



Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina
Jody C. Wright, Senior Minister

JUNE 2, 2013
THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
FOUNDERS DAY

Looking for Lakeside
Ephesians 1:17-23; Matthew 5:13-16, 13:45-46

When people move away from Rocky Mount and our congregation, they often tell me, “When we get settled, we are going to look for another Lakeside.” When I check in with them later on, however, I often hear, “We can’t find another Lakeside.” On numerous occasions when I have met someone who moved away from here years ago and united with another church in another city, they have commented, “We have never been able to find another Lakeside.”

I will admit, at the risk of being charged with the sin of pride, that hearing such comments makes me feel good. It is not that I don’t want people to become involved in churches where they live. I do! And it is not that I think Lakeside is the only wonderful church in the world. I don’t. It is gratifying, however, to hear former members speak so highly and lovingly of this congregation. You are a very special group of people and this is a quite wonderful church. Today we celebrate the gift of this congregation to our lives and the life of this community. To quote the theme song from our Preschool program, “Hooray for Lakeside!”

Because I do frequently hear people say things like, “We have looked, but we can’t find another Lakeside,” I began to wonder what it is they are looking for. I decided to ask some of them. I sent a few emails to members who moved away from here leaving behind strong ties with our congregation. I asked them what they have looked for when visiting other churches. I wanted to know what they think makes Lakeside unique and special.

I had several replies which I thought you might like to hear. Ami Willcox Neilan, daughter of Corrinne and J.N. Willcox, answered immediately. She wrote:

My first response is there is no other Lakeside.

What I look for is family—looking and seeing my mama and daddy in the choir loft which has now grown to include my sisters, brother, brother-in-law, nieces, and nephews.

I also look for extended family—folks that have known me my whole life, and that are just pure loving Lakeside. No matter how long it has been since I was at home, they look at me as if it were yesterday, and best of all they see me as if I haven't aged a bit!

I have tried to duplicate this in Atlanta, and have found a church that is wonderful—but Mrs. Bishop isn't there to tell me about kindergarten, there is no soft chewy ice in the Kincheloe building, Joanna is not on the front row, Daddy and Mr. Scalf aren't cutting up in the choir loft, and Mama isn't there looking beautiful as ever, and making sure all of us behave—which is a full time job.

Lakeside was a block away from me growing up, and what it has meant to me, my amazing parents and Jan, Jaye, Dianne, and John, words will never be able to express. Lakeside loved all of us, through thick and thin, and we are all better people because of it.

So, to answer your question, in a long winded J.N. style answer: I look for welcoming folks, genuine loving Christians, impeccable music, for pastoring, for friends, for love, and for home.

Lakeside is family, Lakeside is home.

Ellen and Tim Davidson and their children, Margaret and Ben, moved to Kansas around eight years ago. Ellen had been thinking about these questions over the years and was happy to offer her thoughts. She said,

When we moved here we knew we would never find another Lakeside. All churches have their unique personalities. The things that we were looking for in a church were the things that we treasured at Lakeside which were: 1) music (organ, choir, instrumentals, handbells, Christmas music), 2) a congregation committed to community involvement, 3) openness to various religious denominations, 4) the many activities available for preschoolers through senior adults, i.e., children's, youth & adult choirs, VBS, Children, Youth, Singles & Adult Sunday School (everything that Lakeside offered), 5) a friendly, loving, supporting & caring congregation, 6) a God-loving atmosphere where members support each other and also support & nurture young families in the raising of their children, and 7) sermons that are meaningful, uplifting & relevant to today's world.

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Did we find Lakeside when we moved here? No. We found a smaller, older Presbyterian church that lacks many of the qualities that Lakeside has. There we have been actively involved in the choir, handbells, and co-conveners' of the membership ministry team. Tim was elected as a Deacon, Ellen as an Elder. . . . we felt like in our move here we were led to this church in our journey of faith . . . We are most thankful for all the support and the foundation upon which Lakeside Church gave us to fill this need.

Marilyn and Keith Richardson moved back to his hometown in South Carolina several years ago. The church in which he grew up is vastly different these days so they, too, had to go church hunting. Keith commented that they had often taken all that Lakeside offers for granted. Along with the others he mentioned worship, music, the sense of family, and the feeling of peace just before worship. Then he added, "Don't forget Lakeside's approach and interpretation of the Baptist faith . . . and an open door attitude to all.

Ann Winstead, who spent her young adult years here, moved away for over thirty years. When she and Billy retired, they returned home and Ann returned to Lakeside. She, too, spoke about growing up with lifelong friends and how much this congregation shaped her life. She shared the fact that she could not find the warmth and welcome in other churches that she was used to here nor could she find the theological openness that was so important to her. Her thoughts round out this evolving picture of our congregation. She wrote:

Now, I will have to tell you that when I returned to Rocky Mount, my Lakeside . . . was more involved in missions work in the city--not far away places as in the days of old. Or, rather we thought they were far away. The people were warm and friendly. I found former friends who welcomed me back. The Discussion Class was amazing the first few times I attended. It was all so different, but I loved it. Not a person to sit back and watch others work, I jumped in head first to help wherever I could. I feel comfortable at Lakeside. I feel happy and grateful to this congregation for being just who they are--warm and welcoming! As my mom used to say about very special people, "They broke the mold when they made her!" I feel that way about Lakeside. To me, there is not another church like it!

According to some of the folks who have been there, when you are looking for Lakeside, you are looking for a group of people who are friendly, caring, and supportive. You are looking for a place which values an honest approach to faith that includes solid biblical teaching with an openness to questions and uncertainty. You are searching for a group of people who allow one another to explore their faith without conforming to a particular perspective.

Apparently, when you look for Lakeside you look for a church where worship is the most important experience of all because it informs and influences everything else that is done. You look for tradition that is shaped by innovation, music and liturgy that are offered as gifts to God, and proclamation that is unencumbered and addressed to life in the moment.

People who look for Lakeside look for a church committed to ministry to one another and to the world which begins at the doorstep. It is a church which feels a responsibility to give back what they have so graciously received by sharing the Gospel in word and in deed. It is a place where each person is encouraged to discover their gifts and put them to work in the service of faith.

When you look for Lakeside you look for a generous group of people who respond both to needs and responsibilities, who provide ministries for every phase of life, who invite the community to come in, but also go out to meet the community where it is. As each of our friends said, when you look for Lakeside, you look for family.

I am grateful that we have found Lakeside. Fifty-eight years ago a group of people was looking for Lakeside. At the time they did not know it by that name nor did they understand completely what it would look like and be like. They were not unhappy with the churches to which they belonged. They were nurtured in those congregations and well prepared for the task to which God was calling them. It was a changing time in the world and in this community, and they felt the Spirit of God urging them to look for something different which would also benefit Rocky Mount and the world.

What they found and what they helped create is a congregation organized on Baptist principles with an appreciation for liturgical worship and a diversity of opinion. By the grace of God and with the energy of the holy Spirit, for fifty-eight years we have proclaimed the Gospel on this corner. We have raised children in the faith, explored scripture, baptized new believers,

blessed marriages, and grieved the deaths of loved ones. We have helped people all over this community in myriad ways. We have sought to be Christ's hands and feet and mouth in a complex and needy world.

We are a unique congregation, but we are not alone. Just like the people who sit in their pews, every congregation is unique. Every church has its own personality. That is what makes God's body on earth so strong and vibrant. The uniqueness of each church offers the opportunity to minister to different people so that God's love is shared with all people. That is why our friends in other churches feel the same way about their congregations as we do about ours. Our brothers and sisters in this city and around the world are doing exactly what we are doing but perhaps in different ways. We can be grateful for them as well.

Two teachings of Jesus stood out to me as I thought about this day, a day celebrating nearly sixty years of ministry in this place. First, the brief parable Jesus taught his first disciples about the value of the Kingdom of God. He said, "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it" (Matthew 13:45-46).

The Kingdom of God is much larger than Lakeside or any other church, but it does include us. The Kingdom of God is not a church or group of churches. It is not a specific place or area. Rather, the Kingdom of God is any place or circumstance where God's ways are lived out in the world. The Kingdom of God is an attitude, a conviction, a commitment to live as God calls us to live. Like a merchant who would risk everything to invest in a pearl of great value, so we are to risk everything we have and all that we are for the sake of God's ways in the world. That means that not only do we look for a church which will provide us with everything we want and need, we also look for a church where we can invest all that we have for the glory of God. It means that we work hard at living out the Gospel wherever we are and whatever we do. Former members have discovered that even when they have not been able to duplicate this Lakeside in some other city, God's kingdom is larger than space and time and they have found congregations where they can live faithfully. The total investment of life is a joyous act of commitment which makes a church like Lakeside possible.

The other teaching that is important for today is found in Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no

longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:13-16).

We have been entrusted with a valuable treasure: the Good News of Jesus Christ—the Gospel. It is light to the world and nourishment to people who are starving for grace. We cannot hide the light from others. We cannot hoard that grace and keep it from the world. It is ours to share, not to save. Our responsibility, then, is to let our light shine for others. Lakeside is the lampstand, the means by which we shine that light into the world. Lakeside is the saltshaker, so to speak, sprinkling us here and there to add flavor to life and help preserve life. Anything less fails to live up to “God’s Way” which must become the “Lakeside Way.” This light will shine from Lakeside only as long as we continue to make it the family of faith that it is.

If you are looking for Lakeside, you found her. This is a loving and affirming family of faith, committed to ministry, and open to discovering God’s ways in the world. We are not perfect. We have many areas in which we still need to grow and mature. We are not exclusively blessed. We share God’s favor and God’s calling with a host of other sister churches. Like our brothers and sisters the world over, we are baptized at the fount of God’s grace and nourished at the table God prepares for us. But we are Lakeside, a people of God called to this place, at this time, and for a unique purpose in God’s Kingdom.

It is a good time to celebrate our congregation and to express thanks for all the saints who have made this congregation what it is today. It is also a day to renew our commitment to our ministry in this place. Thank God for Lakeside. Thank God for all of the churches which worship and serve, shining the light of God’s grace into a world in need of illumination. Amen.

June 2, 2013

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

God who has made yourself known in the events and circumstances of our lives, today is a day when we remember and cherish the past. We are grateful that you have chosen to reveal yourself through the history of your people and through the life of the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, and that you have been lovingly and creatively at work in the life of this church and in each of our lives. We rejoice in the memories we share with beloved friends and we remember with fondness and gratitude those who have gone before us. Help us to learn from our past, that we might avoid repeating our mistakes while salvaging what is good and honorable.

God of this present moment, continue to reassure us that you are with us even now. Enable us to respond to your call by responding to the needs around our world and around our neighborhoods. In this time and place, help us to appreciate those who have touched our lives and have influenced and moved us so deeply, so that we might follow their example in service to others. Teach us to be patient with one another, to reach out to those who are suffering, to show mercy to others as you have shown mercy to us.

God of our continuing story, we know that you will be faithful to the promises you have made. In your Word, you promise to give us hope and a future. You promise that through you all things are possible and that you will never leave us or forsake us. In the last 58 years, we have been witnesses to the marvelous ways that you have kept your promises in this place and among this people. We rejoice, O Lord, in your goodness and in your promise of Resurrection and our inheritance as children of God.

God of our past, present and future, who was and is and always will be, indwell and inspire us now as we celebrate the fellowship and ministry of this church. Bless our work together and strengthen our bonds that we might continue to grow as the Body of Christ that you have called us to be. May we go from this place with renewed spirits and joyful hearts. In the strong name of Jesus Christ our Lord and by the power of your Holy Spirit, we offer these and all our prayers. Amen.

Elizabeth J. Edwards
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