

Good morning everyone, my name is Mark and I'm one of the pastors on staff here at North Shore Alliance Church. If you are brand new this morning, I want to say "welcome," and if you've been here much longer than I have, then I'm so glad you are a part of this family.

It's been a long week in the life of our church, a long week for many of you, for me, and for the Anderson family. If you haven't already heard, Steve Anderson passed away and crossed over from this life into eternal life on Friday morning at 3:45 a.m. Steve and Kim have been long time members in our church, Steve was one of our elders, and like many of you, I considered him a friend.

Steve was rushed to hospital on Wednesday morning, and was quickly transferred from the emergency room at Lions Gate to St. Paul's ICU; a tremendous team of doctors and nurses oversaw his care from start to finish.

As Steve died, his family was crowded around his hospital bed, blessing him, releasing him, praying...I had the privilege of being in the room with them, but more important by far, Jesus was in that room.

As we were standing around Steve's bed, I couldn't help but think of Psalm 23:4. Sometimes we are tempted to think that death is the great separator, that death is the one moment of our lives that everyone must walk alone. Not true! As followers of Jesus, Psalm 23:4 reminds us that even when we are walking through the shadowy

valley of death, we are not alone, He is always with us...He is our comfort, our strength, our protector.

On Wednesday and Thursday, the family was at the hospital almost around the clock; again and again we were taken aback by the speed with which everything was happening. As many of you know, Steve had Parkinson's and Lymphoma, but in spite of these things he was healthy and strong.

Last year Steve was a part of our ball hockey league. In fact, it was Steve's assist and Dave Sattler's goal that sealed the championship. The way Dave tells the story, it was Anderson to Sattler for the championship, just like Iginla to Crosby for the gold.

No one saw this coming, not Steve, not his family, not the doctors; God was the only One who wasn't surprised. James 4:13-15 says,

*"13 Look here, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit." 14 How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning [mist]—it's here a little while, then it's gone. 15 What you ought to say is, "If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that."*¹

Life is like the morning mist...impermanent, temporary, here today, gone tomorrow. And friends, this is why **how** we live, and **who** we live for "today" matters so much; we don't know what tomorrow holds. Steve's life was like a mist...but what a glorious mist! Irenaeus, a second century Christian Bishop once said, "The glory of

¹ James 4:13-15, New Living Translation.

God is a man fully alive.” Irenaeus went on to say that the one who is fully alive is the man, the woman, the student who lives for the glory of God.

Like Steve, I want my life to be a glorious midst, a life set apart to Jesus Christ. If you knew Steve, even just a little bit, then you know that Steve loved God, he loved his family, and he had a passion for others to grow in their pursuit of Jesus. Steve’s life was like a mist, but it was a glorious mist, one that brought praise to God and blessing to others.

I know Kim and her family would want to thank the many of you who were praying fervently for Steve this past week. I know that your prayers have extended beyond Steve, and that you have been praying for Kim, her children, her parents, for Steve’s brother Dave; thank you. I am so proud of the way many of you have been loving the Anderson family. But I want to remind all of us that the time for fervent prayer is not over, but just beginning for the Anderson family, so please continue to pray.

I also want to remind us that there are many people in our church who require fervent prayer. Looking around this sanctuary, there are many of you that have lost someone very dear, not too long ago. Just a few weeks ago, Judy Sattler was on this stage explaining one of our new ministries, Grief Share; a small group that helps people walk through the stages of grief. There are many here who are in deep pain, be it the death of a loved one, the breaking of a relationship, a serious health concern...

I wonder...how many of you are walking through deep waters? I wonder...who is walking with you? Is there anyone? Have you let

anyone in? There are few things more difficult than walking through life alone.

All throughout the New Testament, there are a number of metaphors given to describe the church. The church is described as God’s temple (the place where He dwells), God’s people, His family; it has also been described as being like a human body. The human body is one unit, though it is made of of many different parts. In the same way, one church is made up of many different people with different gifts and experiences.

1 Corinthians 12:26 says that if one person in the church is honoured, then the rest of the parts are glad, and if one person suffers, everyone suffers along with them. This is what it means to be the church. This is why we encourage everyone who attends on a Sunday morning to enter the life of the church, to enter into relationships, to join a small group. We may talk about going to “church” on Sunday, but we **are** the church Monday through Saturday.

Gal 6:2 says, “*Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*” Which law is that? The law of love. In John 13:34-35, Jesus said “*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*”

That’s quite a bold statement. The way we love one another functions as a testimony and a witness to the world. When we love like Jesus, people will see, understand, and experience Him. There is no perfect church, because every church is made up of people like me. I can be selfish at times, and proud, I can be impatient, angry, and demanding. If you know me for long enough, I will disappoint you; perhaps I

already have. Our love for one another will never be perfect, it will always be marked by shades of self-interest, or envy, or perhaps judgement.

But in spite of our brokenness as individuals and as a body, Christian community/love is one of the greatest gifts we have to offer to one another and to our world. When we love like Jesus, people will see, understand, and experience Him.

There are times in the gathering of the church that it's important to talk about death and dying; this is one of those times. It's important to understand how fleeting life really is. What we give ourselves to in this life echoes for eternity. Steve made his choice very clear; he followed Jesus and encouraged many others to do the same. I am going to miss Steve so much.

Kim and her family would like you to know that a celebration of Steve's life will be taking place here at the church, next Saturday, at 10 a.m.

- Following the service, there is going to be some time to connect over some refreshments...if any of you would like to bring some squares or dessert, send me an email this week and I will make sure that things are coordinated.
- There will be a number of friends/family flying out from Ontario, and if any of you are able to take in a guest or two that would be a wonderful gift to the Anderson's...please email me this week if you can help.

Pray for the Anderson's

² John 3:16-17; Luke 19:10.

Illus: By a show of hands, how many of you recognize the following name: Vince Lombardi? Vince Lombardi was the head coach of the Green Bay Packers. In the 60's his Packers won 5 Superbowl's in 7 years; the NFL Superbowl trophy is named in his honour.

Vince Lombardi was a legend in the sport and was known as a master motivator. The story is told of Lombardi's team winning yet another Superbowl, celebrating and then taking the off season to mend and get ready for the season to come. On the first day of training camp, the players showed up still basking in the glow of their great victory...they were the world champion Green Bay Packers; it has a nice ring to it doesn't it?

Well...when Lombardi arrived, he called for the team to huddle up so that he could deliver his first speech of the year. The players were all ears...how would their master motivator fire them up for one more run at football's ultimate prize? Lombardi grabbed a football, held it out, and began with these words: "Gentlemen, this is a football."

Lombardi called his players back to the fundamentals...he believed that if you stick to the fundamentals every team has a great shot of becoming world champions. This entire Fall, we've been very Lombardi-esque in the sense that our weekend preaching has been about calling us back to the "fundamentals".

Missional living is fundamental to the Christian life because God is on mission. God loved the world so much that He sent His Son on a rescue mission to seek and to save what was lost.² And this friends, is how the Bible describes the human condition: lost. Apart from God,

and the life He offers, there is no life. Jesus's death and resurrection is the basis of our rescue; He died in our place to rescue us from sin and death. And along with this rescue, we've been invited into God's family and ushered into a life of intimacy, meaning, and destiny.

And bit by bit, as the Holy Spirit transforms us, we take on the characteristics of the One who made us; we become like Him. The Father's heart for the world begins to beat within us, and we take our place alongside Him as people of mission.

Last week, Pastor Keith spelled out the relationship between God and His people in the following way:

- (1) God's mission is to restore the world through Jesus.
- (2) God's people live out restored lives in the midst this broken world.
- (3) We live this restored life with others so that they might see God and come to know Him.

We were lost, but Jesus found us. We were blind to our own condition, but Jesus opened our eyes. We were dead men and women walking, but Jesus rescued us and restored us to life. We have a story to tell. But to be His witnesses in this world, we've got to be willing to put ourselves out there with people who need Jesus. Relationship is the primary medium for the message of Jesus. As I said earlier, when we love like Jesus, people will see, understand, and experience Him.

This morning I want to talk about the lost art of Christian hospitality; I want to talk about opening your heart, and your home, to people. And to give shape to my teaching this morning I want to address three of the hurdles that stand in the way of Christian hospitality:

(1) our fierce independence, (2) our definition of "family," and (3) a misguided notion about holiness.

1. Our Fierce Independence

Pastor Keith talked about our fierce independence last week, and so I will be very brief on this point. I think Keith was on the money when he said that "Our culture is a very keep-to-yourself, private culture." Even our houses have been designed with privacy and independence in mind.

If your house has an attached garage, it is quite possible to avoid almost any contact with your neighbours. You get into our car, open the garage, and be gone without a word. When you get home, you open the garage with an electronic device that serves two purposes: (1) you don't have to get out and get any physical exercise; and (2) you don't have to talk to anyone...we can drive directly into the safety of your self-contained life.

Architecturally, the front porch has faded out of fashion but much more has been lost than mere design. Our inclination to independence is a hurdle to overcome, but so too are our narrow definitions of "family;" they keep us from opening our hearts and our homes.

2. Our Definition of "family"

I don't want to paint all of us with one wide brush. If you've moved from another country to the North Shore, or if you don't have any family living anywhere near by, then likely you've had to define "family" along broader lines.

Growing up, a family dinner in my home consisted of my mom and dad, and my two brothers. At Christmas and Easter and other special times, there were some cousins, uncles and aunts and grandparents that were added to the guest list. But every person in the room, on most occasions, were related to me by blood.

In almost every gathering, the table was central, a table filled with food. As we ate around the table, we talked, we laughed, and we prayed...we shared our lives around a common table.

When Naomi and I were married, my family circle expanded but so too did my definition of family. Naomi's mom and dad grew up in Southern Manitoba; when they moved to the North Shore they left nearly all of their family behind. But that didn't stop them from having "family".

In the early years of my marriage, I would come to one of their "family" dinners and I wouldn't recognize half of the people. I would turn to Naomi and ask, "*Who are these people?*" and sometimes, she wouldn't know. Every time was different...some were people from the church, some were people who had nowhere else to go, some were friends, some were new immigrants...

I think if I asked my in-laws the question, "*who are these people?*," they would say, "*tonight, they're family.*"

I can remember talking one night with some new immigrants my mother-in-law had invited over for a holiday dinner. I asked them what brought them to Canada, how long they had been in the country, did they know anyone here? It turned out that they had been in

country for 5 years, and they told me this was the first time anyone had ever invited them to their house for a meal.

Romans 12:13 says that we are to practice hospitality. 1 Peter 4:9-10 says, "*Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. **10** Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.*" Our homes, a meal around a table...these are a great gift.

In our postmodern, post-Christian, post-everything world, relationship is the primary medium for the message of Jesus. And in every culture throughout history, the sharing of a meal is about relationship. Sharing a meal is one way to grow in relationship with people who don't know the good news about Jesus.

Now I recognize I am treading upon sacred ground for some of you; the family table is something that many of us protect fiercely, just like our independence. But every so often we need to stop and consider our own standing in God's family. There was a time when we were not a part of God's family, but God's table always has room for another place setting.

John 1:12 says, "*Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God*". Romans 8:15-16 says, "*you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father."* For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children."

As I said earlier, when we love like Jesus, people will see, understand, and experience Him. One of the immensely practical ways we can love others is to open our hearts and our homes to them.

And now I want to talk about one final hurdle that may limit our practice of Christian hospitality...our misguided notions about “holiness”.

3. Misguided notions of “holiness”

In Mark 5: 24, a story is told of Jesus was walking with His disciples, and a crowd of people encircled them. In that crowd was a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years. This woman had it in her mind that if she just touched Jesus cloak, she would be healed. So, she snuck up on Jesus, touched His cloak, and instantly she could feel in her body that her bleeding had stopped.

Incredible, right? The miracle is incredible, but equally incredible was the boldness of this woman. According to Leviticus 15:25-30, this woman was ritually unclean because of her bleeding, meaning, anyone or anything she touched became unclean and unfit for worship. For years, this woman had to constantly avoid contact with people, lest she contaminate them.

The OT Law is quite clear on what happens when something holy comes into contact with something that is unclean. When clean and unclean touch, that which is clean becomes defiled. And so, holy things, holy people avoided everything unclean.

But not Jesus; there was something different about the holiness of Jesus. This time, the flow was in reverse...an unclean woman touched the Holy One and instantly she became clean and whole.

And if you think this was a one time occurrence, think again. The story is told in Matthew 9 of Jesus going to a party at Matthew’s house...try to picture Jesus and His disciples sitting down at a party with a household of known swindlers and extortionists. As you might imagine, going to this party raised a few eyebrows in the religious community. The leaders asked the disciples, “*Why does your teacher eat with such scum? When Jesus heard this, he said, “Healthy people don’t need a doctor—sick people do...I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners.”*”³

This happened over and over again in Jesus’ ministry; He spent time with people of disreputable character, and the holier than thous’ made sure Jesus heard of their disapproval. But Jesus seemed unconcerned about two things: (1) He was unconcerned about His reputation; and (2) Jesus was unconcerned about His holiness being “sullied.”

As Mark Buchanan says, “Holiness, as we see it in Jesus, is a subversive, invasive, and winsome force in the world; it is profoundly attractive to broken people.”

In the Old Testament, holiness was about being separate; holiness needed to be guarded, protected. In the New Testament, in Jesus, holiness becomes a winsome and invasive force that begins to reclaim those who have been broken by sin.

When I grew up in the church, there was a little phrase that I heard thrown around frequently; it went like this: *we are to be in the world but not of it*. I’m not sure exactly what was meant by the phrase but I can tell you how it was translated: *As Christians we live in the world*

³ Matthew 9:11-13, New Living Translation.

but just barely. Watch out, be careful, don't get to close to anything that isn't Christian. Apparently, even games like Monopoly were a little too dangerous, and so the Christian community came up with BibleOpoly...somehow buying Ephesus and Phillippi was safer than buying Park Place or Baltic Avenue.

Am I being ridiculous? Maybe...but only just.

I'm not talking about throwing all caution to the wind and living wildly immoral lives; holiness matters. But what I am saying is that the holiness of Jesus is not a weak or flimsy force. Jesus has placed us in the world, **because** we are not of it. The Holy Spirit lives in us, and He wants to draw us out so that we are close enough for the holiness of Jesus to come into contact with others. We are the salt of the earth...and for salt to have it's preserving effect we need to get out of the saltshaker.

Illus: A few months ago, Naomi had a small birthday party for me...there was a handful of friends, and some of the staff...it was really relaxed, there were kids running around in the front yard and back...we were having a good time.

And our neighbours' daughter from across the street wandered over; Tessa is 4 years old, just like our Anna. Tessa's parents, and younger brother followed right behind and Tessa asked me what was going on. I told her that I was having a birthday party with chocolate cake. Tessa asked, "*Mark, can I come to your birthday party?*" And before long the whole family had joined the party and was eating chocolate cake.

They've been in our house many times, and we've been in theirs. Last time I was in their house they offered me a beer and I would have taken it, but I can't stand the taste...I have to tell you though, it's really nice to be asked.

On Friday, Naomi invited some of her fellow nurses from Lions Gate Hospital over to our house; Naomi was hosting a baby shower for one of her nurse friends. They like Naomi...I mean what's not to like? In the course of conversation, one of her friends (someone I did a wedding for awhile ago) asked Naomi if I would baptize her baby. Naomi explained that I didn't baptize babies but that we would be happy to pray a blessing over their baby and over them as parents. And when the nurse who was having the baby shower heard this, she piped up and said, "*would you pray for our baby too?*" Hmmm...let me check my schedule.

When we love like Jesus, people will begin to see, understand, and experience Him. We open our hearts and our homes, because many people need to know they belong, before they will ever believe.

We are Jesus' witnesses; we've got a good news story to tell. Let's not be shy about telling others what Jesus has done for us. And let's not hide in our garages or behind venetian blinds...open the door to your house, and your heart, and see what God might do.

Pray.