

---

### GRACE DISTRIBUTORS, INC.

A debate and sometimes argument that comes up in some congregations is over the question, “Is the Church a business?”

- Actually, according to JESUS, the church is a sort of business,
  - and those debates that can create conflict in a congregation really have to do more with *what is* the vision of that business.
    - Should it have a balanced budget?
    - Does it exist to serve its members or those outside its walls?
    - Should it seek to make a profit each year?
    - Should it focus on getting new members?
    - Is its purpose just to stay open?

---

When Starbucks first began, their vision was to be “the number one purveyor of the world’s finest coffee.”

- Toward that fulfillment of that vision, they had six guiding practices:
  1. We will offer no franchises; all stores must be company owned.
  2. We will not use artificial flavors, like hazelnut.
  3. We will not sell our coffee beans anywhere other than in our company owned stores.
  4. We will offer only whole milk.
  5. We will not offer lattes.
  6. We will not offer iced coffees or frappuccinos.

That doesn’t sound like Starbucks today, does it?

- Well, something happened.

People on diets would come in and ask for low fat milk in their coffee.

- “We only offer whole milk,” they would reply.
  - So, those people would go across the street to a place where they could get coffee with low fat milk.

People would ask for iced coffee.

- “We don’t do that,” the baristas would say.
  - So, those folks would leave and go to a place where they could get an iced coffee.

Starbucks began to realize that they couldn’t be “the number one purveyor of the world’s finest coffee” if people weren’t drinking their coffee.

- So, in order to accomplish their vision, they had to change their practices—their guiding principles.

---

JESUS has a vision for His company.

- By the way, we call that company the Church,
  - But, in keeping with JESUS’ vision, it might better be called Grace Distributors, Inc.

---

The first guiding principle of that vision—to being distributors of grace—is that inviting all to come.

In organizing HIS company, JESUS needed workers.

- So, HE called together a board of twelve directors and trained them for three years.

It didn't always work the way JESUS hoped.

- One of HIS board members tried a hostile takeover of the leadership.
- Following that, the remaining board members became unfocused.
- Even though JESUS had appeared to them and reminded them of GOD's mission ("As the FATHER has sent me, so I am sending you.") they were struggling with how to carry on.
  - Peter said, "Let's go fishing."
    - Several others said, "I'm in."
  - So, JESUS had to show up and teach them again about the vision.

"Cast out your net on the other side."

- Hadn't HE previously told them to leave their nets behind?
- Now HE helps them to remember what fishing feels like.
  - A great catch of fish, but a lot of hard work bring it in.
  - Probably very satisfying and familiar.

But then HE reminds them of the vision.

- "Come. Come and eat."
  - I'll bet there was nothing better than to be able to sit down and eat a meal with JESUS:
    - to be in HIS presence;
    - to hear HIS words;
    - to share in HIS vision.
- JESUS invited them to come and eat, and then they were back on track.
  - just as we can be each week when we are present to hear JESUS' words, "Come and eat. This is MY body. This is MY blood."
  - JESUS is inviting us to come, and freely receive GOD's grace.

---

That's the second guiding principle of JESUS' vision to be distributors of grace.

- We have to be sharing grace with others.

---

Two basic needs of every human being are a sense of belonging and a sense of purpose.

- We need to feel accepted by a larger group in order to have a stable identity and sense of self. This is why the children of many immigrants join gangs.

- They don't identify with the culture at home.
- They don't fit in with others at school.
  - The gang gives them that place to belong.

We also need to feel that what we do matters,

- that if we didn't show up, people would notice.

That's purpose, and it's one of the greatest motivators in the world.

- Believing that you have something of value to contribute is more meaningful than money, or fame, or power.
  - That sense of purpose draws us again and again into challenging circumstances and even with joy.

---

The conversation that JESUS has with Peter on the beach is about belonging and purpose.

- Three times, JESUS asks Peter, "Do you love ME?"

Imagine someone you care about asking if you really love her/him, not once, not twice, but three times.

- That would be painful. Peter is indeed hurt by this.
  - I suspect, though, that Peter later realized that JESUS is not testing him,
    - but rather reinstating him into the company of believers by having him confess the same number of times that he denied his faith in JESUS earlier.
    - JESUS is drawing Peter back into a community to which he belongs and accepts him for who he is.
- Then, each time Peter makes that confession, JESUS tells him, “Feed my sheep.”
  - Be a leader.
  - Look out for others.
  - Devote yourself to this community.
    - This is the good work you must do.
    - This is your purpose.

---

(SING) Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name>>>that’s belonging. And they’re always glad you came>>>that’s purpose.

---

Belonging and purpose are gifts of grace.

- They are gifts we receive when we accept JESUS’ invitation to come.

Baptism and communion are about belonging.

- In baptism, GOD says to us, “You belong to ME.”
- In communion, GOD says to us, “I belong to you.”

And because we belong to GOD’s family, and are part of the body of CHRIST,

- we also share in the purpose of CHRIST, the vision for Grace Distributors, Inc.:
    - “Come and freely receive GOD’s grace, so that you can distribute to others.
- 

“Peter, do you love ME?”>>>”Feed my sheep.”

“As the FATHER has sent me, so I am sending you.”

Grace Distributors, Inc.—the company that delivers GOD’s grace to the world.

---

By the way, did you ever wonder why this passage tells us exactly how many fish they caught? 153 fish.

- That was the exact number of species of fish known in that day.
- That number represents every race and nation in the world.
  - Invite them all. Catch them all. Distribute to them all.
    - GOD’s grace is for everyone.
      - “This cup is the new covenant in MY blood, shed for you and for...all...people.”

For that matter, did you ever wonder why this passage tells us that even with so many fish, the nets were not torn?

- It means that there is room for more.
- 

Why do you come to this place week after week?

- Isn’t it because you belong here? That’s a gift of grace!

Why do you invite and bring others to come?

- Isn’t it because you want them to belong?
  - That’s your purpose. That, too, is a gift of grace!

I want to be able to bring people to a place that knows grace, to meet other people who know God’s grace.

- Sometimes that means we must change our practices,
  - but we don’t change our vision.

JESUS invites us to come and freely receive GOD’s grace so that we can distribute it to others.

- That’s our business. That’s our company vision.

- Welcome, to Grace Distributors, Inc.