I can remember sitting in Simkins Hall during one of our Haiti Report back luncheons as our team members were recounting stories of God’s grace and transformation from our Haiti work trip. One of our team members shared that she noticed while we were in Haiti that we had developed a different rhythm to our life together; we prayed together, ate together, served together. She relayed how easy it was to remember that we were Christians and to live out of our desire to be faithful.

In a confessional moment of holy vulnerability, she went on to say that when she was home, more often than not on a daily basis, she forgot she was a Christian. That somehow in the comfort of her home and her neighborhood it was harder to maintain this rhythm of following Jesus.

What a powerful insight, which resonates in our daily lives. We live in a frantic world and often we keep a hectic pace for ourselves and our families, and, generally, remembering that we are Christian becomes one thing on a loooooong list of things to do throughout the day.

Running through your schedule in your mind might look something like this: I’ve got the meeting at 4pm, I just got a text that we are out of milk so I’ll stop by on the way home after the meeting, I have to remember to send an email to my boss before the end of the night, make dinner, check the kids homework, and if I can, squeeze in following Jesus somewhere.

Today is the second Sunday of our fall theme Believing and Belonging, Why Faith, Why Church? Each week we will be exploring the building blocks of what makes a Christian life. We are getting back to the basics. For some of us, this may be an introduction, for others a refresher, and ultimately for us all the sacred opportunity to be reminded by the Holy Spirit, that we are called to live in the way of Jesus, the way of life-giving love.

**This week we are exploring the theme, Holy Habits: Living and loving intentionally.**

Shannon helped us to ground our exploration by reading this passage at the beginning of the Gospel according to John. John’s gospel is unique in many ways, including this opening passage, which transports us back in time and walks us through this mystical, mysterious meditation on Jesus as the Word of God.

The Word, John describes, was First with God and was in God and was God and it was through the Word that everything came into being. John is showing us that Jesus’ life has cosmic implications. He is demonstrating that the very nature and substance of God revealed in Jesus is beyond all human imagining or limitations.

And simultaneously, this Holy, Glorious, Majestic, Divine thing, the Word, the Logos, became flesh and blood and moved into our neighborhood. I love how this verse is translated in this version; the Word of God became flesh and blood and moved into our neighborhood.

This belief is one of the central doctrines of the Christian faith, handed down generation to generation. It is called the incarnation. Jesus is fully God and fully human; he embodies the Word, the Logos; Jesus is the grace of God revealed in flesh and blood.

Throughout the centuries many faithful and inspired theologians have written, conceptualized and argued about what this means for God; what this reveals about God’s nature. These creative and brilliant people have gifted us with images and ideas which
we can reflect upon that point to this awesome mystery that the transcendent Creator of the universe, of all that is and will ever be, became human.

But, this idea that the Word became flesh and blood and moved into our neighborhood has profound implications for us. We believe that God moves into the nitty-gritty, into the mundane day to day of our lives and consecrates every part of our existence. When God moves into our neighborhood it means that God sees our neighborhoods as worthy of the most sacred concentration of life-giving love.

So much so, in fact, that God takes on every single part of what it means to be a human being. God takes on our most extraordinary moments saturated in the goodness of being fully alive, the most boring and unexciting moments; That God takes on the most excruciatingly terrible moments, the most deeply satisfying moments of contentment. God is in the birth of a new child and a math lecture. All of it, all of it, God has moved into our neighborhood, taken it all, redeemed it all, and is in the midst of it all.

Living first from this deep conviction is the key to living and loving intentionally. Because when we take this into our hearts we have to ask: what does it mean for the Word to live in my neighborhood, to be my neighbor? If God is redeeming every aspect of our lives, mundane and extraordinary alike, then how does that change how I enter into everything that I do?

In our limited humanness, generally, the hardest thing for us to do is to remember. To remember this when you’re sitting in traffic on the 405, when you’re waiting in an incredibly long line to get Dunkin Donuts coffee, when you’re walking along the bike path, pacific ocean to your left and 9.9 million people to your right. We forget, we forget.

This is where Jesus calls us, to each of us and asks us to cultivate holy practices, holy habits which a give shape and pattern to our lives. Holy habits which enable us to remember, to remember, that God is here, that the Holy Spirit is in our neighborhood, that Christ is present in each and every person that we meet, that there is a beautiful rhythm to God’s unforced grace which underlies every part of our universe.

What are your Holy Habits? What things do you do daily, weekly, monthly which you intentionally ask God to bless, to sanctify, to make holy? Maybe you have a few or maybe you’ve never thought of it before. But, what might happen if you took one thing you do that is life-giving but added another layer of life-giving goodness by offering it to God as an intentional prayerful action.

When you invite God into your ordinary practices it makes a world of difference in how we live and move and have our being. If we open ourselves to cooperating with God in every choice, it gives us eyes to see and live into the unforced rhythm of God’s grace.

The question might remain, where do we start? What does a holy habit look like? Here are three that I offer for your consideration.

Try practicing Christian hospitality.

A young woman in Dallas Texas recounts her experience of moving into a small Christian intentional community in the midst of an impoverished neighborhood. She chose to live with a group of young adults in a communal house; sharing meals, praying together and practicing loving their neighbors. She said one of the practices that she offered to God was the practice of hospitality. Now she was from the South and there is nothing in the world like southern hospitality. In fact in the south hospitality isn’t just a recommendation, it is a mandate. She reflected that as she offered this habit to God and to ask God to breath into it life-giving love of the Holy Spirit, her practice didn’t change but the recipients of her hospitality shifted drastically. Instead of solely practicing hospitality to her friends, family, people who came from similar backgrounds or looked like her, she began to seek out Jesus’ people, the lost, the lonely, the poor, the weak, and the vulnerable and invited them to share in her world. Try practicing Christian hospitality.

Try praying for your enemies. A couple years back I was leading a confirmation class and we were talking about intercessory prayer, praying for others. We started to make a list of people who we might pray for: parents, siblings, teachers, police officers, people who serve our country, homeless people, on and on until I asked, what about our enemies? One of our youth chimed in and said ‘I never understood that, I have this person in my class who is like my enemy, we just don’t like each other, and if I pray for him I know he is not going to change.’

I paused for a moment thinking uh oh what am I going to say to this one because she’s right... and then the Holy Spirit spoke through another youth, as the Holy Spirit often does, who said, ‘yeah but maybe if you prayed for them then you might change, you might change how you feel and act toward them.’ Take this on, start praying for those people in your life who are like human sandpaper to you. Pray for those people who you don’t like and who don’t like you. Just try it out and see what happens.
Try practicing community in the midst of our hyper individualized world. I try to be a consistent runner. About a year ago I started to offer my running to God as a holy habit and it changed the way that I entered into each run. I run around the Brentwood Country Club trail, populated with various other folks, exercising, or waiting in line at the local food trucks. I began ask God to make my runs holy, and the strangest thing happened, I started to look up while I ran, to look at other people in the eyes, to try to see the image of God in the various strangers and neighbors that I met on the path. They started to acknowledge me too, we started smiling at each other, waving at each other, spreading just a little bit of joy and community. At first it was hard, it was a discipline, but I had to trust that God is present on the running path around Brentwood Country Club, and God longs for us to be in community in the midst of the individualism and anonymity of modern urban culture. I had to trust that loving your neighbor starts first with looking someone in the eye, acknowledging their existence, even if you are sweaty and smelly.

As a country, this last week we paused for a moment remembered that we have scars. As a people we have known pain, grief, and anger, but that we have also known courage, resilience, healing and hope. Some of you might be thinking these are really small things, really small things, and in light of what we have known, how can they make a difference. I would say you are right. These are tiny and seemingly insignificant acts of grace. But, as we celebrated the feast day of Mother Theresa this last week, I was reminded too that this prophet and saint once said, ‘We cannot do great things, only small things with great love. What is important is not how much you do, but how much love you put into doing it.’

As we continue to explore our theme Believing and Belonging: Why faith? Why Church? Take something in your life and ask God to make it holy, practice it for a bit, put it into action in our neighborhoods, and maybe, just maybe, our lives can be an answer to those questions: why faith, why church.

May God make it so in the name of Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Amen.