

“Pivot, Pivot, Pivot”

1 Corinthians 3:9; Mark 10:42-45

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October 14, 2018

As most of you are aware, some 5 years ago this church made a very difficult decision to sell the property on which they had enjoyed ministry since 1951. You might say that this decision was over 20 years in the making, as it had been suggested by previous leadership that a move to South Lake Charles would be in the best long-term interest of the church. Moving from the sale of that property, to moving in with another congregation, to identifying and purchasing a piece of property, to formulating plans to actually BUILD on that property, **each year** was considered to be one of **increasingly critical importance**.

At a Session mtg. earlier this year, one of that/this church’s elders, somewhat frustrated with just how LONG this process of relocation was taking, declared that *“It seems like every year for the last several years we have continued to make the same statement: ‘This is going to be a very **‘pivotal’** year for our church.’ Sooo... Is this really going to be THE ‘pivotal’ year?”* She asked if this was going to be that year that things really begin to ‘turn around’... that the church ‘pivots’ on a particularly vital POINT in order to **move** in a more positive direction? Moves that are not easy because of the different **personalities** and various **plans** involved to effect that change...

As I thought about that word ‘Pivot,’ I was reminded of a **glass** owned by our daughter Christine, who lives up in VA. It has a picture of a couch on it, with the words **“Pivot, Pivot, Pivot”** written on it. From which comes, of course, today’s sermon title. It has to do with a particularly funny scene from a sitcom popular back in the 90’s and early 2000’s called **“Friends.”** Here it is... **[Following is description of YouTube video entitled “Pivot”]**

Ross, played by David Schwimmer, has bought a BIG brand new couch and wants to get it moved up a flight of stairs that make three 90* turns in a short distance. He enlists the help of two of his ‘FRIENDS,’ Rachel (Jennifer Anniston) and Chandler (great name, EH?) played by Matthew Perry. While short on manpower, Ross does have a ‘plan’... a **‘sketch’** written down on a sheet of paper, of how to accomplish their task. As they attempt to wrestle this oversized couch up the stairs, Chandler first gets wedged between the couch and the banister, and later between the wall and the sofa. All the while Ross, in their **attempts** to **get** the big object

turned, is screaming at his two friends, “Pi-vot, Pi-vot, Pi-vot!” The scene ends with the three in a stalemate, stuck in mid-stairway, in disbelief and **disappointment** that couldn’t reach their **goal**... because after all, their **leader**, Ross, ‘had a sketch!’ As they stand there exhausted, Chandler looks at Ross and says, ‘Now just WHAT did you mean when you said ‘pivot?’’...

SO, just what does this cute little clip from a sitcom about a few close ‘friends’ have to do with US, here at F.P.C.? Well, if you use your imagination just a bit, one *could* consider this little vignette a ‘microcosm’ of the church’s journey.

We are a group of ‘friends’ who are trying to accomplish a task... to move not a *couch*, but a **CHURCH**... to move it not up a flight a stairs, but an equally ‘uphill’ challenge: to reverse the trend of decline and begin a new season of **growth**.

In that journey, we will have disappointments... things that just haven’t **worked**. But we still must continue to develop a **PLAN**... a ‘sketch’ of how to accomplish our goals. Our primary goal is not to simply move around a new piece of furniture... but to **renew** our faith and bring **new**, fresh ‘blood’ into this beautiful ‘**body**’ of Christ. Our purpose is to **KNOW Christ and make Christ KNOWN**... to share a faith that is **vibrant, alive**... both in **private** and in **public**.

In order to accomplish this goal of ‘knowing Christ and making Him known,’ it is vitally important that we **LISTEN** to one another. **Understand** one another. I.e.E., Effectively COMMUNICATE! (Something our TV ‘friends’ didn’t do too well!) Our personal ‘failures to communicate’ most often come NOT because our **voices** haven’t been **loud** enough... but because our **hearts** haven’t been **soft** enough. And our **ears** and **minds** haven’t been **open**...

Our goal as followers of Jesus Christ is not merely about building a building... or adding names on a church roll. Our goal is to make a difference in other people’s lives... to make a difference for the Kingdom of God. One life at a time. Today, as Willie so enthusiastically pointed out, is “Dedication Sunday.” The time at which we ‘dedicate’ our pledges of Time, Talent, and Treasure to God. But which one of those gets the most attention... and the most reluctance to talk about? Our ‘*treasures*.’ And there is no doubt that the financial giving we do for God’s work is VERY important. Particularly as we embark on an exciting, and *costly*, new adventure in ‘Mission/MorganField.’ With each passing day, we are finding that to build the physical structure of a church is an increasingly *expensive* endeavor.

But let's face it... on this day of presenting our pledges for the future of Christ's church in this place... the 'decision\$' have likely been made on how much to commit to "the Future (which) is NOW." If a card was to be filled out, it likely has been already. The time to decide has about come to an END. (Tho, it's NOT *entirely* too late... ☺) But what BEGINS on 'Dedication Sunday' is the **commitment** to **fulfill** one's **pledge**. Not only the monetary one, but to consider just how you are going to give back to God of your time and abilities. Today is the day that you consider just how you are using the gifts God has given you... gifts of **compassion**, gifts of **wisdom**, gifts of **teaching**, gifts of **encouragement**, even gifts of GAB ☺... for the purpose of GIVING of yourself for others. No matter what the progress is on some piece of dirt in a rice field, you are a 'work in progress' for God. As Paul said, YOU are "**God's field.**" YOU are that fertile soil into which God plants the seeds of love and hope to be fruit for others to be nourished by. And as "**God's field,**", you and I are, in the words of the prophet Isaiah, called "**to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor...**" and for our obedience to that proclamation, "**we will be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.**" (Isaiah 61:2-3) As you passed by those beautiful oaks just outside these doors, I'll bet that you didn't think about how those little saplings planted so long ago have grown to bear witness to the glory of God, providing a place of refreshment of the body and encouragement of the soul. You too have been 'planted' by the Lord to grow in witness to the glory of God. Each one of you IS that 'tree of righteousness,' proclaiming the Lord's favor.

Not only did Paul proclaim his brethren 'God's field,' but also ****"God's building."** Aside from the individual 'fruit' that we each bear, collectively we are a structure, a **building**, that serves to provide shelter for others. We remember Christ's words to his disciple Simon: "**And you are Peter and upon this rock I will BUILD this church, and the gates of hell will NOT overpower it.**" (Mark 16:18)

Jesus chose a faithful, but flawed follower... impetuous but important... on which to build that tangible earthly reflection of His eternal kingdom, the church. And WE are Peter. You and I are those 'rocks' on which the church is built... that place of refuge and shelter for others to come and experience God's love.

And just as God has 'planted' His Spirit in us, his 'field' of faith... just as God has 'built' us to be His Church... not a building, but a people... we are to in turn plant in others seeds of faith. We are entrusted with the task of helping to 'build' others up. How? Like Paul said, By **working together** as **God's servants**. In Mark's words, By looking to Christ's example of **servant leadership**. That if we want others to KNOW Jesus, it's not so much by what we SAY, but what we DO. We plant seeds of faith by acts of kindness. We build God's kingdom by building others up... one parched 'field' at a time. We plant those seeds of faith when we hand out a bottle of water to a storm victim... or support a church in Cuba or a student in Malawi... or tutor an elementary school student. We best serve the Father by serving as His Son did. The One who came not to BE served, but to SERVE... and to give His life as a ransom for many. A 'ransom' is a price paid to release a person from captivity. By the resurrection power of Jesus, you and I are empowered to help set captives free. Those held captive to fear, and doubt, and oppression... people who suffer from the loss of loved ones, or from their own fears of death.

In speaking of the loss of loved ones, of friends and family, I was reading the LC American Press this past Tuesday, and was stunned to read this headline: **"Longtime Barbe Coach Castillo dies."** Now, having only been in LC some 7 years, there are a lot of names in the obits that I don't recognize. But *this* one I knew VERY well. You see, I went to elementary school with David Castillo. His dad was a long time sportswriter in BR. Two of my very best friends were very close to him... one of whom is now also a minister, and officiated his service. And what really jumped of the page was the statement: "He was 61 years old." One year younger than ME. I saw my own mortality staring up at me from the page...

I would go on to read that the service was the Friday morning that we would be in BR for both the Presbytery meeting and an appointment for Barrie's Dad. So, even tho I had some 'homework' yet to do for Sunday, I KNEW that I must at least go to the visitation. There are certain 'interruptions' in life that one MUST pay attention to. And I was SO blessed by doing so...

Not only did I get to spend much quality time of conversation with both of those close friends, but also got to see a number of friends from growing up, including even a close relative of Barrie's. But perhaps the most significant conversation I had was with a person familiar to

many of you. *Coach Glenn Cecchini, head baseball coach at Barbe H.S. He actually got his start in coaching as an assistant coach to my friend, who was the head basketball coach for the Bucs for 18 years. But Coach Cecchini's close friendship with David went far beyond hoops... but to a much loftier 'goal.'

I had read his comments in the paper, which spoke of the legacy that our friend left behind: lives impacted not by *telling* others how to live, but by being a *living* example. He echoed to me what had been written in that paper... that in the morning, >> "I would walk into his office and he would be highlighting verses in his Bible... He showed me what was most important in life... not wins and losses, but a relationship with the Lord. It was because of his impact on MY life that in 2013, I gave my life to Jesus Christ."

Now here's a man who himself has influenced many young men. One who has shown his servant's heart in the manner in which he has cared for those entrusted to him. In no small part because of the example given to him by a colleague and friend. Seeds of faith sown in his own life, and in the lives of many young people... that will continue to bear fruit for years to come. Know that you too have the opportunity to make a difference in another person's life... even today. You never know when someone... perhaps very close to you, or a perfect stranger... is going through a particularly 'pivotal' time in their life. So may you and I always be open to the Spirit's leading as God's servants... working together... in the example of Christ... not to be served, but to serve... and to give of our lives.

As we seek to help others carry their burdens through the uphill battles of life, let us **listen** carefully to God's voice directing us... 'Pivot, pivot, pivot'...

***"For we are God's servants, working together;
you are God's field, God's building." (1 Corinthians 3:9)***

So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.

***For the Son of Man came NOT to be served but to serve,
and to give his life a ransom for many."***

(Mark 10:42-45)