

***Cheers – Engaging Third Places***  
 “Therefore go into all the world” - #11  
 Luke 10:1-12  
 November 15, 2014

*After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. <sup>2</sup> He told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. <sup>3</sup> Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. <sup>4</sup> Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.*

*<sup>5</sup> “When you enter a house, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ <sup>6</sup> If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you. <sup>7</sup> Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.*

*<sup>8</sup> “When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you. <sup>9</sup> Heal the sick who are there and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ <sup>10</sup> But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, <sup>11</sup> ‘Even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet as a warning to you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God has come near.’ <sup>12</sup> I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.*

Luke 10:1-12 (NIV)

You will be happy to know that we are almost at the end of this series, *Therefore go into all the world*. A very challenging series indeed. Next week will be the end of it, then we will celebrate Thanksgiving on Sunday, November 29<sup>th</sup> with one service, our annual *Harvest Offering*, and communion. That will prepare us for the beginning of the Christmas season. This year we have decided to celebrate the entire month of December as more of a Christmas season instead of recent years which we have celebrated Advent throughout most of December and then Christmas, often seeming like the celebration of Christmas itself gets short changed. But we don’t want to get too far ahead of ourselves.

At times I continue to be amazed at how the Holy Spirit works. You would think by now that I would know better but when it comes to most things I am usually a pretty slow learner. When I began thinking about doing this series, *Therefore go into all the world*, based on the book *Missional Essentials*, by Brad Brisco and Lance Ford, which is essentially about being more missional in our own community, it was way back at the beginning of the year towards the end of my sabbatical. Back then I would have never thought of a storefront ministry in West Liberty. It is amazing how God has worked through his Holy Spirit bringing the two together, no more evident than in today’s message.

Our Scripture this morning is from Luke 10. Luke 10 marks a pretty significant transition in Luke’s gospel. It moves from mostly the story of Jesus’ ministry – his miracles, the healings, the feeding of the thousands, the partial recognition of who Jesus was (the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God), at least by some of the original disciples, and the witness of the transfiguration by Peter, James and John. He has already sent out the twelve disciples:

*And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.*  
 Luke 9:1-2 (ESV)

Now he's ready to send out seventy or seventy-two more. I say seventy or seventy-two because in the different manuscripts that have been recovered it differs, some say seventy-two, some say seventy. The number seventy is probably not a coincidence because in the Bible the number seven, or a derivative of seven, like fourteen, or forty-nine, or seventy often represents completion or the ideal. When we get to our passage this morning and Jesus sending out the seventy, or seventy-two, it's probably not just referring to the first group of disciples that Jesus sent out after the original twelve, but also his future disciples of all time as well.

And before we get to the sending out of the larger group of disciples, at the end of chapter 9, we have Jesus telling his disciples that if they want to follow him, they need to first stop and count the cost.

After they have counted the cost we have one of Jesus' most popular commands, "Go!" It's like Jesus is saying, "what are you waiting for, go!" And where are they supposed to go? They are supposed to go out into the different towns that surround them, two by two. I don't think the number two is that important, like the Jehovah's Witnesses or the Mormons think it is by literally sending out two at a time. I think what is important is the need of others for mutual encouragement, because Jesus knows it isn't going to be easy. "*I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.*" The charge for Jesus' followers for all time is to "go, into the towns around us proclaiming the kingdom of God – doing the things that Jesus did – healing, driving out demons, showing compassion to people ("the least of these") and offering forgiveness to sinners. And though it might not be as noticeable as it is in the Great Commission at the end of the gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells us he will be with us: *After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go.*

Through our Scripture this morning Jesus is telling us that we are supposed to go!, into the town(s) around us, proclaiming that the kingdom of God has come near, and that he promises to go with us when we do. So where exactly are we supposed to go in the towns around us?

The title of the message this morning is "Cheers, Engaging Third Places." The first part "Cheers," is from the title of one of the most popular shows on television in the late eighties and early nineties. The show launched the acting careers of Ted Danson, Shelley Long, Kelsey Grammer, Rhea Pearlman, Kristie Alley and Woody Harrelson. It took place at a bar in downtown Boston.

One of the most popular scenes took place at the time in every episode when one popular regular would bust through the front door of the bar and everyone would shout out his name in unison, "Norm!" Norm would then proceed to the bar where he would take his usual seat.

The tagline for the show and the song which began each episode was entitled "Where Everybody Knows Your Name." The refrain:

*Making your way in the world today takes everything you've got.  
Taking a break from all your worries, sure would help a lot.  
Wouldn't you like to get away?  
Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name,  
and they're always glad you came.  
You wanna be where you can see, our troubles are all the same  
You wanna be where everybody knows Your name.*

The full Lyrics never actually aired. Lyrics like:

*All those nights when you've got no lights or the check is in the mail;  
And your little angel hung the cat up by it's tail;  
And your third fiance didn't show;  
Roll out of bed, your Mr. Coffee's dead;  
The morning's looking bright; but your therapist ran off to Europe,  
And didn't even write; And your husband wants to be a girl;*

*Be glad there's one place in the world, Where everybody knows your name,  
And they're always glad you came; You want to go where people know,  
People are all the same; You want to go where everybody knows your name.*

The song represents the brokenness which lies in all of us. The venue, in this case a bar, represents those very few places in the world where we can be accepted just for who we are, “where everybody knows our name.”

Today we find ourselves in a society and in a culture in which more and more people feel alienated and alone than ever before. We’ve gone from a culture in which almost everyone around you knew not only your name, but they knew many things about you, because you interacted with your neighbors on a regular basis, to one in which people know very little about you, if even your name. Over the past several decades we have moved from a culture of community, neighborhood, and corporate involvement and activities, to one of mostly individual activities – time spent on the computer, video games, and unlimited television choices.

The second half of the title of the message this morning is “Engaging Third Places.” It is actually a phrase coined by a sociologist by the name of Ray Oldenburg, back in 1989 in a book entitled “The Great Good Place.” The extended subtitle of the book says it all, “Cafes, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts, and How they Get You Through the Day.” How is that for a subtitle?

In 1996 Oldenburg wrote an article entitled “Our Vanishing Third Places” about the devastating effect the changes in our culture have had and the reason many people feel isolated and alienated:

“Most residential areas built since World War II have been designed to protect people from community rather than connect them to it. Virtually all means of meeting and getting to know one’s neighbors have been eliminated. An electronically operated garage door out front and a privacy fence out back afford near total-protection from those who, in former days, would have been neighbors.”

In the process we have eliminated many third places. What exactly is a third place? Well, according to Oldenburg, the first place is our home and the people with whom we live. The second place is where we work and where we spend the majority of our waking hours. A third place is a public setting that hosts regular, voluntary and informal gatherings of people. It is a place to relax and have the opportunity to know and be known by others. It is a place people like to “hang out.”

Oldenburg identifies eight characteristics that third places share:

1. Neutral Ground – People are free to come and go as they please.
2. Act as a Leveler – People from all walks of life gather in third places.  
There are no social or economic barriers.
3. Conversation is the main activity.
4. Accessible and accommodating.
5. There are regulars – it’s easy to recognize that some, or even many, are regulars, but at the same time newcomers are welcome.
6. Low Profile – As a physical structure, they are typically plain and unimpressive in appearance.
7. Mood is Playful – Usually there is food, beverages and games which make the mood playful which encourages people to stay longer and want to come back.
8. A Home away from Home – At their core they are places where people feel at home.  
They feel like they belong there and typically they have a sense of ownership.

Brad Brisco and Lance Ford in their book *Missional Essentials* ask, “Why is it so important for Christ followers to understand the concept of third places?” “Because the vast majority of people in the United States are living isolated, relationally impoverished lives, and third places offer an opportunity for missionally minded people to do life in proximity to others.”

At little further ahead they add, “the deterioration of social connections in our communities should drive us to action. As followers of Jesus we know we were created as relational beings. We know that God designed us to be in a deep, abiding relationship with him. But we also understand that we were created to be in life-giving relationships with one another. The idea of millions of lonely people sitting at home, dying relationally from the lack of basic human connections should inspire us to bring about change. Brisco & Ford offer us a couple of suggestions regarding third places:

1. We should search out third places which already exist in our own community:
  - a) Local football games or other sporting events where lots of people gather.
  - b) The local coffee shop, “Coffee Matters,” and the local restaurant, “Liberty Gathering Place.” The idea of a third place is even in its name.
  - c) Maybe it’s joining an organization which already exists.
2. Create our own third place(s).

That is where it really hit me that the Holy Spirit is working. That is exactly what we are trying to do with “The Grove” – our new storefront ministry, without really even knowing we were doing that.

My message for this week – “Engaging Third Places” ties in very closely with my message from last week – “Pursuing Biblical Hospitality,” that which we defined as loving the stranger, the alienated, the least of these. What we are trying to do is to close the gap between those who are alone and alienated in our community, to a community where “everybody knows each other’s name.”

What is the primary goal of finding and creating third places?

“Our engagement with third places should first flow out of our desire to see those who are relationally disconnected drawn into life-giving relationships with others, and ultimately with the life giver himself – God. But secondly, it should flow out of the recognition that as an increasing number of people are less and less interested in the activities of the church, it is we, as the missionary people of God, who have to engage others on common ground, or third places.”

Brad Brisco & Lance Ford, *Missional Essentials*

But if we look back at our Scripture from this morning I believe Jesus gives us a couple of caveats, the word caveat defined as “a warning as one engages in certain acts or practices,” just as he did to his original disciples and as he sent out the seventy or seventy two.

First the warning: *I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.* In Matthew’s version of Jesus sending out the twelve he is recorded as saying, *I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves* (Matt. 10:16).

And Jesus tells us at the end of the passage this morning that not everyone is going to receive the message, or be open to it. Some are going to be outright hostile to it. Some will just ignore it. That is not supposed to prevent us from going out and moving around – pursuing, seeking out, aspiring to, finding those individuals in our community who are ripe for hearing and receiving, or that are just open to having someone in their life who cares, who will just listen to them, who want to know their name. Third places provide that opportunity, the opportunity for no immediate expectations, where people can be accepted for who they are and where they are at the current stage of their life.

The other caveat is that I think God wants us to be wise about the third places which we pick. We need to be careful that it isn’t a third place which takes us away from the kingdom of God. As much as Cheers might have been a good introduction into my message this morning I would caution us about bars being good third places where God wants us to hang out. The Bible does tell us that drunkenness is sin and a good number of people have difficulty making the distinction between what is temperate or moderate when it comes to alcohol use and when it crosses over the line to becoming destructive and an escape from addressing issues in their lives. Though the current media attention is on dangerous drugs like heroin, cocaine and other strong drugs, alcohol is, by far, still the most abused drug in the United States, though it is socially acceptable. While those of us who grew up watching Cheers grew very fond of the different characters – those soon to be famous actors and actresses were playing – what we didn’t see is the toll that their lives would take on their families if they really did spend that much time in the bar.

Excessive alcohol use leads to approx. 88,000 deaths every year in the United States. More than 10,000 men, women and children die each year in alcohol related accidents.

As we reach out to our community to become more missional we need to be careful of the message we are giving out and that we are proclaiming the kingdom of God and not hindering the kingdom of God, in our own lives, in the lives of the people we are reaching out to, and our community. We need to be finding and creating third places which are healthy and life giving.