

“People Need the Lord”

John 1:35-42

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Kick-Off Sunday for the New Church Year

It is time for fall and football and I am glad about both. Few sights are more spectacular than a football heading to an open receiver with golden leaves and a bright blue sky in the background. Surely this is a foretaste of heaven.

It is also time for us to resume our schedule of activities after the summer break. School is back in session and it is time for us to return to the class room, too. I hope you are ready for a new season of challenging classes and mission opportunities. They begin this Wednesday evening. Even though the kitchen is still being renovated, Lu and her fine staff will have a delicious meal waiting for us. Come and enjoy the warm fellowship around the tables at the Smoke Rise Café.

As I think about our new church year, I am reminded of three things that I want to share with you. People need the Lord. People need Smoke Rise Baptist Church. We need to go to the people in our community, introduce them to Jesus and invite them to church.

Why do people need the Lord? Let our text answer this. Among the many things that God can do for His children, two are highlighted here. He can *forgive our sins* and *give us back our future*. As a matter of fact, he can lead us where we would never have gone on our own.

“The next day John was there with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, ‘*Look, the Lamb of God!*’ When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, ‘What do you want?’ They said, ‘Rabbi, which means teacher, where are you staying?’ ‘Come and you will see.’ So they went and saw where he was staying and spent the day with him. It was about the tenth hour” John 1:35-39.

“The Lamb of God” became one of the most precious and descriptive titles for Jesus. In ancient times, lambs were sacrificed daily to atone for the sins of the people. Jesus would become the final sacrifice and through him forgiveness would be granted to all that asked.

I know everyone has many needs in this world filled with stress and pressure, but one need that all of us have in common is forgiveness. Each of us has made mistakes that cannot be changed and do not need to be ignored. Neither do we need to live in guilt or shame.

Where can we find forgiveness? Who can take away our guilt and restore our self-esteem? Who can show us a better way to live?

“The next day John was there with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, ‘*Look, the Lamb of God!*’ ” There’s your answer. Confess your sins and ask Jesus to forgive you. You can trust him to be compassionate and merciful.

Let the text continue to speak. “Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, ‘We have found the Messiah,’ that is the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus *looked intently* at him and said, ‘You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas,’ which when translated is Peter” John 1:40-42.

What do you think Jesus saw the day he met Peter? Certainly he saw what others did, a rugged fisherman, but he also saw what was hidden from the casual observer. He saw what Peter could be, the rock upon whose faith the church could be built. In other words, Jesus saw Peter’s potential and was ready to help Peter realize and achieve it.

Legend says that Michelangelo was chipping away with his chisel at a huge shapeless rock. When asked what he was doing, he responded, “I am releasing the angel imprisoned inside.”

Why do people need the Lord? He can release angels inside us. He can help us see the potential that is hidden from others and us. He can enable us to achieve dreams beyond our wildest imagination. Even if we have made mistakes and underachieved to this point or ignored the potential given us, he can forgive us and give us back our future, a future filled with promise and hope. Do you know anyone that doesn't need this gift? I don't. Everybody needs the Lord!

Twenty-one years ago, Greg Nelson and Phil McHugh wrote the words to that popular song, "People Need the Lord." They did so after looking into the empty eyes of a waitress and other patrons in a restaurant.

Every day they pass me by, I can see it in their eye;
Empty people filled with care, headed who knows where.

On they go through private pain, living fear to fear.
Laughter hides the silent cries only Jesus hears.

People need the Lord; people need the Lord;
At the end of broken dreams, He's the open door.

People need the Lord; people need the Lord;
When will we realize that people need the Lord?

I hope we realize it. I can think of nothing more important that people need in our world filled with anxiety and fear.

Why do people need Smoke Rise Baptist Church? This is a church filled with grace and encouragement, two things people are desperately seeking. As a matter of fact, I have never encountered a people more willing to accept, affirm and help others along their journey, traits for which I am eternally grateful. I think Smoke Rise is the kind of church that people want and need.

Brian McLaren states in his book, The Church on the Other Side, "Postmoderns are not loners. Life is a journey to be shared with others. They want to share their pilgrimage with people that care about them and allow them to be authentic. They resist any group that demands they conform to their expectations or makes them feel uncomfortable. Authenticity is important and love that demands conformity is an impostor. They want to plant their lives in the soil of a loving community that will be patient with them and help them grow into what God wants them to be."

McLaren's quote of Lesslie Newbigin is most appropriate. "It is our love for one another, living in community that will prove our legitimacy and His. This is truer than ever in a community-starved postmodern culture where the pendulum has swung to extreme individualism, isolation and loneliness."

This is why I proudly proclaim that if you have made mistakes and need to be forgiven, Smoke Rise is the church for you. If you have not lived up to your potential, need another chance or need encouragement and prayer to help you make changes in your life, Smoke Rise is the church for you.

If you need to identify your God-given gifts and abilities and need to be trained and equipped to develop them, Smoke Rise is the place for you. If you need a place where all people will be given equal opportunities to use their skills and achieve their potential, this church is for you. If you are looking for a church that has a plan and strategy for making the world better and needs your help, Smoke Rise is for you.

Repeatedly, I have seen this church embrace people at their lowest and with God's help lift them to their highest. I have seen people come in discouraged and leave encouraged. I have seen people develop and use talents that other churches ignored.

I truly believe that Smoke Rise's purpose is to release angels imprisoned inside people. God help us to be faithful to do so until he returns!

I would be remiss, however, if I did not tell you one more thing. **The people in our community need us to go find them and bring them in.**

Andrew is highlighted three times in scripture and all three times he is bringing someone to Jesus, beginning with his own brother, Simon Peter. Would Simon have met Jesus had it not been for Andrew? We'll never know. We do know, however, how they met and Andrew was the catalyst.

Our community is filled with people that need Jesus and Smoke Rise Baptist Church. Will they find either without our help? In our current religious and social climate, it is doubtful.

Since 1991, the adult population in America has grown by 15%. In that same period, the number of adults who does not attend church has nearly doubled. For the most part, these adults are disinterested in church life because of the rising numbers of scandals and charlatans. For many of these people, all churches are alike and the God they reflect is unconcerned about them. In short, they are not going to church!

The statistics in our own city bear out this fact. There are 3,400,000 people living in the main part of Atlanta. On an average Sunday, eighty-seven percent is not in church. Seventy percent does not even belong to a church.

This means we must go get them. We must develop relationships with neighbors, schoolmates and coworkers and show a genuine concern for them. We must model authentic Christian living and reflect the Light of the world. We must share our faith, lives, Lord and this wonderful church with them. We must tell them the difference that Jesus has made on our journey as we, like Andrew, introduce them to Jesus.

Will you join me in this effort? Will you invite family members, school mates, coworkers, neighbors, civic and club friends to come to Smoke Rise? Will you invite softball and soccer friends to sit with you in Sunday School and worship? Will you introduce them to Jesus and encourage them to follow him as you are? Will you be like Andrew?

Recently, I overheard a conversation between two women at a fast food restaurant. One was expressing feelings of loneliness and guilt over recent marriage problems and her impending divorce. The other invited her to church. "Where do you go to church?" the first woman asked. "A Baptist church not far from here," she replied. "Baptist!" the woman exclaimed, "I could never go to a Baptist church. They would condemn me for sure and make me feel even more guilt."

How sad, I thought, as I listened to these women talk. That's the impression that many people have of the church and God. That's why many hurting people don't darken our doors.

We've got to find these people and befriend them. We've got to tell them that our God is not unmerciful and our church will not condemn them. We've got to find them before they sink further into despair.

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I hope we realize it and are ready to share our faith and church with them. What a difference it will make in their lives and ours. Ask Andrew!