

The shortest verse?

Jesus wept at Lazarus' death. See how he loved him, the neighbors said. Then he told the family that he was the life.

Isaiah foretold Jesus. His suffering would be on our behalf. He shared our life, he shares our death and therefore, we can share in his resurrection. By his stripes, by his pain and suffering, we are healed.

Mary Magdalene told us Wednesday night how Jesus cared for her. She got little respect and much rough treatment from others, but Jesus brought her as much respect as the male leaders got. She noticed how he cared for the woman caught in adultery, how he ate with tax collectors and sinners, how he paid attention to the beggar beside the road, how he loved people.

Jesus' promise "I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you. In just a little while, the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you will live also. John 14:18

We are those people that Jesus is caring for. We are the ones who put on a party and run out of wine, and are embarrassed. And Jesus turns water into wine. He makes something special out of the ordinary.

We are the ones who are like sheep without a shepherd, but now we know the good shepherd's voice, and are no longer afraid of getting lost. We are the ones who have lost and grieved, and he has borne our griefs. We are the ones whose child was sick, and Jesus brought the right kind of healing. Jesus cares.

Jesus helps. One of our members told me that prayer is part of his weight loss plan. He asks Jesus to help him lose weight. He's lost 24 pounds.

People have told me that at one time they took their blessings for granted. As children, they believed that the family they had, the house they had, the food they had were automatic. Then they found out that those things were gifts, then they found that they were gifts from God. The smell of rain is grace. Somebody loving you is grace. You felt God's love. There's nothing you have to do, or believe to be loved by God. Jesus died for us while we were still separated from God.

People have told me that they used to get defensive when someone criticized them. Then they found out that God loved them whether they were right or not. Then they learned from Jesus that they could check their own behavior when someone

criticized to see if they were right. This maturity was a gift from God. They felt God's love.

People have told me that their life used to revolve around me and mine. Then Jesus came and showed them a wider area of care. Their life got bigger, and more interesting. The love of Jesus came.

Jesus has come to you here at Immanuel Church.

And we want that to happen more often. We want more people to know Christ and people to know Christ better as they go. So we have been planning for the future. 20 different people have met on four Tuesday nights to renew our common vision for the purpose and ministries of this church. Then we set several goals for strategies to accomplish this over the next four years.

Warmth

Follow up on conversations, call back

Time in worship for personal praise or prayer

Ask for prayer requests

What happens. The reasons you don't want to say anything about your joys or needs, the reasons you don't want to hear about someone else's joys or concerns, are the reasons there is not more feeling of warm hearted connection between us.

Connections

Neil Wilson spoke yesterday of connections to our fathers. Many of us men keep something that belonged to our fathers to keep connected.

Call each other

Fellowship events

Cain said to God "Am I my brother's keeper?" Jesus answered that question.

"When you saw someone sick or in prison and visited them, you did it to me."

When you saw a stranger and welcomed him or her, you did it to me".

He did not say "you are your brother's keeper, but he was saying, you are your brother's brother.

So when you listen, you can't prevent his pain, but you can share it. You can't guarantee her success, but you can share it. You can't make him happy, but you can rejoice with his happiness. You can't cancel her discouragement but you can hear it. When you listen.

Welcome

Invite

Encourage groups within the church who lead worship: UMW, youth, Men's club. Someone once told me "if I had known the youth were going to have the service today, I never would have come". That was one of those times when I wish I had thought of a good response in time, but I didn't. What I could have said

was “well that makes you even, because you are one of the reasons they don’t come”. That’s not healthy church. Healthy church is where people of different ages and stages of the spiritual life support each other, learn from each other, care for each other.

Thank someone for the way they decorated, even when, especially when its not the way you would have. Thank someone for the music they brought, even when, especially when, its not the music you would have brought. Thank somebody for their ministry to you. They wonder if anybody notices it, just like you wonder if anybody notices what you do. That’s why we put up thank you valentines last year. A warm and welcoming church demonstrates Jesus love by finding ways to care.

One of you occasionally calls me up and tells me what a good service we just had. It’s great that someone notices. I’m not going to tell you which one of you it is, in case you think it is you and you’ll keep doing it.

Greet people you don’t know. Of course you’re shy. So are they. They want someone to notice them as much as you want someone to notice you. They may be new, they may have been here often, they still appreciate being noticed.

One of you told us at the men’s club yesterday about something you learned in disciple Bible Study. You learned that God’s people have always been a community. Old Testament, new Testament. Community. They are connected to each other. That’s what church is to be. While she was learning that, she noticed how many people in this church showed up for the funeral of one of the members. She saw community in action.

Calling on inactives

We will identify those who have not been attending for 2 months or more, and those who are attending less often than they were and check with them by phone call or in person.

Special events

a special Sunday morning event twice a year, to meet the needs of those outside the church who may be seeking faith or the church’s help with another life issue. .

Sunday School parent participation

We need to connect parents with Sunday school, perhaps with a parents’ group class and/or helping with short term projects in existing classes.

Small Groups

I will offer training for small group leaders in how to organize and maintain a study or ministry group.

Worship Planning

Some of us will work to reorganize the 10:30 service to include drama, other music and other creative ways to communicate the gospel. We need a storyteller and youth input.

Since Jesus is with those in need, we are ministering to Jesus when we are adding to their lives. It's like Jesus in disguise. There was a sign in a pet shop window. Police Dog Puppies \$5. Someone looked and said "that's nothing but a mutt". The owner said "this police dog is working undercover".

In disguise

A survey this week showed us that fewer Americans are claiming to be Christian. The percentage went down since 1990 from 86% to 75%. Those people are not going to other religions, they are deciding not to believe in a personal God, in Jesus Christ. Why are they going away from Jesus? Because they don't find Jesus in church. We are to bring Christ to each other.

So if you're walking on the street sometime
And you should spot some hollow ancient eyes
Don't you pass them by and stare as if you didn't care,
Say hello in there, hello.