

Would You Rather Own or Rent?

Is there anything I can stand up here and tell you this morning that you do not already know? We are *so full* of knowledge. We enjoy a Biblical buffet here in the congregation of Chapel by the Sea!

I have been thinking about this lately. Who had more knowledge than the Pharisees in the time of Jesus? Yet, what did they do with it?

We have God in our heads. We have his Word in our heads.

What about our hearts? Does He have our hearts? It's the heart that needs help. It's the heart that needs to be alive! The heart is the place of **ownership**.

Today's message has **one point**. It's a question and it's the title:

Would You Rather **Own or Rent?**

The church has a highly-developed culture of a full-service buffet. This creates consumer-type expectations. Church leaders now decry the fact that there is a church-shopping, church-hopping consumer mindset abroad in the land. Yet, we (the Church) did it to ourselves.

We have taken ministry out of the hands of the many and put it into the hands of the few - the Chosen.

We have played the Landlord. *Please forgive us.*

This Scripture keeps insisting itself back into my mind:

Scripture: **Ephesians 4:1-16**

Therefore I, the prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, accepting one another in love, diligently keeping the unity of the Spirit with the peace that binds us.

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope at your calling—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

Now grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of the Messiah's gift. For it says: When He ascended on high, He took prisoners into captivity; He gave gifts to people. But what does "He ascended" mean except that He descended to the lower parts of the earth?

The One who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things. And He personally gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the training of the saints in the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into a mature man with a stature measured by Christ's fullness.

Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit. ut speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into Him who is the head —Christ.

From Him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part.

How would you treat a lawn mower you just bought at Lowes? Maintaing it? Hide it from the weather? Clean it after every use?

What if you moseyed to the rental business down the road and rented your machine? What would change in your perspective? How motivated to care for it would you be?

Have you rented an apartment or house? In your rental, who took care of the painting, fixed the water heater, repaired the broken furnace? How attached were you to the place?

What is the difference in feeling and in mindset when you are paying rent to a landlord, and when you are investing in a house?

Have you ever rented a car? How attached were you to it? How did you care for it? Have you noticed any difference in how you treated your own car as opposed to the rental?

Quote from "Community", Brad House:

It was a perfect day for the beach, and my new bride and I had the top down in a fun but gutless Mustang. My faith in the directions our host had given us was waning, but I was still having a good time. We had left the main track miles ago and were tearing down a dirt road riddled with potholes. There was a sign saying something about four-wheel drive a few clicks back, but I didn't bother getting the details. My wife began to get nervous about our adventure and asked if we should be taking a Mustang on a road like this.

"Without hesitation, I uttered those three little words that put our minds at ease and that have been used by most of us at one time or another to justify the reckless

disregard for vehicle degradation: *'It's a rental.'*

"It's amazing how differently we treat things that we own versus rent. Ownership gives us a sense of responsibility and care. It is ours, and in some way it reflects who we are, so we take care of it.

"For several years I drove an old Buick Park Avenue that my wife and I had bought from her grandfather. It was hot beige with a beige interior. Not exactly the ride of choice for a young man, but it was mine. It was not nearly as nice as the gutless Mustang we rented on our honeymoon, yet I treated it much better. My treatment of a car reflects my level of ownership more than it reflects the value of the car itself."

Let me suggest: if owning a car makes you more careful when driving it, **owning an idea makes you more passionate when sharing it.**

In a rental, when something breaks, the landlord is expected to deal with it. Renters won't take risks for the sake of the rented item.

The rental mindset says, I am paying the rent, and as long as I pay, I expect the management to take care of my needs. Renters tend to approach their work with a mentality of "it's just a job", tend to make statements like "that's not my problem" and point the finger at others when things go wrong.

The ownership mindset says, I am invested in this, and although some things may not be my responsibility . . . I choose to take responsibility because the mission matters to me.

In many churches, leaders are landlords. They are expected to fix things. Leaders usually have ownership and passion.

Need: We are in a mode of growth by accumulation of Christians from other churches. We have a desire to make disciples who make disciples, but we find it difficult to move past primarily increasing one another's library of knowledge.

This Ephesian letter was written to everyone in the church, not just the leaders (few as they were in those days). Do you even realize you are called? Do you think the "call" applies only to the platform people?

This is a **call to community**. Look how the calling is to be walked out: humility, gentleness, patience, accepting one another, keeping unity.

The calling isn't just something out there by itself. It's practical, down-to-earth,

and probably inconvenient. It is walked out in relationship.

How did the church grow from about 25,000 in AD 100 to up to 20 million just before Constantine came along and did his damage?

- 1) They were an illegal religion throughout this period.
- 2) They didn't have any church buildings as we know them.
- 3) They didn't have the Scriptures as we know them.
- 4) They didn't have an institution or the professional form of leadership normally associated with it.
- 5) They didn't have seeker-sensitive services, youth groups, worship bands, seminaries, commentaries, etc.
- 6) They actually made it hard to join the church. (There was a significant initiation period so worthiness could be seen)

How about Red China? During the Cultural Revolution (explicit intention: to obliterate the Christian faith), the church grew from 2 million to 60 million. This without professional clergy, official leadership structures, no central organization, no mass meetings.

How did this happen?

Ephesians again:

And He personally gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the training of the saints in the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ...

This describes the elements, the roles, the functions, of the church. Not Capital A Apostles or Capital P Prophets, but small letter roles or bents or traits or functions or predispositions in ministry. This, plus the various gifts, constitute the DNA in the Church - each congregation.

God has planted the DNA described in Ephesians 4 in God's people. They have the same power potential as the underground church in China - as the Church of the first 300 years.

Does God know what He's doing?

Do we believe that God has given our congregation all it needs for life and godliness, and for being a church of power and ever-expanding ministry?

Notice: the Scripture says God has given a ministry grace or leaning to "each one", and then it says what the ministry roles or functions are. They are planted in this church, but some may lie quite dormant because we don't think we have permission.

The underground church in China has borne that out! They are not the "early Church". They are **today's** church.

The believers, almost instinctively, knew what to do! The church, being the living organism that it is, organically structured itself at the ground level. That's because God has supplied what is needed for that to happen.

APOSTLES extend the gospel. As the "sent ones," they ensure that the faith is transmitted from one context to another and from one generation to the next. They are always thinking about the future, bridging barriers, establishing the church in new contexts, developing leaders, networking trans-locally. Yes, if you focus solely on initiating new ideas and rapid expansion, you can leave people and organizations wounded. The shepherding and teaching functions are needed to ensure people are cared for rather than simply used.

PROPHETS know God's will. They are particularly attuned to God and his truth for today. They bring correction and challenge the dominant assumptions we inherit from the culture. They insist that the community obey what God has commanded. They question the status quo. Without the other types of leaders in place, prophets can become belligerent activists or, paradoxically, disengage from the imperfection of reality and become other-worldly.

EVANGELISTS recruit. These infectious communicators of the gospel message recruit others to the cause. They call for a personal response to God's redemption in Christ, and also draw believers to engage the wider mission, growing the church. Evangelists can be so focused on reaching those outside the church that maturing and strengthening those inside is neglected.

SHEPHERDS nurture and protect. Caregivers of the community, they focus on the protection and spiritual maturity of God's flock, cultivating a loving and spiritually mature network of relationships, making and developing disciples. Shepherds can value stability to the detriment of the mission. They may also foster an unhealthy dependence between the church and themselves.

TEACHERS understand and explain. Communicators of God's truth and wisdom, they help others remain biblically grounded to better discern God's will, guiding others toward wisdom, helping the community remain faithful to Christ's word, and constructing a transferable doctrine. Without the input of the other functions, teachers can fall into dogmatism or dry intellectualism. They may fail to see the personal or missional aspects of the church's ministry.

Quote from *Community* by Brad House on "Well-oiled machine"

"We have so programmed the church to function as a well-oiled machine that we leave no room for Christians to be Christians. Are not these the functions of the church, as in the people of God, rather than the church, the institution?"

"Seriously, what is left for the disciple of Christ to do? As Hirsch points out, 'We have created passivity through the way we have done church.' We think we are helping by providing every imaginable service, but instead we are robbing the church of the joy of living out their faith and imaging God through encouragement, prayer, generosity, and witness."

(I am trying, kindly enough I hope, to foster a "holy discontent with the status quo" and encourage ownership of God's mission here. (Guess who's a little scared of where that might take us?)

Ephesians again!

But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into Him who is the head —Christ. From Him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part.

Ownership inspires passion and leads to action.

Owners take on risks. They are invested.

Ownership isn't agreement! Agreement won't risk comfort, time, money, self-interest.

Ownership will.

A renter might say: "I like what you are doing."

Corollary: "I *don't like* what you are doing! Fix it!"

An owner will say: "I believe in what we are doing."

Do you detect the difference?

Owners will jump into the messiness of being in community (life together) and of being inconvenienced on behalf of someone else.

Don't Have Time:

You might have to let something else go. You might have to reduce event-based activity and pay more attention to relationship.

There are ways to incorporate relational ministry in the spheres and rhythms of life you already have.

Don't Know What to Do:

Ask to be mentored / disciplined.

Join or gather a life group and pray together over these things, while you search the Scriptures.

Take some time to examine the suppressed dreams that may have been given you by God when you were more fervent with Him.

Have any of the following thoughts entered your mind when thinking about this?

I Am Not Trained/no Bible School or Seminary:

Neither were most of the Big Letter "A" Apostles.

Neither were most of those believers in the book of Acts of the Holy Spirit

Neither were most of those dear fervent believers in Red China.

Neither was Jesus.

Take advantage of the opportunities provided here and elsewhere. There's no shortage of information.

Our Programs can get it done:

Are you bought in? Are you an owner in one of those programs? Program or not, the key thing is relationship and community.

Programmatic solutions can become mechanical, with surface relationships.

Be careful you don't rely too much on subcontracting out your ministry. You have a calling and some aspect of the DNA for this congregation's mission.

We are trying to develop **profit-sharing** around here!

We are trying to foster opportunities to participate in the mission.

Imagine a church where several people are each is shepherding people to shepherd others.

Imagine most of our ministry being relational, interactive, entrepreneurial, broader than primarily focusing on increasing our fund of knowledge.

Imagine a church of 200 ministers, with the freedom to explore and create ministry - the freedom to experiment and fail.

Imagine life together, embedded in our daily routines, not just a calendar of ongoing events.

Remember in all this: our primary reason for gathering, making disciples, connecting in life groups, is to **image the Son** - mimic His life in our life together.

Our focus is on Jesus. We lift Him up, not tasks, not events, not pleas for help. The more we see Jesus the more we'll have ownership and passion. The more people see Jesus clearly, and not the religious filters we put around Him, the more people will be drawn to Him

The more blind we are to His glory, the more we'll be renters and not owners.

Action:

Decide to give yourself permission to be a minister.

Tell me (or someone) your ministry dream.

Look around: see what you can offer someone nearby.

Gather some others into a life (transformational, community) group and begin sharing life. Pray together. Eat together. Search the Word together. See what God does.