

What would it be like if Jesus lived in your house?

Series: Dare2Share

Ephesians 3:17

June 3, 2018

Welcome again to worship today. I would appreciate your prayers as myself and Scott Hayes represent you at the West Ohio Annual Conference this week in Lakeside, Ohio. These are very difficult times for our denomination; we are all waiting for a specially called General Conference this coming February to learn the direction of our church. In fact, I am preparing a special teaching and discussion session to talk about the church the 2nd Sunday evening of July.

This is an important time for our church, and not just for theological reasons. The United Methodist Church continues to decline. Every year; that's right, every year since the merger in 1968 – 50 years ago – the United Methodist Church has declined.

Back in 2015, a United Methodist layperson who is an economist delivered a sobering statistical report to denominational leaders, which stated that unless the denomination adopts and implements a credible turnaround strategy soon, worship attendance in the United States will drop by over 35% by 2030 and will fall to less than a million in 2050. We are losing the equivalent of a 318-member local church every single day.

A variety of reasons are given for the declines in membership and worship attendance. Aging church members and local churches located in sparsely populated areas are often cited. We have also seen a drift away from our core theological teachings, and equally disturbing, a lack of evangelistic zeal.

For the next few weeks, we are going to talk about the commission Jesus gave His disciples to “go and make disciples of all nations”¹ with our series “Dare2Share.”

Please turn to page 5 in your bulletin. Today, I want us to look at one passage of Scripture, from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, the 3rd chapter and the 17th verse:

Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him...²

Maybe it's because we are re-meeting our former neighbors in Fairfield as we are working on the house to sell it that I've been thinking about neighbors lately. You know, it is easy to become complacent as life rolls along day by day, especially as far as our neighbors. I know my neighbors here in Germantown, a little bit about them. And when nothing changes, you just get complacent. However, in our neighborhood, things often change, and it's not just that they have started Phase 3 of building more houses. People change as well. One of the sons of the Walker Toyota dealership just moved into our neighborhood, and I have met the wife. The new school superintendent just moved into their house in the last few days; we haven't met them yet.

So, with neighbors on my mind, and as I looked at today's Scripture of Christ making His home in our hearts, the question came to me: What would it be like if Jesus lived in your house? If Jesus, not you, lived in your house, what would be different? Would He mow His grass on just the right day every time, never letting it get too long? Would He decorate differently (I think Jesus would have a lot of lava lights; those things are cool)? Would He play only organ music when having a dinner party? Would He fly

¹ Matthew 28:19

² Ephesians 3:17 (NLT2)

an Ohio State Buckeye flag on His pole (Yeah)? Would Jesus' house have a sock basket (Yeah)?

Seriously, I think if Jesus live in our homes, He would see His neighbors much different than we do.

First, before talking to his neighbors about his Heavenly Father, he would talk to his Heavenly Father about his neighbors.

When I read the Gospels, I'm always amazed that Jesus, the Son of God, the one human closest to God, spent so much time in prayer. Let's consider a few Scriptures:

Luke 6:12-13:

One day soon afterward Jesus went up on a mountain to pray, and he prayed to God all night. At daybreak he called together all of his disciples and chose twelve of them to be apostles.³

Don't you think Jesus knew who His disciples would be? But what does He do? He prays all night about them. And the title "apostles" means (sent out).

Consider Mark 9 and the story of Jesus coming down from the Mount of Transfiguration to find a demon possessed boy with his father, asking the disciples to remove the demon, but they could not. The boy was in torment, as was his father over his son. Jesus had compassion on them and healed the boy. After Jesus had cast out the demon, the disciples asked Him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" He said to them, "This kind can come out only through prayer."⁴

At the beginning of His ministry, the Gospel of Mark says this:

Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray. Later Simon and the others went out to find him. When they found him, they said, "Everyone is looking for you." But Jesus replied, "We must go on to other towns as well, and I will preach to them, too. That is why I came." So he traveled throughout the region of Galilee, preaching in the synagogues and casting out demons.⁵

Before He chose His disciples, Jesus prayed. Before facing a terrible demon, He prayed. Before He went to the people and preached the Word, He prayed. If Jesus lived in our house, before talking to His neighbors about His Heavenly Father, He would talk to His Heavenly Father about His neighbors.

Second, there would be a sense of urgency regarding His neighbors.

There would be an underlying sense of urgency in the way He related to His neighbors that chased away complacency.

Folks, God is a God of love, but He is also of God of justice. Sin is never tolerated before God. There will be a judgment, and those who have rejected God's Son will be rejected by God. There will be heavenly benefits or hell's consequences.

When my son Matt was a little boy, one day, he had a question about hell. He came to me to ask me about it but didn't want to say the word for fear it was a cuss word. So, he tried to ask me by spelling out the word hell, but he couldn't even bring himself to do that, so he spelled hell "h-i-l-l."

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, required that people who joined the Societies (early groups that latter became churches) must have "a desire to flee from

³ Luke 6:12-13 (NLT2)

⁴ Mark 9:28-29

⁵ Mark 1:35-39 (NLT2)

the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins. When people really establish this in their souls, fruit always appears. So, we expect all who continue in the societies to show evidence of their salvation.”⁶

Folks, there are people all around us, in our neighborhoods, who are going to hell. That’s not being judgmental; that’s stating a fact. If statistics are true, then only one in three in your neighborhood is a Christian, and that means statistically, the neighbors on your left and on your right are going to face damnation for all eternity when they die. And since we know not the day of our death, we need to have a sense of urgency. Tomorrow might be too late.

If Jesus lived in your house, there would be a sense of urgency regarding His neighbors.

Third, He would assure His neighbors that His door would always be open for questions.

Folks, people want truth. We live in a world of relativity.

George Barna, the Christian pollster, surveyed and asked, “What do the unchurched want from church?”

- 64% want to find out more about God.
- 60% want religious training for their kids.
- 58% want better training of the Bible.
- 56% want to learn how to handle life’s problems.

Folks, they want truth, and if Jesus lived in your house, He would assure His neighbors that His door would always be open for questions.

Fourth, He would not just share about His Father, He would show it.

Many people think that Christians are always negative and fighting against something. That’s unfortunate, because we should be known as the positive people who promote what is good and right. One newspaper columnist addressed this issue, saying that we have strayed from our Savior’s commands. He wondered if we are loving our enemies and praying for those who persecute us. Are we feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and visiting those in prison?⁷

Many of us are disturbed by the evils in our society, but we do little more than talk negatively about it. We leave the impression that we hate those who don’t live by our standards. They see us as self-righteous snobs. How unlike Jesus and His first followers! Although they did not hesitate to denounce sin, their primary focus was to demonstrate the purity, compassion, unselfishness, and humility of Christ’s love.

How much better to be a beacon of truth rather than an instigator of condemnation. Instead of merely complaining about the problems in the world, let’s be part of the solution! Following the example of Jesus, we need to reach out in love to those around us who need Him. If we love Christ, we will love the lost.

SERVANT EVANGELISM.

Finally, if Jesus lived in our house, He would be authentic with His neighbors.

Another Barna study compared Christian life-style (born-again) and non-Christian lifestyle. In most areas, differences between the self-oriented behavior of born again

⁶ (“The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies, in London, Bristol, Kingswood, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne,” 1743)

⁷ See Matthew 5:44-45; 25:34-36

Christians and that of national norms were small. Although born-again Christians are more likely to volunteer for their church, they are no more likely than average to help the poor or homeless, the survey found. And they are also one of the least likely groups to recycle. When measured for other moral behaviors, born-again believers are not much different from non-born-again adults. One quarter of born-again believers are less likely to view sexually explicit movies and magazines, to use profanity in public and to buy a lottery ticket, compared to roughly one third of non-born-again Christians. Overall, 28% claimed to have said mean things to others about someone else when that person was not present; 13% admitted to having told someone something they knew was not true; and 10% said they have gotten even for something someone did to hurt or offend them.⁸

LIFESTYLE EVANGELISM. PEOPLE WILL ASK, "WHAT'S SO DIFFERENT ABOUT YOU?"

What would it be like if Jesus lived in your house? He would see His neighbors much different than we do. Jesus saw our own lostness as a greater tragedy than the suffering He would go through.

Let me share with you a story I came across:

It was a week before Christmas 1996 when they showed up on my doorstep. Our daughter Andrea called from the restaurant where she was a waitress to ask if we could take in two young boys who had been dumped by their so-called friends on their way to Kansas City. They had been caught in a freezing rainstorm while hitchhiking along Highway 71. "Mom, they've been sitting here for over three hours. We've been giving them free coffee because they don't have any money. They're wet, cold and hungry. And they don't have a place to stay. Can we put them up for the night?" my daughter asked.

"Andrea, we don't know anything about them," I said in a cautious voice. "I'm not sure this is a good idea."

"Mom, they're just boys. I feel really sorry for them. Besides there's a police officer here who can drop them by the house if it's okay," she said in a persuasive voice.

I agreed to take the boys in, knowing nothing about them. After all, hadn't we always tried to teach our children to be kind and compassionate? They showed up on our doorstep 10 minutes later, shivering from head to toe, wet and hungry, with teeth chattering uncontrollably. I took one look at them, and my heart melted. They couldn't be much older than our own son, who was 15.

"We appreciate you taking them in," the officer said.

After a hot shower and nourishing meal, dressed in warm, dry clothes, they sat by the fire and shared stories about their lives. As I listened, I remember silently praying for the lonely, hurting young men who sat on my sofa.

We brought out the sleeping bags, and everyone said goodnight. They both fell into an exhausted sleep just minutes later.

It was already well past midnight, but I decided to launder their clothes. When I pulled the last load from the dryer, I found it - a prison id card from the Mississippi

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<https://www.christiantoday.com/article/american.study.reveals.indulgent.lifestyle.christians.no.different/9439.htm>

Department of Corrections! One of the boys was a convicted felon who had just been released from prison. I felt betrayed and scared. I wanted to call the police and tell them to come and take them from my home, but something kept me from rushing to the phone. Instead, I crept back into where they were sleeping. They looked so innocent. A tear rolled down my cheek. "They're just boys," I thought. I never made the call.

The next morning I handed them a stack of clean, neatly-folded clothes with the id card strategically placed on top. They both looked at the card, then at each other, then back at me. Big tears welled up in their eyes. They knew that I knew but had let them stay the night anyway. "We really appreciate all you've done for us, Mrs. Berry," one said in a choked voice. "We won't ever forget it." My husband gave them some money and put them on a bus to Kansas City. We haven't heard from them since.

I've lost count of the times I've thought of those boys. Where are they now? Are their lives any better? Did we make a difference? I came across a verse in Hebrews some time after that memorable night, and it brought great comfort to my soul:

Keep on loving each other as brothers and sisters. Don't forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it! Remember those in prison, as if you were there yourself. Remember also those being mistreated, as if you felt their pain in your own bodies.⁹

Someday, I'll stand before the Almighty and answer for the way I've lived my life. What if I had turned away those two young men on the cold, dark Christmas night... only to find they weren't inmates at all, but angels?

⁹ Hebrews 13:1-3 (NLT2)