

Celebration Sunday June 28, 2015

Welcome: connecting people to God and to each other

This is a special Sunday on our calendar—each year at the end of June we step back and we look back at what God has done over the past year

And as a big part of that, we celebrate and thank the volunteers who made it all possible

Some of us love a good party and enjoy celebrating and reflecting
others of us this doesn't seem like it's all that important or necessary or it's just not a natural part of how we're wired

So for all of us, here's why we celebrate and here's why this is actually a legitimate and super-important and deeply spiritual exercise

Remember back in the winter we looked at the book of Exodus
and we read about how God did amazing things to deliver the Israelites OUT of slavery

God delivered them from the Egyptians when he sent all those plagues and then parted the Red Sea

We stopped at the part where the Israelites were set free but here's what happens a few chapters later:

these same people who experienced God's crazy-miraculous faithfulness to spring them from Egypt and who saw God literally blow-dry a path through the Red Sea

They came to the edge of the land that God had promised them and they FREAKED OUT

and said "No way we can take that land, the people who already live there are too powerful!"

God had just delivered them from one the biggest superpowers in the Middle East, and yet when they bump up against MUCH SMALLER OBSTACLES in the land of Canaan, they get scared.

Do you know why? Because they forgot God's faithfulness in the past, which kept them from leaning into it in the future

They forgot how powerful and good God HAD been to them,
and so when they came up against the next set of challenges, they panic, they melted down, and failed at the very moment when they were on the cusp of receiving God's greatest gift for them as his people

And I would roll my eyes and laugh at them except I see the same thing to be true in my own heart.

See, I, too, forget all the time that God's been faithful in the past.

And so when I bump up against obstacles in my present, it's like I'm starting all over with a blank slate, doubting, questioning, worrying and anxious and freaking out!

And all that's pretty normal and might make sense

EXCEPT that God HAS done all these other things in my life—great things!
Wonderful things!

And he intends my experience of his faithfulness in the past to be building and accruing in this account of his faithfulness and building my trust in him

So that God's past faithfulness and past grace fuels my confidence in his future grace and his future faithfulness

That's why we take the time to celebrate.

We celebrate because we forget. We celebrate because for some of us it's easier to complain or minimize.

Because if we DON'T do this, we might come right up to the edge of some GREAT GIFT that God so wants to give us

and we might wilt because we're looking at the obstacles rather than the record of how God's been faithful to us all along our journey

To start us off with, since a big chunk of today is about celebrating and thanking our volunteers

I want us to look briefly at a passage of Scripture where someone volunteers for one of the worst jobs in the whole Bible

And in the process I want us to talk about what makes for a healthy and life-giving experience of giving of ourselves to a God-sized volunteer effort

So turn with me to Isaiah 6—if you're new to the Bible, Isaiah is right about exactly in the middle of the pages

Isaiah is in the Old Testament, several hundred years before Christ, and Isaiah was a prophet

Remember last week we said that prophets in the Bible didn't tell the future, they spoke the truth from God to the people

So Isaiah is a prophet in Israel during a time in Israel's history when they have a very checkered pattern
of faithful kings and not-so-faithful kings and then very un-faithful kings and then a kind of faithful king

So Isaiah is sent from God to call the people and these kings to be faithful to God in a time when that's not such a popular message.

As we drop into Isaiah chapter 6, Isaiah has already been at work prophesying. He's already started his prophetic career

But God meets him in a fresh way after he's already started doing this work
because he's got a special job for Isaiah that's going to require more of Isaiah and therefore will require more rootedness in the goodness and love of God

So Isaiah 6, verse 1: Bible/no Bible/free Bible

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³ And they were calling to one another:

***"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty;
the whole earth is full of his glory."***

⁴ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

⁵ "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty."

⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

⁸ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"

And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

So my freshmen year of college I made one of the top 5 decisions of my entire life—I got involved in a campus ministry

This ranks right up there with marrying way over my head 17 years ago yesterday, happy anniversary sweet! and switching from PC to Mac

But a not-so-funny thing happened to me as I got involved in this great ministry—I loved it so much I kept volunteering for more and more things

And eventually I found myself like some of you have found yourself:
burned out like a bad piece of toast

In my case as a sophomore in college, I realized that I had this grid with all these check-boxes that I felt like I had to check off to keep God happy with me

And what God did one particular morning as I prayed and read the Scriptures, he met me in a new and profound way right there in the words of the Bible

That was the turning point of a life-long journey of understanding God's GRACE at the center of my relationship with God, not my effort

My deliverance from burn-out came as I began to better understand the bigness of a God who didn't need me quite so much as I imagined

and the love of a good God who was ALREADY for me more than I could possibly imagine

And this was mission-critical for me, not only for my own personal sanity at the time, I was spent and exhausted

but also because the calling he was going to put on my life to do this Christian thing full-time!

I needed a deeper and truer understanding of who God actually was
in order to walk the path he was going to call me down that was going to require more of me than I ever dreamed or realized.

When God meets Isaiah here in Isaiah 6, he's already started his work, he's already volunteered, he's already doing this ministry

But it's about to get much harder, much more complicated, after King Uzziah dies and the resistance to God's messages will get turned up in some circles more and more

And so God meets Isaiah, not to do something completely new but to give him a vision that's going to be compelling enough to enter into the depths of what this call on his life is going to cost him

There are two extremes when it comes to the phrase “Here am I, send me” and our relationship with this whole volunteering thing

The first extreme is those of us who over-commit sometimes to the point of burn-out, that was me in college and still my tendency today

The other extreme is those of us who under-commit, who are allergic to offering themselves and are often very good at saying

“well, no, I’m not terribly interested or available but there THEY are, send them!”

Both of those extremes have one thing in common: they’re both the result of bad theology and poor vision.

Some of you didn’t even know you had a theology, but we all have some sort of theology it’s just a question of whether it’s good or right or not

Both burnout and volunteer-avoidance is the result of bad theology and/or poor vision

Burn-out happens when we believe one of two things:

1. God’s too small and it’s really all on us to do everything or
2. God’s not happy with me unless I’m doing something for him to check all the right boxes

Isaiah here gets a massive vision of a big God who is truly in charge of the whole world

and this vision of a big God is what’s going to sustain him and give him strength

God says “who will go and who can I send” and Isaiah says “I’ll go”

and then God says just after this passage basically

“Yes! You’ll go and you’ll speak and they won’t listen to a word you say but I’m sending you anyway!”

Great God! Thanks for the sweet assignment!

You know what kind of strength it takes to spend your entire life on a mission from God that God has already told you will not result in anything changing?

It takes a lot of love and a big understanding and vision and a connection with God that’s deep enough to withstand decades of your life being poured into a task that in your lifetime bears no fruit

Isaiah received a clear vision of how big and utterly REAL god was—and he also received in that experience a gift of grace, forgiveness, acceptance.

He wasn't volunteering to GO to try to make God happy with him or to do penance and work off something wrong he had done earlier in his life

In the burning coal, God had already forgiven him, already accepted him. He doesn't volunteer to go IN ORDER TO earn God's favor and forgiveness

He already HAS God's favor and forgiveness, THEREFORE he is set free to give his life and his days over to God not out of guilt or compulsion but because of the greatness and wonder and goodness of God!

Over-achieving, over-eager, willing-to-serve friends—THANK YOU! I'm super-grateful for you and I'm thrilled that we're celebrating you all today with some Allen and Son BBQ!

But hear me when I say that some of us need to ask God for a bigger vision and better theology and better thinking around the WHY we're doing what we're doing

So that we don't burn-out—because over-committed burnout is usually the result of bad theology or poor vision or both

And my goal and my desire is that when people serve here and volunteer here, you'd come MORE alive, not less, MORE awake to the Spirit, MORE whole

That NOBODY would just feel like a cog or a victim in the CCC machine and that as few people as possible would have to stop serving simply because they're burned out.

On the other end, some of us who are allergic to serving have our own struggles with our theology and vision, too

Now some of you aren't serving here at CCC because you're new, so glad you're here, please sit back and relax and get to know us for a while—we invite you to jump in whenever you're ready, and please stay and eat BBQ with us and celebrate with us!

Others of you are totally serving and giving in the community or your neighborhoods or schools or whatever—it's just not here.

You've felt called to serve and give in some other place and as a church we want to say "THANK YOU! for what you do!"

We want to get behind you and bless you in whatever place Jesus has called you to serve, and it might not be here and we're totally cool with that.

Others of us aren't serving in part because we've been burned out or we've experienced some level of burn-out before—and yes, you, too, need to sit back and relax and recover

But maybe as I'm talking about burn-out being a problem of theology and/or vision, you're recognizing that's what happened to you

And if that's the case, then I want to encourage you, while you're sitting back and recovering, to do the important soul work of naming that problem and doing something about it

Stepping back from responsibility can be VERY fruitful and productive in our souls
OR it can just turn passive and checked out and disengaged. The difference is what you do with that time and space

If you're in that place, let's talk, I'd love to help you do some recovery work!

Finally, some of us are just allergic and hesitant to offering ourselves and our gifts and our time and our energies

This, too, is a theological and vision problem

It's a lack of understanding about God, a lack of understanding about the huge mission of God to redeem all things in Christ Jesus

There's maybe some gaps around why God's given you gifts and what it means to be a part of a body where every part is doing their part.

No guilt here—I hate guilt, it's stupid, it only works for the short-term and never actually produces long-term fruit in anyone's life

So no guilt, just a call and an invitation.

Just like my burned out friends might need to do some thinking and praying about what it means that

God is bigger than they are, loves them more than they know and operates on grace not our performance

So you, too, might need to do some praying and thinking about

what does it mean that God is a big, missional God who's whole goal and heart and passion is built around bringing grace and healing to this world
and who gives each of us gifts to participate in his work all around the globe

My hope and my prayer is that for all of us, whether we're volunteering or not, we'd have hearts that are open to who God really is and what God is really up to

that our vision would be clear and big and that would free us and compel us to be a part of God's great big plan

Isaiah has ALREADY volunteered and is doing his work

when God meets him with a profound vision and invites him to step into and persevere in this much more difficult season of the work God wants him to do

My prayer for each of us who have served this year and for us as a church as we finish this year and move into a new one, is that we'd have a clearer, bigger, more real vision of who God actually is

And that might infuse our work and our life together with new levels of power, meaning, perseverance and purpose

This morning, as we close out our year

I want to briefly just hit some highlights and celebrate what God has done, much of it through the willingness of many of you who have joined with Isaiah and said "Here am I. Send me."

If you look back over not just the past year but over the past 2 years, small groups have without a doubt been one of the places where we've seen God move and work

Our vision is to connect people to God and to each other, and small groups are one of the primary ways we deliver on that vision

This has happened through the work of small group leaders and hosts who have said "Here am I. Send me."

Two years ago, we had 8 small groups and the women's Wednesday morning Bible study

This year, we had 16 small groups along with the women's Wednesday morning Bible study

We surveyed small group leaders and total we've got over 160 adults involved in small groups across the county on any given week.

Of those 16 small groups, at least 6 of them this year had new leaders that stepped up to the call to lead a small group—THANK YOU!

I'm so incredibly grateful for all of our small group leaders and for how they've served us this year and given of their time and efforts and energies

And it's not just about adding more of them or about the leaders.

In our on-line survey that we've been conducting, our small groups are getting rave reviews for how the small group experience is touching lives

Of the people who took our survey who were in small groups this past year, 97% report that there was at least one Scripture study that was significant for them—97%!

Almost every person who participated in small group had at least one formative experience where being in the Scriptures in community was a formative, important experience for them!

We asked a true/false question around small group and prayer: **I had at least one time this past year when my small group prayed for me in a significant and personal way.**

87% of us said that this was true

87% of us were blessed to have people who knew us and loved us come alongside of us and pray for us in the small group setting when we needed it.

You know what that's looked like this year? it's been prayer as the centerpiece of what it means for us to be a Jesus-following community that cares for one another

That has looked like people getting ready to go to the hospital for tests or procedures that could turn out very scary

being cared for and brought into the presence and peace of Christ by their friends through prayer
and then meals delivered while they recovered

That's parents who are at the end of their rope and patience with their kids or who need some help figuring out what to do or not do, being prayed for in a critical season

You know what that has looked like this past year?

That's coming to small group with your marriage hanging by a thread and having a place where a community of people rally around you, pray for you, and help walk with you through it.

That's looked like people in job or financial crisis or crossroads being supported and helped out

that's groceries being bought for someone in need or coaching being offered to help draw up resumes that help people land jobs

This is us helping one another integrate a real-time faith with real life situations—praying for one another as the centerpiece of a whole-life integration of helping one another and pointing one another towards Christ

We asked another true/false question: **I had at least one time this past year in small group when I got to pray for someone else in my small group in a way that felt significant to both of us**

86% of us said that this was true—we're not only getting prayed for, we're also getting the privilege to pray FOR one another and grow in the ministry of prayer to one another.

Small groups have been and continue to be a place where we see God doing amazing things as we gather around Scripture together, pray for one another, do life together, and grow together

Thank you to the volunteers who when the call came to lead a small group you said "Here I am. Send me."

Speaking of prayer, prayer was also a place where we saw God move and work this past year.

A little over a year ago, I got a group of our people together who I knew were passionate about prayer and I said,
"what ideas do you have to help us as a community grow in prayer and raise the prayer temperature of our community"

And we listed a big huge whiteboard FULL of ideas that were great
and at the end of the meeting we all agreed that these were great ideas and NONE of us had the bandwidth to do anything about any of them

But this fall, about 6 months after that conversation, we launched a massive prayer campaign

- we did a 4-week series on prayer
- we invited you to submit prayer requests at the beginning of the service that we collected and prayed over during the service
- we opened up a prayer room that was coordinated by Kathy Duszynski and hosted by a number of gifted prayer volunteers
- we did our first ever and then our second ever 24-hour prayer event down at the office space in Chatham Mills

For some of you, signing up for and praying for 30 minutes was one of the biggest steps of faith you'd taken in a long time

But we got story after story of people who took that step, signed up for a slot, showed up, and then were amazed at what can happen when we step into this richer, wider world of prayer

We also did our first-ever overnight retreat in January that for a number of you was extremely formative as we started out the new year.

Some of the stories and the quotes from those times have been simply outstanding, they mostly sounded something like

"I've never done anything like this before and it was incredible."

A funny thing happens when we carve out space for a God who wants to meet with us—he shows up!

We have continued to offer the prayer room and we're continuing to look for ways to help us as a community raise our prayer temperature

We are a community of DO-ERS! And so for many of us prayer just isn't our most natural first-step.

But if we do and do and do and do and there's no spiritual power or energy underlying all that doing

we can **do** all we want, it's not going to bear the kind of fruit that the Scriptures say is possible

when our DOING is anchored in a deeper and more eternal ENERGY available in Christ.

One of our most constant and frequent prayers around here is for our county

we feel that God has put us here to bless Chatham County in as many ways as we can possible come up with

One of the most important things we can do as a church is to be a people of invitation, inviting people to come and see what God's up to here

We asked folks in our on-line survey how they found out about Chatham Community Church

far and away the number one way they found out about it was personal invitation from someone they knew.

Personal invitations from people that you know and trust are so important, especially to our friends and neighbors who have been burned before, right?

If you've been burned by a church experience before, why on earth would you go back?

For most people it'll only happen if someone they know and trust says "I know a place where your experience will be different.'

And this year when we asked you all if you'd invited anyone to Chatham Community Church over the past 12 months

over 85% of you said you had invited at least one, most of you more than one.

That's awesome! Thank you!

What happens when we invite people so recklessly is that God shows up and people show up and some of them end up in church who never imagined they'd end up in church again

Or some of them start coming for the first time in their lives EVER to a church setting, and they've got all kinds of great and wonderful questions

On our visual survey we invited folks to put up a dot if they came to faith or re-engaged their faith in a significant way this past year—we've got 6 dots up here!

I don't know the story behind all of these dots, but my guess is for many of them invitations played a role in giving faith a chance to work out in their lives

One of my favorite days of the past several months was when I got to have a 3-hour lunch with a couple

who have started coming over the past several months, one of whom has never done church before and the other one grew up in it but hasn't been engaged for decades—they came because a neighbor invited them

We spent 3 hours asking and wrestling with some of the best questions about faith and Jesus and Scripture and culture and science—awesome!

I totally believe that God's at work in them and lots of other folks like them who have come because someone they knew invited them to come

We are here to bless Chatham County---and we do that not only through inviting people to come to us but also by going to them and serving wherever we find needs

One of the most visible ways that we do that is through Chatham Serves, one Sunday in the fall and one Sunday in the spring

Between those two Chatham Serves events, we poured out around 1,500 work hours of good into our community

With an outstanding array of projects and great project leaders who were willing to say "Here am I. Send me."

We could get in the car and drive all around Chatham County and point out

roofs that we've repaired

yards and houses of people in need that we've fixed up

schools that we've beautified

homes where we've delivered meals

nursing homes where people have LOVED hearing our kids sing to them

And other non-profits who have loved partnering with us as we've shown up with manpower and woman power and just said,

"we love that you're serving our community already, how can we get behind what you're already doing?"

Chatham serves is 100% directed, coordinated, led and then the work done by volunteers—all of whom have said to varying degrees, “Here am I. Send me.”

But Chatham Serves is just one of the ways that we as a church and as individuals within the church serve here—it’s an ongoing, year-round commitment to loving our neighbors as Jesus called us to do

I once heard a speaker challenging a room full of church leaders by asking “If your church disappeared, would anyone outside of your church care or even notice?”

And by God’s grace and because he’s faithful, we can humbly, joyfully, lovingly say YES!

Jesus tells this great little parable of the kingdom of God growing up to be this large tree where all the birds of the air can nest in it

In some very small but real ways, we can say that Jesus has been and is continuing to make us into that kind of tree

Still more work to do, but praise God for the willing Spirit he’s given this community to serve our community—it really is one of the Spiritual gifts of this church

Now, if we’re talking about significant events worth celebrating over the past 12 months or so, I would be remiss if I didn’t mention the wonder and joy that bringing Steve Tamayo on board a year ago has brought to our church

His energy and creativity and excellence has blessed everything that he’s touched

In the past twelve months, Steve has had his hand in creating or helping to re-create any number of things:

The daily devotional we launched in September is crafted by Steve each week.

Someone told me several months ago she appreciated it because she might not always get around to opening her Bible each morning but she was definitely all about checking her email!

Steve partnered with Mark Matthews to re-launch our web site which is simply exceptional

He has taken our Facebook page and social media presence from something that would be nice if we could get to it

to something that is a real creative source of community and networking with other organizations and businesses and opportunities in Chatham

Steve has worked with our children’s ministry team to do a thorough evaluation and in the next several weeks they’ll be rolling out a new curriculum as a result

He's also coordinated our team of great adult volunteers working with the youth ministry

In fact, he spent all this week down in Charlotte with the students doing camp with them—I think that certainly qualifies for hazardous duty pay

Steve spearheaded both 24-hour prayer events that we did this past year, he coordinated and ran the overnight retreat we did this past January

He has taught several classes that have benefitted many of us and he's done a great job the weeks that he's spoken on Sunday mornings

I'm just super-thrilled for what God has done in and through Steve over the past 12 months—thanks so much, Steve

Now, as we close out this school year, we not only want to look back but we also want to look ahead just a little bit

and talk just briefly about the future that we've been dreaming about and praying for over the past couple of years here

I've shared this story before so forgive me if you've heard this one

But one of the most formative conversations I had in my first six months here was with a woman who worked for a social services organization

And she was saying that it was so incredibly difficult and so very not worth it to try to work with and through the churches in Chatham County

because they were so NOT important to the fabric of life in Chatham.

She said to me, "I don't want to say that Chatham County is a godless community but.... it's kind of a godless community!"

That conversation sparked some research and lots of prayer and discussions about what would it take to change the name of Chatham County from a godless community

To a God-saturated and a God-Rich community?

We know that God has put us here to connect people to God and to each other.

Everyone's invited to that and if you're one of our friends coming from outside of Chatham County we're thrilled that you join us

But Chatham County is a distinctly spiritually dead community. One local pastor that I met with called Chatham County an un-reached people group

There are almost exactly 100 churches in Chatham county. In most of them, the average age is 65 and the average size is 50

These are not vibrant, growing, thriving churches.

In the next 10 years given the ages and stages of these churches
It's not difficult to see Chatham county going from 100 churches to something around 50 in just the next ten years or so

So for the past two years or so, every so often I've put up this map with this vision:

Plant a church in Pittsboro in 2016

Plant a church in Siler City in 2020

If we did this, it would put just about everyone in Chatham County within 20 minutes driving distance of a contemporary, non-denominational church

Now in conversations with a number of you and as I'm reading our on-line survey I'm realizing that there's a critical piece of information that hasn't been well communicated

In order to do this first church-plant in Pittsboro in 2016 the way that we've envisioned it, it required that we grow here in this location to about 450
we need critical mass here before we can bless 100 of our people to go and start something new

several of you are concerned that we're going to try to do this with our current attendance and I would be too!

but the idea is that we wouldn't do this UNTIL and UNLESS we hit around 450—at which point, we would be bursting at the seams here at Woods and we'd HAVE to find another solution anyway to our space issues

We also knew that we'd need start-up money so that we could do some of the things that make set-up and tear-down here more sustainable and professional:

We'd need sound boards and lights and chairs and all that stuff

So last year we started tithing 10% of what came in each month into a savings account earmarked for the plant

And based on our growth rate in terms of Sunday morning attendance for about the first 18-20 months I was here

I thought what might happen was we'd get to 2016 and our attendance would be HERE and we'd be ready to go but our money would be HERE

But here's what happened last spring: our Sunday morning average attendance hit this wall at 275-290 last February in 2014

And for the past 15 months, we've been pretty much stuck at right around 275 every Sunday and we cannot consistently break through to the 300-plus level

every so often we'll get over 300 and then right back down to 270 the next week

Now of course, the trick of this is it's a different combination of 275 every week.

So we've got a pool of maybe 325-350 people who say that when they're in town, when they feel like going to church, they come here

And it's a different combination of 275 every single week.

We have done all kinds of things—lots of prayer, we did a bunch of neighborhood outreaches, continued to do things like mailers that had driven our growth previously

We launched Sunday's best 3 minutes back in April so that folks could get a taste of what we're all about here at CCC and as another way to connect with our neighbors

But nothing's helped us to get through this ceiling that we've hit.

All the while and in the mean time, we're adding all these new small groups
and new people are coming and staying all the time
and there's not some massive exodus because we've had some silly fight over the color of the carpet or something

AND, at the same time as we've shown zero Sunday morning numerical growth for the past 14 or so months, the giving has increased by 20%!!!

That's ridiculous and generous and wonderful! Thank you!

So 18 months ago I thought our attendance might be where it needed to be but our money wouldn't quite be there by 2016

But instead, our money is here and our attendance is here.

So we're at a crossroads

and what I want to do this morning as we close out this year is invite everyone to lean in with us this summer to pray for us and with us as we try to figure this thing out

God has resourced this church in super-abundant ways—we've got outstanding people, we've got a great financial situation

And we KNOW that God has put us here to bless Chatham County
to serve and bless this community that in many ways is disconnected from God and from each other

But this vision of planting a church in 12 months isn't going to happen in 12 months.

Now it might still happen eventually, but we're no where near where we'd need to be to do this, at least not how we envisioned it

And so we're asking God, and I want to invite you to ask with me this summer: God, what do you want us to do?

Here we are! Send us! We're ready to serve Chatham County and to be a part of your work, but we need your direction for that

Every so often over the past six months particularly we've looked at a piece of land and sort of nudged the door of a building

There are some schools of thought that say basically a set-up tear-down church will hit a limit as to who will come to it that it can't get past until they build a building

I don't know if that's what's going on here or if there are other factors we need to address and deal with

Nothing's come of that and we're not sure if that's the route we want to take

Certainly this year has been a fruitful year here at CCC, our commitment and connection with each other has deepened—it's been a deepening kind of year here

And our goal here isn't just to grow for growth's sake.

Our goal is to grow here to plant there to bless and serve our Chatham County neighbors and our community that is full of mostly dead or dying churches

This has been a great year of deepening and strengthening what we're doing here

And we're asking the Lord how he wants us to take that gift and offer it to our community. And so I invite you to pray. Pray for us and with us

And I know that if passed the mic around, lots of folks could offer all kinds of opinions about what we could or should do

I'd love to hear them, but not now.

We circulated a survey in recent weeks so that we could hear from you because we want to hear from you

But for this morning, for this day, at this point in our church's history, we need you to pray. Will you pray?

Will you go to God on our behalf asking him what he wants us to do with HIS church and HIS people and HIS resources to bless Chatham County, HIS county?

Because I don't know what the future holds. And I'm not exactly sure which direction we need to go next

But I do know that God has been FAITHFUL in the past—amen? He's brought this church through some significant turmoil before I got here and he's brought us here

And this year, he's healed broken bodies and he's healed broken marriages and he's healed broken families and he's awakened spiritually dead people

And he's provided jobs and support and help and encouragement to people who needed it and he's

And maybe here, today, we stand on the edge of a promised land that we just can't quite see

And maybe the thing that God is going to call us to do next is going to require us to take an extraordinary step of faith and courage

And maybe together we're going to need to pray and ask and seek and accrue and remember all the ways that God has been faithful to us in the past

And maybe together we need a fresh calling and a fresh and huge vision of God to give us strength and fortitude and perseverance for the work he's preparing in advance for us to do together

Because when we give him full control to call all the shots and direct our paths, there's no telling where we might end up.

PRAY