**Breaking Down the walls**

**FBC Albemarle**

**May 22, 2016**

We have all experienced this. We are at a family gathering and there are too many people to sit around one table. So, we do what seems to make sense and seems to be very natural: we create an adult table and a kid’s table. Most of the time, the adults sit around the fancy table in the dining room while the children are relegated to the “TV” room around card tables. You all know what I am talking about…we’ve all done it. Some of you in your 30’s and 40’s still have not graduated to the adult table at your family gatherings!

The problem exists when we applied the same logic to how we do church. Most churches have created positions for adult pastors, youth pastors and children’s pastors. Some churches have created adult worship services and youth worship services. Even within the realm of service, we often have adult mission trips and youth mission trips.

It isn’t bad to have age specific ministries. We all need to be together with those who are similar in ages. The JOY group should continue to have ministries that are age specific. The youth need time together with one another to have age-appropriate teaching and activities. However, when the body of Christ is completely segregated every time we are together, we are no longer functioning as the entire body. We are different parts that never come together to create a whole.

Though we at First Baptist have not gone to extreme like some others, we still have room for improvement. Though we might be all together in the same room physically, that doesn’t necessarily mean that we are being successful in building relationships across generations. The chances of us building relationships are better than those that are totally separated but we still have to intentionally seek to break down the walls that divide us. (Side note: We do this better than many churches but we can always do it better!)

You have probably heard many sermons on the familiar passage of Jesus rebuking his disciples for not allowing the children to come to him. You probably have heard sermons on how we need to come to Jesus with a child-like faith. We need to place our complete trust in him as children do with their parents. We should have the innocence of children and be vulnerable as they are to the care of adults in their lives. All of these things are true and good. However, that may not be the complete interpretation of this passage.

The disciples might have heard Jesus’ words from a slightly different perspective. In that time women and children were held in very low regard. Often times, they were expendable. They were seen as liabilities and had no standing in society. So when Jesus saw his disciples treat the children just the way others would treat them, it made Jesus indignant. As he had taught time after time, the kingdom of God belonged to those who were cast aside, who were overlooked and who were disenfranchised. He said it at the Sermon on the Mount and he is reiterating it here. Jesus is saying that we are all important in the sight of God. We were all chosen by God and adopted as his sons and daughters. In his eyes we are holy and dearly loved. We simply have to live into this identity.

So YES, children and youth are incredibly important to Jesus. Every age group and every generation is valuable to God and his kingdom. In order to develop Sticky Faith or a faith that lasts, we must break down the walls of generations and pass on the great works of God to one another. This sermon is for all generations because it takes all of us working together to build up God’s kingdom. Yes, as adults it is up to us to engage our children and youth first but there is also some responsibility that lies within our young people to being open to having adults in their lives. We need to break down the walls.

First, in order to break down the walls, we need see each other as God sees us. We all have been adopted by God as his sons and daughters. We have been chosen since the beginning of creation to be holy and blameless. Though sin was introduced in the world, through the sacrifice of Jesus, we are co-heirs with Christ. Just as Jesus is at the right hand of his Father, we will also spend eternity in his presence. When we place our faith and trust under his care, we accept our adoption into the kingdom. No matter our age, whether we are eight or eighty, God sees us in the same way.

So we need to see each other in the same way. Adults, God is using our children and youth to build up God’s kingdom. Children and youth, our adults are wonderful examples of what it means to follow Jesus. We need to learn from one another and encourage each other to take the next step forward!

Second, in order to break down the walls, we must desire the best for others, even at the expense of our own comfort and desires. Christ taught his disciples to sacrifice for others. We are to do the same. I guess the disciples preferred to not have to deal with the chaos of having kids around. It probably cramped their style. Jesus simply reminded them that it wasn’t about them and it isn’t about us today. It is about the kingdom.

Are there some things that we would prefer to do differently in the church? I believe we would all answer yes. However, the question is not what I would prefer. The question should be what would be best to meet the needs of others. I believe that once we change our paradigm from our own wants and needs to what is best for others, then I believe we are living as Christ-centered people.

Finally, we can break down the walls by focusing on relationships. When we truly get to know one another and our stories, then we are much more likely to sacrifice for one another. When I know someone well, I am more willing to go the extra mile. When we keep people at a distance and label them into groups, it is much easier to choose self before others. Labels like blacks, Hispanics, homeless, unemployed, special needs, old, young, drunks, mentally ill and many more help us to keep people at arms length rather than seeing them as uniquely created in God’s image. However, when we have a relationship with someone of different race or of a different social status or a different generation, then it becomes more personal. We should be more personal with everyone around us.

So let’s break down the walls. Let’s break down the walls by seeing each other as God sees each of us. Let’s break down the walls by desiring the best for others even at the expense of our own comfort and desires. Let’s form relationships that will widen our perspective and will help us to the face of God in everyone. This can seem overwhelming. We can’t break down the walls overnight but we can take down the wall one brick at a time.