

## Why We Are Here

I am presently doing something at home that I haven't done for quite a while. I'm building some cabinets. Back around Mother's Day I bought Betty Jane a new LCD monitor that she could hook up to her laptop computer, thus giving her a larger viewing screen to work from. The downside of that purchase is that there is currently not enough room on her desk to accommodate the laptop and the monitor. The problem is the cabinet now sitting on the back of her desk area. The solution is to build some new cabinets that can be attached to the wall, thus freeing up more surface area on the desk.

The truth be told I like building cabinets. I especially like creating the mortise and tenon joints which hold the cabinet and door frames together. There are easier and quicker ways to build cabinet frames and doors, but I like doing it the old fashioned way. I like the simplicity and strength of mortise and tenon joints. If one cuts mortises and tenons to fit well, there is little or no need for nails, screws, or even glue.

This method of construction can also be used on much larger structures. The post and beam method of building barns, for example, is just mortise and tenon joinery on a bigger scale. Actually, if we wanted to, we could build a church using mortise and tenon joints. You will notice as I assemble the model I brought along today that I'm not using any nails, screws, or glue. This little church frame has been built using nothing except mortises and tenons.

Now the reason I am talking about this today is not to teach you a method to build cabinets or barns. I do, however, want to teach you something about how I think we need to go about building our church into the future. The mortise and tenon joint is an example of how I believe God wants us to operate here at Fourth Street.

I've mentioned in a couple of sermons and have shared at Council meetings that I've been somewhat frustrated and have been at a loss lately in trying to understand the current mission and to capture the big picture vision of who we are or ought to be as a church. What does God want us to be doing exactly and how are we supposed to go about doing it? What is the common mission and vision that holds us together and gives direction to our work as a church?

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I've noticed, and you may have noticed too, that we work best when we have a common goal to work toward. In 2006 it was the celebration of our 100th Anniversary as a church. We had a great year working together to remember our past and to give thanks for what we had seen the Lord accomplishing among us. Interest was up, excitement was up, attendance and giving were up, as we worked together to celebrate our anniversary. In 2007 we didn't have a clear sense of purpose. Interest was down, excitement was down, attendance and giving were down. In 2008 we have rallied around the challenge of replacing the church heating system. It's not a very spiritual thing at all, but it does give us a common purpose, and guess what? In 2008 interest is up, excitement is up, and attendance and giving are up too. It is clear to me that we work best when we have a common goal to work toward.

Although I like the mission and vision statements we have been printing in the bulletins every Sunday for a number of years now, I am now convinced they are not effective. If I were to ask you to close your eyes and tell me what those statements are, there might be one or two people among you who could give me the gist of them. Most of you wouldn't have a clue. Frankly, I have trouble recalling them from memory. This tells me that we need something better, something that we can easily understand and get hold of, something as simple as celebrating an anniversary or hiring someone to replace the furnace--something that we can see just as clearly as that.

This brings me back to the mortise and tenon joint, a joint made up of two components, a mortise and a tenon. It's so simple but with just these two components one can build cabinets, tables and chairs, and barns that will stay together for hundreds of years; you can even build a church this way.

As many of you know I usually write my sermons on Thursdays. This past Thursday it just wasn't happening. I was in the office trying to write something, and asking God to help me, but nothing was working. My mind was wondering off down a dozen different rabbit trails, and I just couldn't focus. I was frustrated and after a while I was scared. What if Sunday comes and I don't have anything to say? But try as I did, I couldn't see what it was that God wanted me to say. After a number of false starts and many interruptions I finally had to give up and hope to come back to it later. It wasn't until about 10:30 Thursday night after Betty Jane had gone to bed and the house was quiet, that I

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began to feel like I might have something to share with you this morning. What came to me was this: the mortise and the tenon: we need a mission and a vision this simple and this strong to hold us together and to give us direction as a church. And then I was reminded that Jesus was once asked: "Tell us if you can: what is the most important commandment?" "And Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these **two** commandments," Matthew 22:37-40.

Do you hear what I hear, see what I see? Here are two components, two commandments that hold everything else together: Jesus says, "All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." Could this be it? I believe it can be and needs to be this simple. As it relates to us as a church I would phrase it this way: **Our mission as a church is to love God and care for people. Our vision as a church is to be loving God and caring for people.** You can remember this on one hand: five words: "Love God, Care For People." Or, you can remember it on the other hand: "Love God, Care For People." **Our mission as a church is to love God and care for people.** Say it to yourself out loud: **"I am here as a Christian to love God and care for people."**

Now if you can hang on to that, that answers the question as to why we are here and what we should be doing. We should be loving God and caring for people, and everything else we do should relate to these two mandates, loving God and caring for people. The only other question we need to answer is "how?" How are we to show our love for God and demonstrate our care for people?

First of all, how are we to show our love for God? It seems to me there are three main components to loving God: Worship, Word, and Ordinances. We need to show our love for God by worshiping Him passionately and praising Him for Who He is and for all He has done and will do. We need to learn to lose ourselves and find our God in worship. Worship is one way we actively love God. Jesus said, "God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth," (See. John 4). **We love God by giving all of ourselves to Him in worship.**

A second way we love God is to fill our minds and hearts with God's word. When we read and/or listen to God's word, meditate on His word, study His word, memorize His word, and obey His word, we honor Him and love Him. Jesus said in John 14:15, "If you love me you will obey my commandments." The psalmist said, "Thy words I have hidden in my heart that I might not sin against thee." **We love God by paying attention to, and by obeying His word.**

A third way we love God is to practice the Ordinances. In regards to the Lord's Supper, Jesus said, "This do in remembrance of me." In regards to the washing of the Saints' Feet, Jesus said, "Now that I your Lord and Master have washed your feet, you should also wash one another's feet;" "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." And, in regards to Baptism, Jesus said, "Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost." **We love God whenever we give ourselves to His Ordinances.**

We show our love to God through Worship, Word, and Ordinance. Remember: **Worship, Word, and Ordinance.**

The other how question we need to visit this morning is how are we to show our love for people? I'm going to give you three "Ps" for this one: **Pray, Practice Hospitality, and Proclaim Christ.** Certainly we care for people and love people by praying for them. I want to acknowledge the good work Phyllis Heaton does here in maintaining our church prayer chain. We need to pray for one another and to pray even for those we don't know. Paul tells Timothy in I Timothy 2:1-3, "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone--for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior. Paul also says, "Pray for one another," "Pray for me," and "Pray without ceasing." **We are called to love God and to care for people through our prayers.**

The second way we care for people is to **Practice Hospitality.** This means taking the time to listen to people's stories and to pay attention to what they are telling us about their hearts. It means spending time with them, opening our homes to them, being with them in times of need, and celebrating with

them in times of joy. Romans 12:15 says, "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn." Galatians 6:2 says, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." **We care for people by welcoming them into our lives. We are called to practice hospitality.**

The third way we care for people is to **Proclaim Christ.** We must never forget that there is no greater need in anyone's life than the need for God. We sing the chorus, "People need the Lord," and that chorus speaks the truth. People need cared for physically. They need food when they are hungry, shelter and clothing to cover their nakedness, companionship when they are lonely. They need other people to pray for them and to show them hospitality, but the only thing that can deliver them from hell and make them whole is Christ. The most important thing we as Christians have to offer others is Christ. Praying for people and showing hospitality to people is essential, but we have not fulfilled our calling to care for people until we have told them of our Savior. **The most important thing we have to give is Christ.**

Just to review: We are here to love God and care for people. We love God by giving ourselves to Him in worship, learning and obeying His word, and by submitting to His Ordinances. We care for people by praying for them, practicing hospitality toward them, and proclaiming Christ to them.

These are the two main reasons why we are here, the mortise and tenon of our faith: **We are here #1 to love God, and #2 to care for people.**

## The Fourth Street Church of God

2001 Fourth Street  
Altoona, PA 16601  
942-1007/946-4110  
4thstcog@nb.net

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### Why We Are Here

**Matthew 22:34-40**

Jon R. Neely, Pastor