

FINANCE REPORT

From Scott's email...

Some good news this month - our giving to the community was slightly in excess of the budgeted amount. To be accurate, the budgeted amount for July is lower than average, because I know we are a little slim in the summer, but still - it's progress!

1. If you don't get the numbers report -- get on the contact list

2. Good for us -- sustaining our community together
 - A community is healthy...
 - When many -- take an ownership stake
 - We give our dollars -- our time and energy -- and our love...
 - To make ours a healthy community

If NRCC is beginning to feel like your spiritual home...

- Consider your role -- making ours a healthy community
- Your dollars -- and time -- and energy -- and love

LESSON

It's a different kind of Sunday

- First, we're goodbye to George...
- Second, our lesson -- is mostly stories

Stories to reinforce a core value of our community

- After which -- I'll suggest we re-up for that core value...
- And after that -- we'll make a practical application

So...

1. Core value stories
2. Invite us to re-commit ourselves to a core value
3. A practical application

The first story.

- When I moved to Raleigh to start NRCC, one of the first people to join NRCC was Jim
- He was a big guy -- 6'5" and heavysset
- With a booming voice -- he was a big man -- and a big personality

He died. It was sad. He was dear to me

- Preparing his funeral -- his wife -- who is informed by her profession...
- She speculated that Jim struggled socially -- as much as he did
- Because he was on the Aspergers spectrum

Which seemed to fit -- because Jim struggled w/ social relationships

- He said things -- way out of bounds
- He missed cues -- and hurt people
- And was often bewildered when he did

As big and loud as he was...

- When it happened -- nobody missed it
- People would come to me
- Doug! Get control of Jim

- Make him stop

Which usually happened on a Sunday...

- So on many Mondays, my day off...
- I'd mull it over

I didn't know about Aspergers...

- But I'd pray -- and reflect -- and seek wisdom...
- And an inner nudge would come -- again and again
- *Don't get control of Jim*
- *Love Jim.*
- *Befriend Jim.*
- *Invite Jim in*

So I would

- And he kept hurting people's feelings
- And the cycle would repeat -- for some years

When Jim learned that he had hurt someone...

- And that I have been at work smoothing ruffled feathers
- He'd apologize to me -- and try to apologize to the person
- But mostly he'd do what he'd done for years
- He'd retreat into his cave -- and avoid people

And I would have another inner nudge...

- *Go get Jim.*
- *Coax him out of his cave*

And going through that as many times as we did-- I got to know Jim pretty well

- And he didn't spare me
- Some of the things he said to me...
- They hurt. He was tough

But as I got to know his heart

- I'd encourage him to engage people...
- Even though he created these episodes
- And when I was smoothing ruffled feathers
- I'd acknowledge Jim's missteps...
- But I'd also tell people about his good heart

That was after the fact

- But eventually I started doing that in real time
- I'd hear him say some knuckleheaded thing...
- And I'd say...
- Whoa, whoa, whoa...
- Let me tell you what Jim means by those words

And I would translate for him

- What I said would seem to have nothing to do with his words...
- I would just tell them about Jim's heart

- And because I'd gotten to know him -- and love him
- And because he had come to trust me...
- And because we'd had so many honest talks about people he'd hurt...

- He allowed me to translate for him

Here's what Jim means...

- *I love this community*
- *And I love you*
- *And I this thing I just said...*
- *I think it will help us thrive and flourish together*

And because I laughed while I said it

- And because everybody knew Jim did what Jim did
- And because Jim would know what I was doing,,,
- He'd say...
- *Yeah. Isn't that what I just said...*

And over time -- our community began to see beyond the hard things Jim said

- We began to see him -- as a man who loved our community
- And loved the people in our community
- And really . . . Didn't always express it well...

We began to see...

- Jim wasn't defined -- by his social ineptitude
- And looking past that, we were able to see the rich gift Jim was
- And he was!
- Insightful. Wise. Compassionate. Generous
- He was all those things

That's when I coined the phrase...

- *Yeah. He's a jerk. But he's my jerk*
- Which doesn't mean we don't deal with jerk behavior
- But it does mean Jim's -- and all of our -- jerk behaviors --
- Don't define us

We are not our sin.

- And if we take grace seriously...
- We get to see the deeper truth about one another...
- Deeper than the failure -- deeper than the shortcoming -- deeper than the broken part

Grace was in the primordial soup...

- From which NRCC has emerged

Grace -- is encoded in the DNA of our community

The second story.

As you've heard -- or read on our website...

From 1995-2007 our community was consumed w/ 2 questions...

- *Can we still be Xn?*
- *Can we still do church?*
- Because "Christian" and "church" were a mixed bag for many
- Deeply transforming...
- And deeply hurtful

We didn't abandon the heritage -- as many do...

- We had experienced something profound in it
- But we were disillusioned

- We couldn't believe -- some things church said we had to believe

And

We were working hard so on those two questions

- That the divisive issue of gay people and church
- Wasn't on our radar

Now -- since then...

- We've done a lot of work -- on the issue
- We have a lot of "why..."
- Behind LGBT folk fully belonging at NRCC
- We have a lot of reference to Bible.
- And history.
- And tradition.
- And science...

But back then...

We hadn't done any of that work

And -- back then...

Two lesbian ladies emailed me from Oregon...

We're moving to Raleigh

- *We have a daughter from a previous marriage*
- *She doesn't want to leave Oregon*
- *Mostly because she loves her church youth group -- and it's in your denomination*

We've been talking to her about your church -- your youth group

- *But here's the thing. We're lesbian*
- *And we know better -- than to show up at a church*

But -- our daughter is heartbroken about leaving

- *What do you think? Could we come? (and not be shunned)*

So I wrote them back

- Well, clearly you know...
- This is a big, divisive issue in churches these days
- Also -- it's a discussion our community has never had
- Give me a week.
- I'll invite the community to have it
- And get back to you

So I emailed everybody in the community to tell the story...

- "These folks have asked to come to our church.
- "What shall I say?"
- Come out next Wed evening to talk it over?"

But before that...

Here's what we cannot do...

We can't say, "Sure. Come on."

- But after they get relationally connected...
- And are ready to teach Sunday School...
- Or some other role in the community
- We can't spring on them then...
- *Oh. No. Sorry.*

- *We can't let you do that*
- *Your kind of people can't really lead in church*

That's NOT an option for us.

- Because that is bait-and-switch.
- That it cruel.

That means...

- Come out this Wednesday
- We'll be deciding -- can gay people fully belong at NRCC

And a lot of folks came out -- and we talked

- And because it's a big -- divisive -- social -- issue...
- Folks knew the cases made -- on both sides

Here's what the Bible says about homosexuality

Here's what the Bible says about grace and acceptance

Yep. That's what Bible says...

- What shall I tell them?

Well...

Here's what the Bible says about homosexuality

And here's what the Bible says about grace and acceptance

Yep. That is what Bible says...

- But again.... What shall I tell them?

Back and forth several times...

- Yep. What shall I tell them?

God, Doug...

- *We don't know!*
- *Why are you asking us?*
- *This isn't the way church works!*

Over the discussion, it became clear...

- Oh...
- *This* is why this is such a divisive issue out there

The other thing that became clear...

- Doug isn't going to tell us what to do

It got quiet after a bit...

And a kind older woman spoke up

- I'm sad you all don't know
- Her name is Tricia Camp
- Her health doesn't allow her to be with us any more
- I miss her deeply

She spoke quietly

Everyone strained to hear what she said...

This is why churches struggle with this issue

- *Once we decide the Bible is how we'll make our decisions...*
- *And then we read the Bible say X...*
- *And also read the Bible say not-X...*

- *Getting the right answer -- which we really want to do*
- *Doesn't seem like an available option*

So...

We could let this issue tear us apart like other churches

- *Or -- we could just admit there is no clear answer*
- *That we're going to err no matter what we do*
- *If we do one thing the Bible says...*
- *We won't do the other*
- *And visa versa*

So...

- *I think we should just admit to ourselves...*
- *We're going to err no matter what we do*

- *And for me...*
- *I think we should err on the side of grace -- and love -- and acceptance*
- *I think that's more important to Jesus*

And the room got quiet...

And people looked at each other

- *Yep. That's what you should tell them, Doug.*
- *They can come belong with us*

Grace is encoded in the DNA of our community

The third story is about a family -- in those early years

They came in the early years...

- And as we do -- they began rethinking religion
- They began practicing the ancient practices
- They got connected in honest, authentic spiritual friendships

Talking about personality struggles

- And marital struggles -- and kid-raising struggles

And they became dear to many in the community

- And many in the community became dear to them

And then a big thing happened in their life

- The husband was arrested for public exhibitionism
- Walking around downtown without a stitch on

And he was arrested

- His mug shot was plastered all over TV
- The wife -- hurting deeply...
- Emailed his mug shot to everybody in the community
- Kind of a messy day

So I left him a voicemail -- and after he was out on bail -- he emailed me...

- Doug. I want to thank you for folding us into the community
- Thank you for all the help the community has been in our lives

But yeah...

This thing has happened

- Pretty humiliating
- So I'll be leaving the church
- But I didn't want to go without thanking you
- It is a wonderful community

We got coffee and talked about the mess

- And after, I asked him...
- *"You need leave the church. Ok..."*
- *"But before you do -- would you do me a favor?"*
- *"I don't think it will cost you much more trouble or humiliation than you already have..."*

But would you do this...

- Send me another email...
- Tell me what happened -- pretty frankly
- Say what you said to me about leaving the church

I'll forward your email to everybody in the community

- And I'll ask -- "would should we do?"

Who knows what will happen...

- But it could be good for you
- I suspect it will be good for the community....
- But we'll see

And so -- we had another Wednesday evening

- I told the story he had given me permission to tell
- About why he did it
- About this history.

- Laid it all out there.
- Shared some of his own speculation...
- Maybe it's this experience in my past -- or that

- Told about his court-appointed therapy
- And his wife leaving in and taking the kids
- And how, If the case goes this way or that -- it'll mean this or that

And then I posed the question...

- What shall I say to his email? What is best?

And we talked...

- Exhibitionism is dangerous, Doug.
- The kids.
- The bathrooms.
- It is dangerous

And then -- for a while...

- The conversation shifted -- to grace -- and redemption
- Big themes in our tradition...

And after a while I asked again...

- What shall I tell him?

After a moment of quiet...

- A guy who had been pretty vocal about the danger
- Stood up to speak...

- Which was notable oh, because we don't usually stand up when we speak

The difference between this man -- and me

The difference between this man -- and all of us

- *Is that his sin -- is sexual -- and out there in public*
- *But if we're honest...*
- *If we tell him he can't belong here*
- *We'd have to say the same -- to me -- to all of us*
- *We can't belong here either*

And he sat down.

- And it was quiet
- And then he stood up again...

But I do think we should figure out how to mitigate danger

- With our kids
- With the bathrooms
- And for 10 minutes we hammered out safety guidelines

But then... Tricia Camp...

- The same lady from the last story...
- She said this...
- We're talking about how to protect the community from the man
- We're not talking about the community protecting the man

This is probably the hardest thing he will ever face

- How can we support him? Stand with him?

And the next 10 minutes were spent hammering *that* out

- And we did -- both
- We worked together -- to make sure he was safe...
- And our community was safe

Grace is encoded into the DNA of our community

And today we are going to decide again...

- Who we are
- Are we still a community of grace?
- Is it still encoded in our DNA?
- Will we still be organized around Grace?

Mark came to talk to me about how much IAF

- The community of communities -- ignites his passion
- How much he wants to serve in this area of our community

- But -- he's afraid
- He's afraid his past... will render this role in our community -- inaccessible to him

So I asked him...

- How brave are you?
- Why don't we ask the community?
- Would you tell your story -- and let us discuss it together?

And he said yes.

And then he told several people in the community...

- People who have come to love him
- Who said -- don't do it, Mark!
- What if it goes badly?
- Feeling very protective of him -- they said...
- It's so public.
- You're so vulnerable.
- Are you sure, Mark.

So I called him again this week...

- You sure, man?

And he said...

- It is scary! It really is.
- But i really want a role in our IAF ministry
- And I don't want this fear hanging over my head

So..

He's going to tell his story...

- He said he'd rather not be here while we talk
- You will leave before we do what are you thinking...
- And I'll call him this afternoon
- I won't tell him *who said what*...
- But i will tell him the upshot of our conversation
- We'll talk about his role on our IAF team

[MARK'S TESTIMONY]

Here's what Mark told me...

These last 15 years have been years of dashed hope

- Being on the registry has been crushing
- Career. Housing. Friendships

- It was my doing.
- It was my crime

But every time passion comes up...

- Like now...
- I'm afraid the other shoe is will drop any minute

But I think IAF could be a lifetime passion for me

But also, he said...

Living out here on the fringe -- it's affected my growth

- Sometimes I get inappropriately angry.
- Sometimes I push too hard
- Sometimes not hard enough

So I'm afraid when my flaws show up...

- All people will see -- is the registry

So...

- What shall tell Mark later?
- What? Why? And how shall I say it?

Put another way...

- Restorative justice talks about restoring harm done

How does that work -- with the who has done harm...

- You hear our projects -- working to restor when harm is done...
- But how does it work -- on the other side of the equation?
- How does grace work -- for those who have done harm?

How are those people integrated back into community?

How are they restored?

What are you thinking? What is God stirring up in your heart?