



St. Michael's Church
CHARLESTON, SC

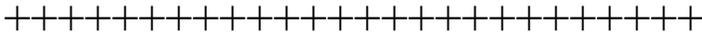
SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2017

GENESIS 26:26-31
LUKE 5:27-31

PREACHER: THE REV. AL ZADIG, JR.

HELP US LORD TO BE SO CONNECTED TO YOU THAT WE MIGHT BECOME THE SERVANTS OF OTHERS.

TAKE OUR LIPS AND SPEAK THROUGH THEM,
OUR MINDS AND THINK THROUGH THEM,
AND TAKE OUR HEARTS, AND SET THEM ON FIRE



I wish we could all just sit down and share our Hurricane Irma stories.

Some of you from what I can tell did just fine, others,

It's a whole re-do,
A repeat of your last year re-do..

And for still others, it was Irma-geddon...

a re-re-do, for the third year in a row!

Some of you even had to leave your homes and go to what I'm calling this morning...

Your

"STORM HOME"

for refuge.



For part of my growing up years, we lived on the plains of North Dakota on a family farm,

There the storms came not in the form of

- hurricane produced water and
- out of control pluff mud,

But blizzards producing

- Snow above roof lines.
- And out of control white outs

Which would mean after school on a blizzard day, instead of going home, we would go to our official and assigned storm home.

Our storm home was my great Uncle Luther Williamson's house, a wonderful old Victorian,

I put a picture of it in the front inside page of the bulletin..

a magical place with

- game rooms from floor to ceiling
- magnificent fire places
- pool tables

How we loved to be sent to our storm home!

But there was another side to going to the storm home..

Invariably, there would be others seeking shelter there we didn't know..

But by the end of the onslaught, we were united, in ways only a good Dakota blizzard could produce.

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Thanks to Hurricanes Matthew and Irma, many of you know your lowcountry storm homes only too well!

But for all of us, this

nearly 300 year old anchor we call St. Michael's is our daily storm home.

Our rock!

- Yes, the old mahogany wood..
- These aged wooden pews
- The smell, the texture..

She whispers peace through the storm saying..

"I've been through it all before,

from Hurricanes to Wars...

Keep calm and carry on."

Case in point,

Last Sunday the day before Irma hit, our doors were open for worship.

During the service, there was a woman, whom I noticed crying.

After church we prayed with her.

It turns out she and her husband have a boat and live in Florida. They love coming to Charleston and specifically coming to worship at St. Michael's.

Last Saturday night when they realized their Florida town could get a direct hit

they got in their car at 11pm, drove from Florida and through the night straight to St. Michael's for worship at 10:30.

Her words are words I will never forget:

In tears about what they left behind she said:

"St. Michael's is and will always be our home. We love this church!"

Storms often bring us in touch with those we've never met, and we leave that storm home sometimes with friends made for life.

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Jesus has a way of bringing people together from unexpected places to do extraordinary ministry.

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Luke 5 is a radical example--
Jesus bringing people together from unexpected places-

There was no one more unexpected than Levi.

Why...?

Levi, who's name would become Matthew, was a dreaded Tax Collector and accountant whom Jesus invites to be his disciple.

Of all people in Palestine, Levi was one of the most hated!

You see, Palestine was a country of Jews, subject to the Romans and therefore had to pay taxes to Rome...

Here's the crazy thing.

Rome hired Jewish tax collectors....

to

collect taxes from the Jews!

And everything was taxed... There was the:

- Poll tax which every person from age 12-65 had to pay,
 - simply for the privilege of living!
- The ground tax
 - a tenth of grain and a fifth of wine and oil..
- Income tax,
 - one percent of your income..
- Taxes to use
 - Roads
 - harbors
 - and markets..
- A tax payable on each wheel of every cart you used,
 - and on every animal that pulled the cart...
- There was the purchase tax on everything you bought..

If that's not infuriating enough, A tax collector could see you on the road, demand you open your suitcase and tax everything again!

So, tax collectors were as hated if not more than robbers and murderers.

But it's even more theological than that...

"The Jews were looking for a day when God would defeat the Romans and re-establish His Kingdom."

So it wasn't just the Jews vs. the Romans,

it was God vs. the Romans.

And because these traitor Jewish tax collectors sided with the dark sided Romans-

They, Levi...were enemies of God!

Which is why the Pharisees

- didn't allow them to worship in the synagogue
- or allow their own clothing to touch a tax collector!

So you can imagine how it shocks the living daylights out of people when Jesus asks, of all people...Levi to become his Disciple!

It was un-THINK-ABLE...

Yet before the Pharisees and others can get their jaw off the ground,

Jesus attends a banquet feast at Levi's house with what the Bible says is an even larger group of tax collectors!

To realize how radical **this** is you need to know what eating together really meant in ancient times.

Eating together in the ancient day was for much more than filling your stomach.

Eating with another communicated acceptance, and agreement.

Being welcomed at a table for the purpose of eating was like a ceremony... rich in friendship, intimacy and unity.

So, for the Pharisees, the problem is not only the guest list, but Jesus having a good old time eating with them!

These Pharisees are irate at Jesus...Jesus knows it and replies saying look: It's not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.

I have come not to call the righteous folk but sinners to repentance.

The Pharisees are basically asking Jesus to behave like a:

- doctor
 - who avoids sick people,
- a teacher
 - avoiding students
- A fireman
 - avoiding fires

This calling of Levi teaches us '3' essential truths..

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First, The power of Grace.

Grace defined is ONE-WAY-LOVE.

Jesus pours his love into those around him, not because they deserve it, but because of his radical unbounded love for them.

Jesus with grace pouring one way love into Levi...

Jesus with grace pouring into the large crowd of tax collecting accountants.

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1st grace...

Second...Jesus teaches that eating with sinners doesn't make Him unclean, it makes the sinner clean!

Sometimes we might think if we hang around the least, last and lost we become polluted, no! Transformation works from Jesus in here...out!

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And third... Jesus simply has a way of bringing people together from unexpected places to do extraordinary ministry.

Levi turned Matthew would go on to do extraordinary ministry, chiefly through writing the first Gospel of the New Testament and is proof that even accountants can go to heaven!

So...

- Grace!
- People transformed and made clean!
- Unexpected people doing extraordinary ministry.

The Bottom-line-amazing-thing-about-Jesus is that while he always had a foot in the life of his disciples,

He ALWAYS HAD a grace-filled foot outside with the least, last and lost.

Jesus was and is the storm home to the world.

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And this is really challenging for Christians today for this reason:

For the new Christian, the desire to spread the news of faith is strongest on average the first 2 years after conversion. Then what often happens is that our circle of friends change, and we often become comfortably surrounded by what I affectionately call the Christian Ghetto..

People that believe and look like us!

And so my question to us today is this:

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In a spirit of grace, where do we need to stretch our comfort zones regarding the company we keep?

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What would happen if the Lord brought unexpected people into our lives to do extraordinary ministry?

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You know, to be honest, it was questions like these that several months ago brought me to the convicting challenge that something is missing at St. Michael's,

A missing piece of our discipleship.

And so I did what any good Anglican does when stumped..

I formed a committee!

A Discipleship task Force to help me name this missing piece to our discipleship puzzle.

In just 5 months...this group, chaired by Susan DiCamillo helped me understand what's working and what's missing.

We looked at how we connect with each other through:

- Sunday worship
- The Alpha course
- Men's and women's groups,
- Youth ministry
- Social Groups
- Tool time
- Bible Studies
- and Life Groups.

It was clear to me that after Alpha...

We kind of enter a Christian Ghetto!

Of people like us doing ministry together.

That's not always a bad thing, surrounding ourselves with great Christian people...

In fact, I've been together with my life group for 3 years, we are tightly knit and I know I could share anything with them.

But the task force helped me realize yes, we need something

in addition to life groups and Bible Studies

for discipleship and a wider connection to the outside world.

And they produced a recommendation called:

Wait for it..

Holy City Connects.

Holy City Connects, with its foundation in Luke 5...

Is an open invitation to the whole of our church

AND

our CITY

To connect the way Jesus did:

- Breaking bread
- In grace
- With people from all walks of life

- connecting
- worshiping
- and studying together
- for the sake of doing extraordinary ministry!

So, we are piloting three groups this fall,

Three what I call storm homes..

One

in a home in

- West Ashley
- Another in Mt. Pleasant

- And another Downtown.

They will meet beginning the last week of September,

And

because we want your life group to continue,

The Holy City Connects will meet every other week,
the weeks between your life group sessions!

Each Holy City Connect will always be open to everyone, even tax collectors, and accountants!

Whether you live downtown and want to attend the one in Mt. Pleasant or whatever, it doesn't matter!

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You might say, well, Al, what if you had 60 people in one home?

I would say great! We are now more like the first century church where people literally filled homes by:

- sitting on floors
- counters
- to worship and study the man who turned the world upside down.

Storm home times 10!

Holy City Connects is that mid size group, between Sunday worship on one side and life groups on the other.

It's Developing this rhythm of:

Life group one week with deepest fellow believers..

And

Holy City Connects the next week with a wider group of St. Michaelites and friends.

And Each Holy City Connects gathering will meet 5 times this Fall, and study a different meal that Jesus had and what He teaches about community life through each meal.

... That bible passage and teaching will be the same passage and focus of the sermon the Sunday before!

For Life Groups, we are recommending a Romans study, what we learn from Paul about living in authentic community.

... the bible passage and teaching in the Life group will be the same passage and the focus of the sermon the Sunday before!

So you see, it's all tied together...!

To bring people together from unexpected places to do extraordinary ministry.

So my friends, the week after Irma...

- Do you feel displaced?
- Tired?
- Spiritually stagnant?
- Disconnected?
- Hungry for a storm home
- Hungry for deeper Bible Study?
- Perhaps you haven't been able to find a life group

- Or you love your life group but you want a place in addition to meet more St. Michaelites..

Holy City Connects is for all of us..

In fact, I would love to see every member and friend of St. Michael's in a Holy City Connects gathering-

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Imagine, a good old fashioned storm home..

- Old and young St. Michaelites
 - teenagers
 - millennial's
 - old timers
 - newcomers
- together worshipping,
- And studying the word

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Holy City Connects. Creating storm homes all over the lowcountry in a spirit of:

- Grace!
- Transformation
- And watching unexpected people doing extraordinary ministry.

Finally this morning...I recall a time in my own life right after college...

I was living a kind of Levi lifestyle away from the Lord.

Around that time I was called to Charleston as a journalist...

And ended up living with three guys who needed a 4th roommate.

All three guys were faithful believers..

- They showed me grace, Sweet grace
- My heart during those 2 years was transformed
- And By God's power we did some pretty cool ministry together.

That group, that storm home is one of the reasons I wear a collar today.

It was my modern day storm home.

They were willing to step out and take a chance.

Are we?

Let us pray.