



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

7643 Huron River Drive

Dexter, MI 48130

734-426-8480

Giving God Room to Work: Your Greatest Days Yet to Come

Sermon & Halftime Update

February 4th, 2006

By Matt Hook

- I. Introduction: Campaign Halftime Update
- II. How You May Be Responding to The Campaign
- III. Sermon: “Your Greatest Days Yet to Come”
- IV. Benediction: Dexter Trees and Your Legacy

I. Introduction

Welcome to worship here at Dexter United Methodist Church! If you're new here, you may be wondering where we're headed. Let me say as clearly as I can: **Our journey is NOT about becoming a big church.** I am NOT interested in being just another large church. I am interested in being the Lord's church. But that means **we must be a transforming church**, a faithful church. Because we have the cause of the Gospel and the courage of the Holy Spirit; and that's a power that will make you young when you're old, and live when you die. With the mind of Christ in you, we *can be* a transforming church where discouraged folks cheer up, dishonest folks 'fess up, sour folks sweeten up, depressed folks look up, closed folks open up, gossips shut up, conflicted folks make up, sleeping folks wake up, lukewarm folks fire up, dry bones shake up, and pew potatoes stand up. Amen? But most of all, in a transforming church, Christ the Savior of all the world is lifted up! *God is calling us* to carry His message to all the world: Not a hotel for saints, but a hospital for sinners... a transforming church! If *this* journey were just about growing numerically, it would be one thing. But listen: If we *never* grow numerically, I would be fine with that; as long as we were growing in our *transformation* of becoming like Christ, inviting His presence in. What if we never grow because we just keep sending people to other places to carry out the mission? The problem is, when you find people being authentic, helping each other and really connecting with one another and God, you will have to lock the doors to keep people away.

In case you didn't know, this is halftime, and it's nothing short of momentous: For those of you who are new here (how many began here since June of '05?), 3 years ago, God gave us a vision: to be a regional equipping center for Christ-focused life transformation for the unconnected thousands. And we began to pray. We prayed for lots of things. And we prayed to reach out to more and more people in the faith, hope, and love of Jesus. We also prayed that we would be the church God had in mind. We learned about sacrificial giving. We studied the Scriptures. We had prayer vigils and prayer walks. People began reaching out. And we realized: If we attempt only what we *know* we can do, God will leave us alone. But if we *really* want to experience God, we need to attempt something that only *God* could do. By stepping out in that kind of faith, we give God room to work.

It hit us like a brick, and we called it “Giving God Room to Work”. It became a capital campaign to free up money for ministry by paying down debt, increase program staff, and add space (for youth and an innovative atrium-style connector between buildings). Many people gave in addition to their regular tithes and offerings. A number of folks gave sacrificially. And God began to work in ways we hadn't seen before!

- We hired Steve away from part-time teaching at Washtenaw Community College, and we added Matt Demorest full-time to lead our Student Ministry.

- We paid down over \$500,000 on our debt!
- Oh yeah. We built a building! Today, we're working on the Youth Center interior, we're finishing up the plans for an open, atrium-style connector building and master site plan. Our Building Committee will be putting it out for bid soon.
- We've increased our local ministry and mission budget over 70%.
- And listen to this: In June of '05, the month we began, our attendance was 284. This past month, January of '07, we averaged 378 people each Sunday! Give God the credit—
- And, by the end of '06, we brought in over \$900,000!

Freaky, isn't it? We've been giving God room to work in our lives, and God's working! And halfway through our campaign, we thought that was reason to celebrate and say Hallelujah! So let's sing our praises to God!

II. How You May Be Responding to Giving God Room to Work

Depending on where you are right now, your response to this halftime challenge God is giving us will be different. We have various levels of comfort with this process. We have people at a variety of places on their journeys. You may be a part of the company of

1. The Captured. There are those of you who are sold out. You're held captive by Christ and his mission and our church. You demonstrate that in your commitment to this local church. You're serving and giving and it is clear to the Lord and everyone else that your central purpose is to love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. For you the challenge will be how much you can give to this next chapter in the life of this church. And I thank God for your kingdom hearts.
2. The Committed. You are solidly growing in the Kingdom, enjoying your involvement in Dexter UMC, but the fact that the church really is the hope of the world has not yet grabbed you. It has not yet captured your imagination. Your challenge may be to do what it takes to make that next step to reach the unconnected 1000s in our area.
3. The Conflicted. You know the truth of the Gospel, but you've allowed stuff to get in the way of jumping in with both feet. You're sort of half-in, half-out. Your challenge may be to decide. My prayer is that you become a committed, captured team player, and embrace what God is doing through this church.
4. The Curious. You are checking out Dexter UMC to see if it's the church for you. You may be in a church shopping mode, or you may come regularly. Maybe you're here because your spouse is bringing you. You may need more time than a few weeks to decide, but for some of you, the challenge may be to leave the status of spectator and step up and take ownership of this church and its vision, by investing your time, talents, and treasures here. For us reach our goal of reaching the unconnected 1000s in our area, it's going to take the investment of every Christian who calls this church their home.
5. The Crowd. You represent what we call "spiritual seekers." You haven't crossed the line of faith. You may be here investigating the claims of Jesus Christ. You are who this church is seeking to reach with ministries and our weekend worship services, in order to introduce you to God made known in Jesus Christ. The church is the only organization that exists for those who are not yet members. Your challenge will be to hang in there with us
6. If you are in the company of the curious or the crowd, we're not asking you to give to this campaign. We just ask you to bear with us as the church family rolls its sleeves up and gets down to business. We simply want to be more intentional about doing God's work in a new way.

We don't want our talking about issues of money and stewardship to cause you to leave. We're not going to be asking you to give anything. But you need to be here to understand more of what Jesus said about money. Jesus talked more about money than virtually anything else. Why? Because money, Jesus taught, was a direct challenge to the loyalty of your heart. God is going to ask you for your heart. If you're going to come to Jesus Christ, you're going to have to deal with money issues, because money is seeking to be the god of your life. In Matthew 6:24 "*You cannot both God and money.*" Either you serve God WITH your money, or you serve your money as God, but you cannot do both, and you and I need to be challenged about that. Also, the reason a place like Dexter UMC exists today is because those who really care about you and your eternity have made huge investments of their time and talents and treasure. To get where we are, we've had to talk

about the stewardship of our financial resources. So if we're going to create a place for the future where more people like you can investigate the claims of Christ, we have to talk about money. You may have noticed buildings don't seem to pop up on their own. So hang in there with us. This is NOT going to be about twisting anyone's arm to get money out of you. But each of us is going to be challenged, in order to "Give God Room to Work."

III. Sermon: Your Greatest Days Yet to Come

Based on thoughts by Gene Apple

Psalm 71:17-20

Last week, my friend Eric Waltersdorf shared how in the middle of a really frustrating moment, actually wondering to himself, "Am I even making a dent?" Man, that's it, isn't it? What *am* I doing? I relate. And when I catch the news it's worse: Aids decimating entire continents. Global terrorism. Rogue nations in pursuit of nuclear weapons. Wars and rumors of wars. Women and children abused. And America's infatuation with unimportant, brainless, and violent things. And we want to cry like the prophet Habakkuk 1:2 "*How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, "Violence! And you do not save?"*" Where is God in the midst of all of this? Why doesn't He *do* anything? Can He do anything? Is God greater than all the brokenness in this world? And if He is, what's His strategy? Who is His strategy to do anything about it? Is what we're doing here even relevant? Are our best days truly behind us? It was during one of my tirade of questions that I heard David's words of Psalm 71.

David was dealing with a very messed up world. He writes Psalm 71 from the experience of old age; not David the shepherd boy, or the giant slayer, or the young brash military leader. This is the David who is all those things and more. Listen to this excerpt:

Psalm 71:17 "*Since my youth, O God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds. 18 Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come. 19 Your righteousness reaches to the skies, O God, you who have done great things. Who, O God, is like you? 20 Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up.*"

When you read the whole Psalm, you see David in his old age, facing enemies and facing really tough times. Maybe you're without a job. Maybe you've been betrayed by friends. Maybe you're facing tough medical circumstances. Listen to what David says: Basically he says, "I'm *not* retiring from life. I'm still going to allow God to use me." In a world that makes older people feel unwanted, he's saying "Do not cast me off." Sometimes older people cast themselves away. "I'm not needed. I've put in my time. Let the younger ones have their day." And sometimes younger generations cast them away as "irrelevant." Old people aren't given the respect, or attention they deserve.

Now, if you're here and don't consider yourself to have reached old age yet, I have some advice: "Don't be deceived." ☺ NO! Actually, what I want to say is older people deserve your respect. Lev. 19:32 God says "*Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God.*" When we show respect for people, we show reverence for people God created. Some of the greatest resources God has for you are people who are further along on their faith journey. Talk to them! Hear their story! Ask them their advice! There is a level of life experience and wisdom that can't be duplicated by wisdom.

David was old. He'd seen a lot. As confusing as the world was, you'd think David would be pessimistic and bitter. There's plenty wrong! But Psalm 71 also focuses on hope. In verse 5 David writes "*You have been my hope, O Sovereign Lord, my confidence since my youth.*" And in verse 14 he writes "*As for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more.*" As I read the headlines today, my big question is why hope? Look around the world! How do you possibly believe things could get better in this broken world? Yet David has a great sense of hope, because of what he believes God is going to do...through this next generation. Look at verse 18:

18 Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, & your might to all who are to come.” “Till I declare your power to the next generation.” Pepsi didn’t invent the “new generation”, and neither did we, with our labels like “Boomers, Busters, Gen X, Gen Y, or Millenials.” David was talking about the next generation 1000s of years ago.

David’s *enemies* were saying things like v.11 “*God has forsaken him; pursue him and seize him, no one will rescue him.*” His enemies were saying ‘his best days are over...’ Now, as you age, your energy may not be what it once was, (you may get winded playing chess...or tying your shoe), but I don’t think your greatest influence and impact *can’t* be in your later years of life. It can be.

David knew that his greatest days of multiplied influence, multiplied impact, IF...if he could inspire, equip, and unleash the next generation as a force for good. One of the things that gave him *enormous hope* is that David knew that God has historically initiated some of his greatest works through the next generation.

In confusing times throughout history, God has initiated some of his greatest works through the next generation: Young people like David, Samuel, Joseph, Mary. It was a youth movement that led to the fall of Apartheid. University students in Prague who helped lead the Velvet Revolution to peacefully overthrow communism there. It was a youth movement in Oxford University that tried to actively live out their faith that began the roots of 75 million Methodists around the world who feed over 1 million children every day! Covenant Players began as a youth movement in 1963!

God has historically initiated some of his greatest works in confusing times through the next generation. To help take care of poverty... to help the church live up to what Jesus says we are... especially in confusing times... But do you think *any* young person will last long apart from an active, growing, grounding, and freeing relationship with Jesus Christ? This is the hope in the emerging generation. They are able, *through a God who is greater than the confusion of the world*, to make more than a dent.

The student ministries of today are going to impact the church, and thus the world for years to come. They want a place where people can come just as you are. The come-as-you-are spirit is the attitude of Jesus, who never concerned himself with the outward appearance, but looked down inside the heart and soul of what was going on.

If you’re in your teens or twenties, and you wonder if there’s a part for you to play here, you don’t have to wonder. This church was birthed by an emerging generation. Part of my story begins when I was a child and youth who realized I had a part to play in shaping my church. I’m forever thankful for people who gave me a chance to stretch my wings and to make ripples before I was old. What if no one had given a shepherd boy named David a chance to make a difference when he was younger?

Here’s what David understood: WE have the responsibility to develop and deploy and understand and embrace and empower and unleash an emerging generation to make a difference in this confusing world.

This church seeks to intentionally build relationships with people far from God in hopes that they would feel welcome here. But what if we also try to intentionally build relationships with younger people? A 20something emailed a pastor: “We Gen x and y types are dying to be mentored by older people. We are the latch key kids. We are the generation who would do anything to have an older person pour into us intentionally.” You may not have realized it, but it’s true. You may say “I’m too old,” “I can’t connect with the next generation.” But for a generation of latch key kids who have grown up in a world of single parent homes, we can be like grandmas and grandpas and bring ability and strength and insight and mentoring to them that many didn’t get in the homes they grew up in.

David’s words show us that the primary responsibility of his generation was not for the next generation to pour into him, to build into him and meet his needs. They were to respect and to honor him. He understood the primary responsibility was on him as the more life experienced one to develop and deploy, to embrace and empower to understand and unleash the next generation, because historically, God has initiated some of his greatest work in a broken world, through the next generation.

I think that's God's dream for his family; that we could come together. The Bible says "*Stand up in the presence of the aged. Show respect for the elderly. Show respect for your God.*"

I think that's also spiritual maturity. If you have followed Jesus for 30 or more years in life. You've not been perfect, but you've tried to walk in the direction of Jesus for 30 or more years in life; would you just stand where you are? "We honor you." We really do.

While you're up now, you "aged" ones, I want you to stand for just a minute: I want you to look around at who's seated. Because you have a responsibility: to mentor, to inspire, to enable, to unleash. Together God can be greater than our confusion. David is so enraptured at this aged point in his life, he writes 19 "*You have done great things. Who is like you, God? Who is like you? There's just no one else like you.*" And he ends with these words: "*I will praise you...I'll sing for you...I'll shout with joy to you...I will tell others of your greatness.*" And we'll do it together: From age to age, Your greatness gets passed on from generation to generation.

Our Giving God Room to Work campaign is in addition to our regular giving to the church. It requires sacrifice. And I know: it's scary to talk about sacrifice, but when you think about it, sacrifice is as fundamental to our Christian values as anything!

You should be getting a letter and a commitment card in the next day or two. We need to find out where we are. We're putting this up for bid. We need to know the status and impact of our congregation today on our goal. This week, we need you to consider your gift to GGRTW for the second half of the campaign, and bring your commitment card with you to church next Sunday.

Dear Lord, may it be, that we praise you, from generation to generation. Let each ONE of us know how to do that, with the life you've given us. Amen.

IV. Benediction: Dexter Trees & Your Legacy:

Look at the trees around Dexter. They are so beautiful. Yet they were never seen the way we see them by those who planted them. That's a wonderful legacy that people left to us.

Think about the next generations. Did you ever think that your great-grandchildren may not remember your name? And their kids will surely never remember your name, let alone your likes, dislikes, what you did, or who you knew.

But when you give God room to work today, you are giving a *spiritual legacy* to the next generations that can truly impact them, and help them impact the world, just like David. They, in turn, give witness to the message of Christ in the lives they intersect, which transcends generations, cultures, and barriers. Even, and maybe *especially* when you're old and gray. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.