

Being Boring

“Traditional” and “Contemporary” Faith: A Call For Diverse Community

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High Fives: Accepted and Appreciated

You can feel free to call me boring. I don't get offended by it anymore.

Growing up in the Dirty South, it seemed that all of my friends were either Southern Baptists or Southern Methodists or another denomination that apparently doesn't exist north of here. Besides a few exceptions, they were all members of one of the two large churches in my hometown, all went to services that were led by a man with a goatee and guitar, and all went to the same retreats and wore matching retreat t-shirts. The small Christian high school I attended wasn't affiliated with any particular denomination, but there was still a very clear minority in the student body: boring, plain old Presbyterians like myself.

Yes, I'm a Presbyterian. You know, the Frozen Chosen? The Christians who believe in the Sovereignty of God, baptizing babies, and in never having fun with anything ever? I'm right there. It's what I am. I love Reformed Theology, love Calvinism, and I tend to agree with guys like Tim Keller, J.I. Packer, and yes, often even John Piper. I'm a lunatic, I know.

In fact, I probably am a lunatic, because I love being a Presbyterian.

I'm a boring Christian. I'll gladly admit that. It's not something I try to hide when all my friends go to church in their blue jeans and plaid shirts and I'm wearing khakis and a tie. It's not a major thing. It's just a difference between myself and other believers.

When people think differently than us, our common reaction is to believe they are wrong. We don't consciously make this decision. It's just a sad part of our human nature. This predisposition to feeling superior, to feeling *right*, is the basis behind most of the world's biggest problems, such as racism and sexism. We live in a culture of hate, where even things like someone's birthplace or favorite sports team is just another reason for us to look down on them.

It's in the Church as well. Keep in mind this is the same Church that many years ago went around killing each other over issues of baptism. These days, it's natural for us to look at differing styles in various churches and feel as though they're doing this whole Christianity thing wrong.

But just because it's natural for us to feel that way doesn't mean that it's acceptable.

I'm no apologist. I can't make a definitive case in defense of being a boring Christian; who sings hymns and loves theology. But I know myself, I know what I believe and why I believe it, and I can at the very least offer you an explanation of that.

In a world of excitement, I'm still boring, and I want to share why. I want to show you *how* I can stay boring.

The world needs boring Christians just as much as it needs exciting Christians. And the world will always have boring Christians just as much as it has exciting Christians, who gladly give up a theological emphasis in order to meet the culture head on.

Just don't tell me that either of those styles is wrong.

How I Think

Or,

Why I'm Singing Hymns

We live in an exciting world. It's a world that allows creatures like Michael Bay to roam the streets, blowing things up and filming it. We allow LMFAO to exist, and somehow we've let Will.i.am become some sort of icon. Someday, our grandchildren will build a memorial to the fact that we survived a time of total media chaos.

But the excitement isn't just in our entertainment. It's in all aspects of our lives. Our residential speed limits are faster than our ancestors ever thought we could move. We push a few buttons and within seconds, coffee is brewed or a microwaveable lunch is ready. We live in social media that gives us constant connection with the world and what is happening in it. We love getting things instantly, and things moving quickly.

It's progress, and it's awesome.

In the midst of the excitement, there are still people who haven't totally bought into it. As things get quicker and more exciting, our interactions go from writing to each other, to calling each other, to emailing each other, to texting each other, to Tweeting each other. Some would argue that with progress, we've lost something.

The church is in a similar state. As culture progresses, churches tend to move with it, putting together worship services and singing songs that reflect the more exciting age that we live in. Just like with technological progress, there are people that choose not to fully embrace that.

That's where I tend to rest: not quite fully buying into the excitement. The question is whether not embracing this advancement is good. And trust me, I really do think it is in very many ways. But it's sort of cut the American church in half, into what I would call "exciting" churches and "boring" churches, or churches that are more "contemporary" versus churches that are more "traditional". We've drawn the line of this division, and it's certainly dividing us.

The decision we have to make is whether or not we're willing to let these differences divide us totally. Are we going to let worship style divide us? Differences in theology? Or even just differences in technique? Basically, are we going to make the little things important enough to divide the Church? I hope we don't, and I hope as you read this you'll see what I mean.

When I was in high school, I hated having discussions about church with my friends. It wasn't necessarily because we felt uncomfortable having real discussion about certain topics or didn't like the Gospel much. It's just that they were all more exciting than I was.

I distinctly remember my exciting friends talking about their experiences at boring churches. They all laughed as they told stories of accidentally letting out an audible

“amen” in the middle of a service and feeling judged because of it. Listening to all of that myself? I felt judged for not responding in that way.

I just didn't quite embrace Contemporary Christianity like they did. I don't own a David Crowder CD. I never even listened to Caedmon's Call back in the day. Stockholm Syndrome is the only thing from Derek Webb I've ever listened to. Truth is, I get more fired up about singing hymns along with an organ or piano than I do singing songs I hear on the radio along with a guitarist in skinny jeans. I'm not impacted by a light show and a chorus of “Jesus, Jesus” on an emotional loop in the same way that I am by “A Mighty Fortress” on a large organ.

Clearly, this is pandering to an extreme. I have been to very few churches that are actually like that. This example is an extreme, no more true about exciting churches than it is to believe that all boring church services all take place in 1790. I mean, SOME of us moved into the 1800's.

Honestly, it basically boils down to preference. Preference is something all people are entitled to. You can't be too upset about somebody preferring scrambled eggs over sunny side up eggs, unless you have some really weird conviction and you should talk to somebody about that. It's always interesting, though, because somehow we do still get upset over stupid things like this. Even Christians get upset about triviality, which then leads to people like me rambling on about the subject for like twenty pages (sorry).

A small part of my preference is because I know myself. I know what works for me, and what doesn't. I know how my brain works, and what turns my brain off. It could partially be because flashing lights distract my poor ADHD mind. Sure, from a biological standpoint, that happens in spite of how much as I fight it. But there's more to that. I'm an analyzer. My brain is constantly moving, constantly thinking about things. It's why I'm able to look at stupid topics like sports or flaming holes in the ground and crank out 1000 words about them and the absurdity of life. I'm not claiming to be smart, of course. I'm just claiming to not be able to stop my mind from wandering. I've had to learn these things about my brain over the years.

My brain likes the style that is simple and focused. The way to combat distractions is to remove them, right? And this applies even to worship and theology. When you strip away the guitars and drums and turn off the flashing lights, you simplify things. It is less of a worship *experience*, but that's okay with me.

The style is also focused. When things are too busy, it is much more difficult to focus on one particular thing. So simplification eliminates distractions, but also allows better focus. It just so happens that I love the focus of old hymns, because they keep me focused. For example, modern Christian music often uses wonderful language

focusing on our response to the beauty of God's grace. It's great language and language that is very often taken straight from Scripture. Older hymns tend to have more focus on God's grace and our undeserving nature, which is also great and taken straight from Scripture. The two styles are two sides of the same coin.

I think the emphasis on God that hymns possess and the emphasis on the change in our hearts that praise songs bring are both wonderful. Why do I like hymns more? Because that focus is what I need to be reminded of daily. If given even the slightest opportunity, I *will* become arrogant. It's not even a question. I will become full of myself. I will take the focus off of the grace that has been given to me and instead think I did something to deserve it. I know I am prone to this, so I respond best to the songs that remind me of grace. Sola Gratia - grace alone.

That is nothing more than my look at my own preference. Ultimately? Something very unimportant in the grand scheme of things. But you see, the way my brain works is only a very small reason behind choosing that style. Preference is very unimportant, however, the style itself is.

You have to first recognize that your personal preference is unimportant. Got it? Good. I knew you were a bright one. Now we can move on to what exactly makes style important if it isn't your preference. It is all because of the concept that "what you win them with, you win them to."

My friend Zack Owens shared that quote with me as we talked about these issues. It comes from a pastor named Ligon Duncan, who preaches and teaches in my city and is overall a very wise dude. Dr. Duncan says that "What you win them with, you win them to," in other words: what draws people to your church/company/circle of friends is what they buy into. This is huge, because it dictates a great deal of operation within the church itself. People will expect things from their church based on what drew them in to begin with.

Good marketing draws people towards a product, right? It resonates with people and draws them toward that product, and they therefore expect that from the product. Same thing with the church: people who are drawn in with a particular style will fall in love that style and will expect that from the church. If they are drawn to a church with an emotionally charged style of worship, they're going to expect that from their Christianity. So in that regard, it's still a preference, but one that plays a pretty important role in the health of a church.

I don't need an experience from my Christianity. I don't expect that. Many do, and that's great. But this is a huge area because if the emphasis of the style isn't where it should be, the church will be hurt. If the focus fails to address the need of salvation that we could never earn, then what is the church saying? If what draws people into a

church is an experience with no depth to it, then what good is that message? Likewise, if people are drawn in with a lot of understanding but lack of enthusiasm, then how will they actually feel the love of God?

We don't have to take our preferences very seriously, but our Churches *have* to take style seriously. What tools we use to draw people into our churches will be what they expect from their faith. Let's not bastardize the Gospel by turning worship into a marketing strategy.

What we win them with, we win them to.

A term I've heard used before to describe some contemporary churches is that they are "seeker friendly", or that they design their service to make those who are outsiders feel most comfortable. This is brilliant. There are a lot of people who are naturally afraid of the church, thinking that they will feel judged or overwhelmed if they go. Seeker friendly churches are wonderful ministry tools, helping alleviate the fears people have by not being highly liturgical and by not throwing around massive passages of Scripture.

I love the fact that there are churches like this. This is a necessary "style", if you will, of church. With the sorted history that the Christian church has, being able to make others feel welcome is much needed. We're a group of people who were commanded to go out into the world making disciples, but along the way we got confused and started inquisitions. Now, clearly that isn't the only thing the Church did, otherwise it wouldn't exist anymore, but these negatives stand out. That's why it has been so important throughout the years for the Church to always keep the mindset of welcoming those around us. It just so happens that these days, that mindset (or when it isn't put into practice) catches more headlines.

But the church must have more depth than just that. If you win people to a welcoming, seeking environment, then what happens when they move past that point? I'm not a seeker. I know what I believe, and I'm firmly grounded in that. I am an arrogant sinner who forgets grace. So I *need* those massive passages of Scripture. I *need* that constant emphasis on God. I *need* those things, so that, like John the Baptist said about Jesus, I will become less and He will become more.

Exciting churches do wonderful things. They excel at making people feel welcome and comfortable. They really understand the change that occurs in the *heart* of people when they are saved, not just in their *head*. Where they tend to fall short is in the area of focus. It can be too tempting to try and market Jesus, not preach His name. It can be easy to turn Christ *into* a trend, instead of trying to invite trendy people into the body of Christ.

That's the area that boring churches get right. It's a dedication to not compromising the Gospel for culture. It is a constant focus on grace, not on man. But boring churches fall into the trap of being cold, both in our emotions and in our greetings. All too often, we forget how to use our hearts, and sometimes our refusal to compromise the Gospel leaks into other, insignificant areas of life.

What you have to understand is that neither style is inherently better. It's a matter of meeting certain needs in certain people, not a matter of right vs. wrong. Boring churches and exciting churches are not opposites. That would mean there is a battle between the two, which there isn't. We just act like that's how things are.

It's really no different than whether or not you like rap music. I love it. You might not, because it might not appeal to you in the same way that it appeals to me. It's cool, though, because it's only personal preference. There isn't a right and a wrong way to make music, no matter what Dave Grohl says (I do love Dave, though). There is just some bad, bad music out there (looking at you, LMFAO). Just like there are some bad churches out there. Churches that preach "Jesus *AND...*" but we'll get to that later.

Did I just compare the church to rap music? Absolutely. And I'll gladly do it again.

We fall short when we make the style our focus. What we win people with, we win them to. So can we express a style that resonates with believers but doesn't make the style the focus of worship, eschewing the Gospel for just another way to draw people in? Absolutely, and that's the mark of a healthy church, be it exciting or boring. And because of that, it would be stupid to divide the church over a difference like this. Yet we make this stupid division every day. We can change that when we remember that the important things shouldn't be confused with the unimportant things. Preference is one of those unimportant things. Like style, politics, ethnicity, and so on and so forth. Bear with me, and I promise we'll explore this idea more and you'll see why we have to understand the important things.

So why am I boring? Because I need to be. Not because I think it's the right universal way to do things. Not because I think exciting churches are wrong. We can't keep falling into the trap of thinking that differences are wrong. When we do, we've completely missed the point. You like being exciting? Then do it with all the enthusiasm and conviction you can muster. I would never want to stop you, just as I hope you would never look down on me for being boring.

After all, the world needs us both.

How I Believe

Or,

Why Our Opinions Really Don't Matter

Differences in theology are nothing new. Have you ever heard of this thing called “The Protestant Reformation”?

Speaking of the Reformation, the common misconception about we Reformed folk is that we think we have all of the answers. This misconception is continually propagated by the fact that there are far too many Reformed folk who honestly do think they have all the answers.

This isn’t necessarily shocking information, of course. It’s not an idea limited to Reformed kids. Christians of all denominations, and people of all walks of life, tend to think that they’re all correct and everyone else is wrong. Democrats think they’ve got it figured out and Republicans are stupid, and Republicans think Democrats are awful people and Ron Paul supporters can’t figure out why they didn’t get enough attention.

The truth of the matter is, people have opinions, and people always think their particular opinion is inarguable fact. You don’t agree with somebody that the Yankees are disgusting? Then you’re just wrong. All areas of life are impacted by this desire to be right, and this idea that all disagreements are an open door to hating another person. We just can’t put our pride aside at all, and it causes rifts.

It’s pretty clear that Christians and theological discussions are not exempt from this stupidity. In fact, they’re often some of the biggest proponents of this way of thinking. Reformed folks, Armenian folks, and everything in between seem adamant about never agreeing, to the point of despising each other.

You know the funny thing about being Reformed? Reformed theology is all about the Sovereignty of God, and the understanding that God’s ways are beyond comprehension. The very focus of Reformed theology is on the understanding that we *don’t* have the answers. At all. Only God does. Yet the arguments keep flying from both sides about which way of thinking makes somebody a better Christian than another.

Now, I’m not about to attempt an explanation of Reformed theology to you. There are massive books written about it if you want it explained. What I really want to talk about is the fact that the Christian church is full of differences in opinion and a strange belief that we can somehow figure out *exactly* how God works.

Christians find ourselves in a lot of problems due to our own foolishness. Over the years, the Church has been persecuted and hated, and in response has turned around and lashed out at the world. When we reached a point in history where we were finally respected instead of persecuted, we started inquisitions and persecuting others.

These days, in the interest of outreach, we love to tackle those issues and try to make sure people know that we understand our foolishness. We've gotten really good at apologizing for the differences between us and the world around us. This is fantastic, because the church was able to get closer to the sense of humility that it needed to be based upon.

But there is an issue that we tend to completely ignore, and that's reconciling the differences amongst ourselves. We look at little things, like theological opinions, and treat them as if they were the most important things we could ever believe in. We have a mindset that seems to think it's perfectly fine to throw *all* of our Christian love on those outside of the church, then heap piles and piles of hatred on those within it.

You don't believe in Unconditional Election? Than you don't understand the Bible. You don't think women should be pastors? Than you're a sexist and a bigot. There's no middle ground in these debates.

We fail to see how stupid our arguments are.

The Reformed idea of Unconditional Election actually is a great reminder of this. You probably think of it as Predestination, which is a term I'm going to try to avoid in an attempt to help you think about it differently. The term Predestination is good and Paul himself uses it, but these days deeply connected to a misconstrued definition. To someone who isn't Reformed, typically this is viewed as if God said, "Okay, so this guy will go to Heaven, but sorry buddy, you're going to hell," and then kept moving down the line just picking people at random.

The term Election is one that will hopefully help you see the idea in a different light. It's not that God went down a line picking teams. It's that all men were headed towards one particular fate, and God elected a few to be saved from that. It's not a matter of God's wrath towards particular people. It's entirely a matter of God's saving grace towards a few who don't deserve it.

That is a very simplistic answer, but it's a complicated idea that takes books upon books to try and explain (spoiler alert! It can't be fully explained). But the ultimate truth behind it is actually a truth that ALL Christians must embrace, and a fundamental flaw that ALL Christians must deal with:

We feel as though we are entitled to grace and we don't deserve punishment. The truth of the matter is, for all people, that we are entitled to punishment and we don't deserve grace.

Do you get what I'm saying? Reread it if you need to. Unless our egos stay in check, we miss the point of salvation, and we're incapable of being the lights in the darkness that we're supposed to be.

When you are reminded of that fact, that those of us who are saved don't deserve it (Amazing GRACE, that saved a wretch like me), you have no choice but to remember that our Christian siblings need love too. We can't accept grace for ourselves and then look upon our Christian siblings with scorn. We can't allow ourselves to be that incredibly selfish.

The church is a body. You're familiar with what the Bible says about this. Christ is the head, and the different parts have different functions. We are diverse, but one. United, and very important. Even with our differences.

Take, for example, the issue of women in the ministry. This has been a hot topic over the past year in particular. Many conservative Christians (including a large amount of my fellow Reformed kids) believe that women are not to be ordained, but being a part of the body of Christ, still play important roles in the life of the church. This is especially true in terms of ministering to other women, as they bring a viewpoint and an understanding that no man could ever offer.

The Bible glorifies women. The stories of Ruth, Esther, Mary and Martha, and others paint a picture of how cherished women are in God's eyes. In ancient culture, it was not this way. Women *were* viewed as inferior, and the Christian faith actually was revolutionary in its treatment of women. The roles given to both men and women in the church were never a way to say that one gender was better than another. It instead was a way to play to the strengths and needs of each of them, and also to point to the importance of both of them, especially in light of a men-centered culture.

I'm not necessarily going to dwell on this subject (I assume you don't really want to hear that much about it) because to be quite honest, it's an issue I'm not necessarily 100% either way. There are cultural and Biblical reasons behind either argument, but I'm not going to worry about it because of one simple fact: neither opinion cancels out God's grace.

But it's still a hot topic in the modern church. One that will hang around for a long time. One that divides Christians much more than it should. When it comes down to it, no matter what your opinion is, there is only one proper way to view this entire discussion. I'm reminded of one man I knew who understood what was ultimately important.

Wynn Kenyon was a very wise man, who very quietly had a major influence in countless lives and across entire church denominations. He taught for over 30 years at

the college I attended, but being a professor wasn't always his plan. Years ago, he was actually planning on following in his father's footsteps and being a Presbyterian minister. God, as He is prone to do, had a different idea.

When Dr. Kenyon was going through the ordination process, his denomination asked him about his view on women in the ministry. He explained that he did not agree with ordaining women, *but* not only would he gladly work alongside ordained women, he wouldn't prevent his congregation from electing a female elder. It was his *personal* belief, nothing more than that, and he wasn't going to let it get in the way of the Gospel.

The church didn't like his opinion, saying his "refusal to ordain women on the basis of their sex is contrary to the [church] constitution" (quoted from their official ruling), and therefore refused to ordain him. So there goes his life plan. He's probably pretty furious about this, right?

Nope. His reaction is what is most amazing, because he then *stayed with that denomination for over a decade*. The denomination that rejected him? That said he went against their constitution? He stayed with them for several more years before finally moving on to the next stage of his life. Why?

Because he got it. Because he understood that the Gospel is more important than his opinions.

When Christianity was young, there were people who got into churches and claimed that you had to believe Jesus *and* be circumcised in order to be saved. They were tricky about it. They kept Jesus, but then *added to him*. They took what was important, then tried to make unimportant things just as crucial.

Sound familiar? Here's a hint: it's exactly what we do *all the time*.

We feel completely justified to judge others against our unimportant convictions because we're still claiming Jesus in the process. We're just adding to him. Infant baptism. Worship style. Even genuinely wonderful things such as community outreach get placed in such a position that they cause division. And how effective can a divided church really be?

What we're doing is taking the unimportant and making it equal to the Cross. We're looking down on other Christians because we forget the things that are *truly* important. We're committing a daily blasphemy.

We can do this to any issue. Election. Women in the ministry. We're all guilty of it. I may be viewed as a sexist, even though I have huge amount of respect of the unique roles women play in ministry, simply because my views on ordination don't line up with yours. This logic is silly, though. You may not share my love of the musical

stylings of Big K.R.I.T. or rap music in general, but that doesn't make you a racist. I may feel more in tune than you do to African-American culture, but that doesn't make you an awful person. But that's similar to the claims we make when we argue about these relatively unimportant theological opinions.

The point is to not misconstrue either viewpoint into being more than it actually is. It's all opinions. Preferences. Different tastes. And ultimately, it's all unimportant when compared to what *really* is important.

It's the idea of holding beliefs in either an open hand or a closed fist. Some things, like the belief that it is only through grace that we are saved, have to be held with a closed fist. They should never be compromised. But other beliefs, these minor things like how you feel about election or ordained women, should be held in an open hand. They don't need to be so important that you refuse to let them go. They should never be held in as high esteem as the idea of the Trinity. Your preferences should never be viewed as important as the foundations of our faith. They're too unimportant to get in the way.

There is a very clear wrong way to go about Christianity, but it has nothing to do with our preferences. Neither of us is going to hell because of those little things. So let's stop acting like we are. The body of Christ needs to be united.

Am I saying that I've got it right? Of course not. That claim would go against everything I've written and everything I believe. I've failed you countless times and I will again. I would never claim to be smart or to know all the answers, because in doing so, I would defeat the purpose. The purpose, of course, being pointing others to the work of Christ, not pointing them to any sort of nonessential doctrine or some style of church.

That's the beauty of it all: we, as believers, deserve punishment, but instead are given grace we don't deserve.

And we *must* stand united in that.

How I Interact

Or

Why I Love People

Not too long ago, I was asked to spend a few weeks away from my boring church so I could pretend to be a talented enough musician to be paid for it. I was filling in on the bass for an exciting church, and trust me, it was certainly exciting. Sure, I was getting paid to do something that is honestly fun and wonderful and I enjoy and all that stuff. But it was much more than some gig.

It was a taste of Heaven.

I loved seeing the differences between this exciting church and the boring churches I had been in my entire life. I loved seeing the light shows and the worship leaders wearing t-shirts and hoodies. I loved the design of the services, which were built in a way to have as much emotional draw and artistic impact as possible. It was all beautiful, and I greatly enjoyed celebrating God's love in this way.

Since then, I've had several more opportunities to play with them, including traveling to lead worship for other groups. Every time, I have been deeply blessed by the opportunities, and deeply moved by the glimpses I've been able to get of what Heaven will be like.

I've experienced Heaven a few times in my life. These were the moments in which everything within my soul knew that it was the way things on this broken earth were supposed to be. There was no hurt in those moments. There was no confusion. There was just the understanding that at that very moment, the world was displaying the way it was intended to be. What it was *made* to be.

The connection between all of those tastes of Heaven? The people.

The most notable of these moments happened when I was a senior in college. As a student, I was actively involved in an awesome campus ministry known as Reformed University Fellowship. Over that particular Spring Break, we partnered with another school's RUF and went to New Orleans to do some physical labor in poor neighborhoods that hadn't been cleaned since Hurricane Katrina, years previous.

The labor was great and it was cool getting to interact with the residents of that impoverished neighborhood, but that wasn't the aspect of the trip that has stuck with me. No, what has really stayed with me is the relationship with the students from the other college that came with us.

My school is a tiny Christian liberal arts college. The school we partnered with is a large, historically black university. Our two groups came from drastically different backgrounds, but honestly, the differences were very quickly forgotten. We bonded together quickly. Why? Because we had the same mindset. The same focus. The same goal.

We bonded because we knew that our differences, and the differences between us and the neighborhood we were in, didn't matter whatsoever.

We were in awful neighborhoods that under any other circumstances people of my skin tone wouldn't find themselves in. There was still debris in front yards and in vacant lots. It was years later, yet it looked as if Katrina had hit the week before. It was because nobody cared to help. They rebuilt the things that mattered to them, but ignored the things that were different. Nobody cared, except for a community church that my group was helping out for a week.

It was a community church that didn't care about differences. It was a group of students who didn't care about differences. We cared about each other, and we cared about that neighborhood. And it was beautiful. It was Heaven.

It's always a little bit sad that it takes a lot for us to get over our differences. It often takes bad things for us to remember how to care. It takes evil people flying planes into buildings for a nation to stop caring about politics for five minutes.

My good friend Bryan, who was on that trip, words it best. He gets it. He said at the time, "You know, we should spend as much time with each other as we can now, so that we don't die of culture shock when we get to heaven."

He's right. I saw Heaven in that trip, because I saw people who under normal circumstances wouldn't be around each other working and bonding and doing it all because we cared to help and we loved God.

We get too hung up on differences. We get too hung up on differences between the church and the world. We get too hung up on differences within the church. We forget that the church is *not* a broken institution in need of fixing. It's an institution full of broken people in need of healing. We ought to celebrate our brokenness together, because in Heaven, we will celebrate our differences together.

Together. As a community. A family. The body of Christ, redeemed for him. That is why the church itself is essential to the Christian life. You can't have a body divided, or parts isolated, and expect it to function properly. A hand can't decide to leave the body and stay healthy. Yet we constantly live this mindset in our spiritual lives. Either we believe that we can be just fine on our own, away from the mess of the church, or we believe that God favors our part of the body more than another, so we go off trying to create a church of nothing but fingers.

I can't help but think about a sermon I heard from my pastor a little while back. In the story of Joshua, there is a distinct and strange moment where Joshua is wandering by himself, worried about the upcoming siege of Jericho, and trying to think. As he gets

close to the city of Jericho, God appears to him as a man with a sword in hand. Joshua is confused. He doesn't realize that this is God before him. He only sees a man ready for war. He naturally asks God, "Are you for us, or for our enemies?"

God's response? He says, "No."

You see, it's easy for us to look at good things that happen and think God is on our side. It's easy for us to look at our political beliefs and see things that line up with Biblical morality and therefore think God is on our side. It's easy for us to look at tiny theological differences and think God is on our side, not some other denomination.

God doesn't see it that way. He's not on our side. We are on His side.

My pastor needed to deliver that sermon to my church because my church is full of different people with many different beliefs. You see, my church isn't actually all that boring. In fact, it's actually quite exciting. Sure, we sing hymns and we tend to dress in suits, but we also have a choir that claps and sways. We totally raise our hands and say "Amen" too.

Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Jackson, Mississippi is a taste of Heaven. It is a church built in a city that has been left for dead, and the church goes out of its way to bring people in. It is multi-cultural, taking beautiful elements from the primarily white Presbyterian history and seamlessly combining it with beautiful elements from the primarily African-American culture in my city.

It is a beautiful collection of broken people from many backgrounds. We fail each other, sure. We fall into the trap of thinking that we have it right, both as a congregation but also individually. But we realize that ultimately, it's not a breaking point. Ultimately, just like Joshua learned as he walked near Jericho, we are simply on God's side, not Him on ours. Therefore, we celebrate our differences.

Just like we will in Heaven.

That is the point, my friends. Not whether we are Calvinists or Arminians. Not whether we think women should or should not be ordained. Not who we voted for in the last election. Not even whether we are exciting or we are boring.

The point is that we are on God's side. When we approach our differences in that way, then that makes all the difference.

***“Cause we can talk and debate until we’re blue in the face
about the language and tradition that He’s coming to save,
meanwhile we sit just like we don’t give a shit
about 50,000 people who are dying today.
Tell me: brother, what matters more to you?”
- Derek Webb, “What Matters More?”***

I’m a boring Christian, and I plan to be ‘til the day I die. I know how I best worship, I know how I believe, and I know that ultimately, none of that is important enough to get in the way of grace.

I am not alone in my thinking. There’s certainly no way I could formulate any semi-mature spiritual thought by myself. I have been greatly blessed with the leadership and example of many wise men and women in my life. Many of them exciting, many of them boring.

So if you aren’t from the same background as me, I hope you don’t think we hate you. I hope you don’t think we look down on you. I hope you understand that there are people on both sides of the boring vs. exciting issue who make it more important than it actually is. I’m not saying anyone has figured it out, just like I’m not trying to say that I have anything figured out.

What I *am* saying is this: we boring Christians actually do love you exciting Christians. And we actually do love non-Christians. We may have our different ways and styles, but we don’t consider ourselves to be better Christians because of it. And hopefully you don’t think we’re worse because of it. I won’t always agree with every bit of your theology. And you know what? I shouldn’t have to.

The church needs differences in order to be healthy. We need people to continue putting huge emphasis on old hymns and intense theology. We also need churches that put the organ away and energize their messages to get people excited. There are people that need that. But there are people who will always feel more comfortable in a boring church. People like me.

We ought to embrace that. We ought to embrace the fact that the church is not limited to the buildings and styles where it meets. We ought to embrace the fact that the church can tailor messages that play off of current trends in order to spread the Gospel. We ought to also embrace that there are still churches that don't really try to cater to cultural influences, or that hold onto opinions that are somewhat unpopular.

At the very least, we ought to embrace this for no other reason than the fact that it creates diversity. You don't want all churches to look exactly the same as each other. You also don't want the church to look like some self-help seminar at a convention center. The church isn't a platform for motivational speakers. It's a hospital for the spiritually sick. No matter how boring. No matter how exciting. No matter how different.

That's why boring churches are important. At the very, very least, if you can't agree with *anything* else that I say, please realize that boring churches serve as a reminder that the church is a beautiful collection of many different people. The differences in exciting churches and boring churches are what makes the church as a whole so beautiful. The body of Christ is diverse, and to be quite honest, we need to get over ourselves and how we react to differences.

Without those differences, all Christians would look the same. And, well....that's just boring.