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The Lord be with you.

Good Morning God! You gather us and bless us. Be with us, walk with us, make us your people who are called to pass on faith, who are called to tell your story, who are enlightened by your word and empowered by your spirit. We give you thanks for all these gifts and the gift of your son. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

A reading from the third chapter of Colossians – “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. The word of the Lord.

It is a joy to be with you each year and a challenge for those of you who know me to cram hours of what I'd like to say into 3-5 minutes. My motto has always been to hit hard and get off the stage and so I stand before you aware that time's a wasting.

The question I am asked most often is this one - How can we get more youth involved in our congregation? What's usually behind that question is a fear of their children heading down the street to the Baptist church. Measuring success with numbers is an easy trap to fall into. However, I think we're coming at this question all wrong. If we want to be envious of our Baptist brothers and sisters, let's be envious for the right reason. Let's use the right yardstick to gauge our success or failure. The real reason for our envy shouldn't lie in their youth programs. They more than double us in the percentage of adult participation in Christian education. Let that settle for a moment – double the number of adults in Sunday school, Bible study, or in some way opening the book of faith. If parents and mentors pass on the faith then shouldn't it be important that they are modeling behavior we want our kids to have? Our 23% as opposed to their 49% are the numbers we should be working on. We have the highest participation of seven denominations in grades 6-8<sup>th</sup>. We call it incarceration or maybe confirmation. We then graduate them and tell them they are now adult members in the life of the congregation and they then mimic what they see the adults doing. Showing up at best once a week for an hour. Dear Lord, let's not set the bar so low for them. We get what we are! We get youth who head out the door because we have adults who sometimes seldom darken that same door. We get what we are! Some would say we get what we deserve.

I vote we change who we are as a church and I ask God to help and guide us.

That we spend more time serving our neighbors and less time arguing about service times or style.

That we spend more time connecting gifts and passions than accepting just another warm body to fill a committee spot on a committee that probably shouldn't exist anymore.

That we spend more time feeding the hungry and less on dividing the church.

That we spend more time opening the book of faith and less on complaining that we didn't like the hymns we did in worship today. A friend of mine would tell you – too bad, go home and sing the ones you like.

That we spend more time being disciples and less time being club members.

That we spend more time gathered at the table as the body of Christ and less time arguing about who is welcome at the table and maybe, just maybe when we do disagree, that we go back to the table.

This isn't a theology of works righteousness or some goal oriented checklist. The bar has been set high. Our savior's hands were nailed to it. Christ calls us, commands us to make disciples - to be disciples. We get what we are. It's time to live out that calling in new ways. It's time to step up, to ask deep questions of faith, to study our book of faith so we are able to connect these stories to our stories.

Youth today call us to be real, to stand up for something, to give them something to do with a purpose, to set the bar higher and to walk alongside them as they run with the Holy Spirit. Don't ask them to be on a committee just because you think you should have a youth there – ask them to serve, ask them to connect with others, ask them to truly live into their call to be disciples. Because when we connect gifts and passion with mission and ministry – get out the way, let the Spirit move. You'll see God active in the life of your congregation and you'll know that we get what we are and what we become through the gift of the Holy Spirit is a community that lives its baptism everyday and that walks together as disciples.

We get what we are – I think our youth and young adults are calling us to more. Let's be a part of the spirit moving us to new and exciting ways of being the church. And whatever we do, in word or deed, we do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Thank you.