

“Faith, Family and Future”

Colossians 1:15-20

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor

Smoke Rise Baptist Church

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“Faith, Family, Future: Expanding the Legacy of the Smoke Rise Spirit.” This is the theme of our capital campaign and I like it. It tells a lot about Smoke Rise, who we are and what we consider important. I think this is important, for many churches are going through an identity crisis, struggling to define their mission and purpose. As a result, they are floundering like a ship tossed upon the open sea. I can think of nothing worse for a group of believers.

So, who are we at Smoke Rise? We are a family of believers that has faith in God and is preparing for the future. Let me explain.

Smoke Rise Baptist Church is a family. This may be the most defining statement about our church. As a matter of fact, if I had to use one word to describe us, it would be the word, “family.”

I hope the word “family” is a positive word for you and you grew up in a loving environment. I certainly did. I could not have had better parents or siblings. My memories of home are pleasant and happy. There was a lot of love and laughter in our home. It was safe and peaceful.

Don’t misunderstand me. I don’t want to give the impression that my childhood home was perfect. No home is. I have three brothers. We fussed and fought. We competed against each other to win. We disagreed and expressed it. But through it all, we never questioned our love for each other or willingness to help each other when needed. To this day, we are close and stay in constant contact with each other. Some of our happiest moments are spent with each other at a Rook table or around a pot roast and potatoes. Having this wonderful family has enabled me to spread my wings and fly to heights I may never have envisioned. Their love, support and encouragement make up a big part of my firm foundation.

However, I no longer live with my brothers or even close to them. They are four hundred miles away. Even my children live hours from Jackie and me now. Yet, we need family. We need people in our lives that will accept us as we are, love us at our best and worst, rejoice with us in the good times and cry with us in the sad times. All of us need these kinds of relationships. Where do you find them? Smoke Rise is certainly one place.

My favorite comment to prospects is this. “Come and visit us. We are a family on a journey seeking to understand God, the world and ourselves. We will gladly accept you where you are, teach you what we know and let you teach us what you have learned about life. Throughout this pilgrimage, we will love, embrace, encourage and help you. We will be there for you when you need us and lean on you when we are weak. We will join hearts and hands as we walk through this world and will only let go when we place you in God’s arms at the end of your journey.”

This is what it means to be family. This is what it means to be a member of Smoke Rise Baptist. This is the most non-judgmental and affirming church I’ve ever known. It truly is a family of believers and a healthy family at that. Our community needs us. We must do all we can to expand this legacy.

Smoke Rise is a family of believers that has faith in God through His Son, Jesus. What makes us a family is our common love for and faith in God. Without Him, we would have never come together or stayed together.

Even though we are quite different, as all families are, our faith is very focused. Our faith is rooted in a God that created us in His image so that we could enjoy and take care of His world. Our faith is in a God that loves us, wants the best for us and will help us achieve the potential He has placed inside us. Our faith is in a God that is good, righteous, generous, loving, compassionate and faithful. Our faith is in a God that has revealed Himself through His Son, Jesus, whom we believe to be His fullest and finest revelation.

One of the pillars upon which our faith rests is Colossians 1:15-20. "Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have supremacy. For God was pleased to have all the fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross."

We believe that Jesus made the invisible God visible. If you want to know who God is, look at Jesus. If you want to know what God thinks, listen to Jesus. If you want to know what God would have you do, follow Jesus.

Our faith as a family of believers is not in ideology, nor even ourselves but a living God that loved the world so much that "He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." We believe the people of our community need this faith. This is why we must expand the legacy of the Smoke Rise spirit.

Finally, we are a family of faith in God that is preparing for the future. We believe that life is filled with choices and we are glad it is. We cherish our freedom but are aware of the responsibility that places upon us to make healthy choices. As a result, we are committed to teaching people how to make wise decisions.

Like a conscientious family, we want to teach members how to be good citizens of God's Kingdom and this world. We want to help people be good mates, parents, students, employees, employers, and neighbors. We want to teach them how to handle problems, challenges and temptations so that they can achieve their potential.

In addition, we want to prepare our members to die in peace. From time to time, we know the family circle will be broken. We lose people very dear and precious to us each week and our hearts grieve. However, we find comfort and are even strengthened by the fact that those who leave us go to be with the larger family of faith that spans the centuries. So, the future that we speak about extends beyond this world to "a home not made with human hands, eternal in the heavens." Ultimately it is that home for which we are preparing church members. However, we feel a burden to prepare our entire community and this is why we need to expand the Smoke Rise legacy.

In some of his parting words to Grace Community Church in Houston, Columbia Shuttle Commander Rick Husband said, "If I don't come back, tell them about Jesus."

He's real to me." I'm sure that Commander Husband's family and friends are fulfilling his wishes. I've received several emails that confirm this.

This needs to be our mission, too. Each day we need to be telling people about Jesus and the difference he can make in their lives. But like Commander Rick Husband, we also need to think about the people that will live here after we are gone. They will need Jesus, too, along with a family of believers that will love and care for them. This is why we must make sure that there will be a Smoke Rise Baptist Church for them just as there has been for us. Will you join me in expanding the legacy of the Smoke Rise spirit by making a commitment to our capital campaign? On their behalf and ours, I thank you.