

“State of the Church”

...2017-2018

by Pastor Tim Dodson
of JF Believers Church
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“State of the Church Address”

JF Believers in 2017-2018

Carpe diem: “*Seize the day.*”

Syndicated columnist and author Harvey McKay once said “*Time*

is free, but it's priceless. You can't own it, but you can use it. You can't keep it, but you can spend it. Once you've lost it you can never get it back.” How are we doing today Believers? How shall we be judged this morning as to the use of our time, resources, and energies as a church over the past year and what how shall we live in 2018? Not just as a church corporately but as individuals in unity making up this body?

2018 will ring in the passing of 28 years of ministry for this fellowship. 28 years of joys, sorrows, victories and losses. 28 years of prayers. 28 years of sermons. 28 years of service, travel, gospel loving, and missional outreach. 28 years of names and faces, and 28 years of life lessons. **What have I learned?** I have learned that I have not “arrived” and that I can still change and that I will always need to. I have learned even more of the great foresight, predestination, and sovereignty of God: that He has a plan and He is in control. I have intimately learned of the weakness, the need, and the stubborn pride of mankind, as well as the corruption it brings when left to its own demise. And I have learned so much of the inexplicable love of God, His patient grace, and the profound transformation of a life surrendered to His Lordship.

I would liken ministry here to spending every day at a busy street corner that has no traffic lights or stop signs. I watch the lives pass through the interchange and how some make through it in the clear...some make it by the skin of their teeth with scratches on the bumpers, and some are t-boned right in the middle and spiritual die as quickly as they appear. Those in the latter camp remain forever in my mind’s eye...as I wonder how the years progressed and their mortal lives marched on.

The advantage...*or maybe the disadvantage*, of living in a small community, is that we tend to often watch those very lives play out through the passing years which follow that “blessed junction” or that “crossroads calamity.” Some have went on to incarceration, addictions, divorce, and ruin. Some are dead. Some are lost in aimless roaming from place to place, church to church, looking for the magic they once knew and the life purpose they once experienced. Many of those try desperately to convince themselves that they are special people on a special mission, when anyone with eyes can see that they are simply rebellious children playing tea with stuffed dolls and their household pets. It’s just their very vivid imagination at play...

What has surprised me or even baffled me in those 28 years? I think for one, the self-destructive actions of some. Those who will, as my dad used to say, “*Cut off their nose to spite their face.*” Those who will, like a spiritual suicide, destroy what often is arguably an already blessed life to simply win the argument at hand or to

have the fleshly exhilaration from the act of hurting someone else. For the strange satisfaction of calling someone a name or throwing a playground tantrum, they will throw away a king's ransom and a divine future. That one will never cease to amaze me! But I think it is rather the kind of amazement that one experiences at the scene of a terrible accident.

What else? Well, I am also surprised and amazed that some can sit in a pew week after week and never try to reach out and really experience God in a big way...to find those "thin places" with God and to participate in the spiritual manifest of Christ. There is no commitment...no participation...no embrace... no enthralled excitement to be a part of what God is doing. These are those that would have us believe they have been hit by the spiritual bus that is salvation and yet there is not a mark on them that would say such an event occurred. Like spiritual children living in their parent's basement, they hang around but never grow up and never know the challenge and joy of faith adulthood. There is seemingly and inexplicably no concern in such folks that quite likely they aren't saved. That they, as Daniel spoke of, "*have been weighed in the balances, and (been) found wanting.*"

Yet at the same time there can sit beside that individual, some mere "street waif" who **came** in and **jumped** in and has come to know the "hundred-fold" blessing of God. The individual that has been touched by God's power and has seen His glory! Often little natural talent, and little if any earthly beauty or popularity license. Yet they stepped up and stood on the edge of heaven in stunned silence as God showed His glory and radiance, like He did for Moses up on that mountain. These are those that have truly and unquestionably known a transformation and God has taken their hand and led them on a journey that has left them wide-eyed and wanting more! I do not pretend to know what divides these two individuals except like a CSI lab technician, 28 years has exposed one constant: the player is humble, and the slacker is lost in his pride.

I am equally amazed at who God chooses and what He does in those lives that are humble and willing. Those who are now pastoral and ministerial staff here, and those sent out. Short term and long term Missionaries abroad, and leaders at home. Those who readied themselves for marriage and God gifted them, and prepared themselves for a greater love and family, and He blessed them with children. We have marched on now to careers and families...to financial stability and the plethora of possessions that follow such. We have grown older. Some have grown lazy while others are like the movie "cocoon" and are seemingly without time or age!

I also have been amazed at the profound metamorphosis that has occurred in the lives of the few. How their very lives and futures were transformed and how they embraced their God and have surrendered their futures to Him. I have seen people go on to great endeavors and lives of purpose and joy. Those who once experienced a spiritual "thin place" and never looked back as they wanted more and more of Christ and to be with Him where He was working. And I have been amazed that others at the very same time sat comfortably in their pews...week after week passing them by, and yet nothing changed. They seemingly experienced nothing, and they did nothing. But they did keep coming to church week after week.

I am reminded in scripture of the accounts in which the tangible power of Christ was experienced. The woman who crept up behind Him just to touch the hem of his robe and was powerfully healed when the "power left him." How Lazarus was brought back from the dead, and how the dead son of the woman in Luke 7 was brought back to life. In the latter account such should not have been a great surprise, for it was in that same area of the world that Elisha brought back to life the son of the Shunammite woman years before. But over the years...just like is often found here in this fellowship, many had allowed such accounts to be slowly relegated

to the stuff of legend and no longer possess the power to shake the foundations of a life: that which could literally change the world. No one was *looking* for the power of God to be poured out, because they had got used to life without it. Just as many of you are whiling away the days of your life, smug in self-confidence and the belief that because you prayed the sinners prayer one time that you are done and “good to go.” Yet you know nothing of the power and tangible presence of God.

Yet looking back over the years gone by...especially the one which is closing as we speak, I must tell you honestly that, in my own evaluation, I cannot remember a church year that has been as blessed as the one passing today. In the past year we have continued to grow in number...proven by the adding of new bathroom stalls and the utilization of the church house in prayer breakfast studies! I believe that the permanence of Covenant membership over the past year has clarified so much also...with many of those in the past who feigned love and support having moved on, we are so much better able to understand who is *really* with us and who was “never part of us.” (1 John 2:19) So because of this, there is now a greater unity, faithfulness and consistency in all aspects of the church life...from service to missions to financial. This has also served to be a mirror to *everyone* attending here...if we are willing to look into it, as to what and who we *really* are, without personal bias and skewed perceptions of self. Covenant membership has successfully served to be a bright light in which no one is able to hide any longer.

As I look back over this past year, I see a flock that has moved to reach out to the world around them...in their back yards, the neighbor next door and down the street, the people we work with, and those on the other side of this planet that most us will never meet on this side of eternity. The outreach ministries of this fellowship have found success in our Burning Dog Radio, CW-TV services, The Blind Munchies Coffeehouse, Street Level Campus Ministry, Word on the Street magazine, International Student Ministry, and our own Creative Team. But even beyond the corporate endeavors here at JFB, we have seen the personal ministries of many of you bear fruit and change your living and your interaction with the world around you.

We, of course, will endeavor to continue to invest and grow these ministries in 2018. We have every intention to exploit the momentum in these ministries and to push on in 2018 to affect the world around us for kingdom glory. Our radio station will begin for the first time in 2018 to digitally stream our content for the world. We are the only local radio station in Menomonie and the only UW Stout directed station.

We also will continue our weekly broadcast of our services Sundays on Eau Claire’s regional CW-TV, a unique opportunity that gives us a ministry reach from Rice Lake to the north to Prairie Du Chien to the south and well into South Eastern Minnesota and North West Iowa.

The Blind Munchies has seen a very successful year and is blessed by great staff and exceptional leadership. We have seen a great increase in use and traffic with the introduction of student breakfasts on Saturdays...something we learned from staying at Shelter Hostel in Amsterdam, and offering a free-use conference room. There will no pulling back from this outreach, as no other medium touches this fellowship in so many ways. We will continue with the concerts, the Street Level store with missions merchandise, guest coffee roasters, and our public presentation as Menomonie’s only non-profit coffeehouse.

Internet media is and will continue to be a focus...as Pastor Tom and the tech crew continue to expand our presence in the digital world for the church, the coffeehouse, the radio station and Street Level. From first rate web sights, to google ads, to every social media presence we can muster, we are “out there.”

Word on the Street has had an exciting and sometimes crazy year! Under the leadership of Suzie Haugley we have seen the magazine grow and expand in quality and reach. Publications are now in Menomonie for UW Stout and unique versions for the campus' of in River Falls and Superior, and as far away as Cebu City Philippines in our fledging Street Level ministry there. 2018 will bring a version printed and distribution in India and hopefully the Netherlands too. It is a ministry that is growing and we will continue to support that outreach in every way.

We are also always ready to abandon efforts that do not produce fruit and invest our finances and efforts in ways that do. Things like much of our TV ad's and mass mailings are being financially refocused on personal and fellowship groups personal ministry outreaches...like yard parties and cookouts and neighborhood gatherings. For all the efforts in the world will never match the personal touch...the relational ministries of each of us in our own mission field. We will never "design" our way to ministry success. It will forever come down to the strategic participation of the Holy Spirit and our own love for the lost! Much of our corporate participation in such ministry will happen through the fellowship ministries in this church...Gnosko, One Life, and Kindred, as well as Street Level. These will always be the front line ministries to Dunn County. It is also in these ministries where one can grow as a disciple, and find one's feet when it comes to serving the Lord, the kingdom and this fellowship.

2017 has brought us a renewed focus on missions also. With Laura and Brittany in the Philippine Mission field full time, we have seen our missions work advance there. With a city hub now, we are moving to grow Street Level Ministries amongst the campus's there and see the development of a science/creation teaching and curriculum for public and private elementary and secondary schools.

Our Youth camp in the mountains has seen great success...to the point where we are turning kids away for the sake of lack of room. We have moved "off island" to the Tagalog speaking areas to the north, with pastors conferences and this year, day camps for youth...both in the city as well as in the remote mountain areas amongst the indigenous people groups. A pastoral bible school has been established there with our help, and we will participating in that school also over the years to come.

This year we have 14 on the short term team...really an "above max" size team, but interest in missions is high around here! We did a medical outreach this last year also, which was new for us. I am so proud of our two missionaries, and we are committed to keeping people in the field there.

In February, Pastor Jason and Jesse from Duluth with their wives Chelsey and Faye, will be going over to hopefully establish a project that has been over a year in the making, with some intensive work by Erik and Josh and the tech ministry here. We are attempting to set up at least 2 internet radio hubs that will broadcast a Street Level/Shofar radio version over free wifi in the university areas of Cebu city. It is a technology that has been developed here within our tech ministry, which will allow students to hear our station on their android smart phones, laptops, or other mobile devices for free, and will block all other web traffic on our service at the same time. It has been incredibly complex and I am proud of the work that our people have done on this project. Please pray for the open doors now that we are ready, so we can complete this "dream" that we have of reaching into the campus's in Cebu City to develop Street Level Ministries and minister for the kingdom of God.

India this year was also a great success. We have left enough money to build 2 churches there...to add to the 5 we have already financed. We continue to work even more closely with Vision Nationals, where we again presented leader conferences and filled pulpits there this year, and held women's conferences and children's ministries...and it was, as always, a blast. I even got to preach at two different churches one Sunday morning...which was a new one for me! As I mentioned, we are in full swing to begin publishing an Indian version of Word on the Street magazine there also, which is so exciting.

Our hands continue to be in the Netherlands also, and God is leading us there, so stay tuned for further updates as we move forward on that front also. Even domestically our missions has increased with a team going to New Orleans this summer to help rebuild a church there that was destroyed by a tornado. I have no doubt that we were the greatest recipients on that venture, and we are set to "go south" again this summer...this time with two teams: once from here led by Pastor Tom and one from our Duluth sister church, led by Pastor Justin. We are a blessed community to be so involved in missions abroad and it is because you are committed to such ministry with your giving and your participation. I am a blessed pastor to have such a flock!

Duluth this year had a blessed years also...with their incorporation and establishment as an independent church, they are moving as we speak to bring Pastor Justin into a full time pastoral position for 2018, and the licensing of Jesse Moss as their new assistant pastor. They have lots of plans slated for 2018...growing their campus ministry and outreach endeavors. God has been good to them up there, and we are blessed to have them as a part of us...especially in the overseas missions efforts.

2018 promises to be a busy year for us. All of this and so much more. We will see our "Core" group members in our fellowship ministries designated as just "members" now, so as to not cause unnecessary ambiguity and confusion. We will continue to focus more and more on the activities and discipleship development of the Covenant members community here, while continuing to minister to anyone and everyone in Sundays and Wednesday's services. We are scheduled to have our friend Corne...directors of Shelter Christian hostile in Amsterdam here to be our speaker at our Covenant Conference in the spring and Arjuna from Vision Nationals in India here to speak to us this year also. So much to do, and by the looks of the world at large, so little time left to do it.

You are a dynamic fellowship...a Jesus Fellowship of Believers. Thank you for 2017, and thank you for letting me be your pastor. Let us rejoice in God's love for us, and for His letting us on the playing field. Let's finish this race...may we hear those words "well done, they good and faithful servants..."