



The Beacon

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Bringing Them Back

I recently saw a study by the Public Religion Research Institute called Exodus: Why Americans are Leaving Religion – and Why They Are Unlikely to Return. The Summary of the Study is found here: <http://www.prii.org/research/prii-rns-2016-religiously-unaffiliated-americans/>.

This study paints a rather grim picture of the future of Christianity. I will tell you that this is not news to me. I have been looking at research and studies like this for years. To give you an idea let me quote the article

In 1991, only six percent of Americans identified their religious affiliation as “none,” and that number had not moved much since the early 1970s. By the end of the 1990s, 14% of the public claimed no religious affiliation. The rate of religious change accelerated further during the late 2000s and early 2010s, reaching 20% by 2012. Today, one-quarter (25%) of Americans claim no formal religious identity, making this group the single largest “religious group” in the U.S.

In other words, people are leaving religion in droves. Particularly young adults.

The most cited reason offered is that they stop believing in the teachings of the church of their youth (60%). This is a complex answer, however, and one I will discuss further in a moment.

The next most cited reason is the treatment of the LGBT community by religion (29%). This number is most significant among women (40%). This is an important one for us to understand. First Baptist Church has been called by God to a ministry in Salt Lake City that is significant to the LGBT community. It is a ministry of healing, a ministry of reconciliation and a ministry of acceptance and support. Furthermore, it is precisely because people have said this is important--straight and gay people alike-- that we must be clear and vocal about who we are when it comes to the LGBT Community. People need to know that First Baptist Church is a safe place for the LGBT Community and for those who care about those issues because people are making choices about church based on this issue.

Another reason cited for leaving church and joining the “unaffiliated” flock is upbringing. Many said they were raised in homes where religion was not seen as important. To be honest, this one does not surprise me. It is clear that church is just one small thing among many activities in a family’s life together. It is not surprising that at an early age it is seen as very optional and quite irrelevant. I started out the program year this year challenging all of us to approach church like a calling; to see

being here as a calling and to recognize that we are missing something when we are not worshipping together. This study seems to point to the truth that when church is seen as just another activity it is easily done away with in early adulthood. This study showed that most people left the religion of their childhood and became “unaffiliated” before the age of 18. Again, they cited that it was not seen as a priority in the home they grew up in. If the teachings of Jesus are important and something we want for our children and grandchildren, then we must make it a priority.

Which actually brings me back to the issue of the teachings of the church in which 60% of the people stopped believing. Another interesting statistic is that the majority of people still believed in a higher power (59%), they still believed in God, they just didn’t believe in the kind of God that the church was describing.

My suspicion is that if we were to have a conversation with these folks and have the opportunity to talk with them and ask them to describe the teachings they don’t believe in, I imagine they would talk about things like guilt and shame; feeling judged; the threat of hell; feeling like you had to be perfect; exclusivism of the church being the only right church; in-fighting; money; abuse by the clergy and leaders who thought they were better than everybody else but were often doing awful things; broken trust; inward focus; discouraged questioning and overall didn’t seem to make much of a difference. If we were to hear about that kind of God they didn’t believe in, we would likely say to them, “I don’t believe in that kind of God either.” There is much about Christianity that we have allowed to evolve and have let fall to the wayside so that the heart of the Gospel could take center stage.

We have an important and urgent ministry in this city. Furthermore, I believe with all my heart that this church was called to such a time as this. No church that I know of is better suited to address these longings or these issues than First Baptist Church of Salt Lake City. We are a place of acceptance and support. We are a place that, no matter where you are in your journey, will welcome you and give you space to explore and be. We are a place that really wants to be one in Christ and yet embrace our diversity and let that be our testimony to how powerful our faith in Jesus is.

However, for us to truly be the place of transformation that Christ has called us to be; for us to be the beacon on the hill that beckons all who are weary and heavy laden to come; for us to be the community that confounds the odds and reacquires the “unaffiliated” we must catch the vision that God has for the people who have walked away from the church of their childhood and take on a burden for them. I am convinced that these are our people, these are the ones the Lord will bring to us. But it means we must put out the welcome mat. It means reaching out in a way that helps them know we are not the church they are trying to leave behind. And most importantly, we must not be the kind of church people are rejecting. We must be true to Christ who transforms us and transforms the world and who offers new life to all who would seek it, as we also let go of all the baggage that has done harm to so many. We have unpacked some of that over the years and we will continue to unpack more in the years to come, but it begins with a continual willingness to examine how we are presenting ourselves and how we are extending a welcome to those who have walked away from the church. Jesus still loves them, and I believe God has called us to be a place where they can find that connection to the love God has for the them through Christ once again.

Grace and Peace, Pastor Curtis

Happening at FBC in October

Oct 2: World Communion Day—World Mission Offering
Oct 4: Beers and Bros at Fiddler's Elbow at 6:30 pm
Oct 10: Office Closed
Oct 13: AB Women's Luncheon at noon
Oct 18: Beers and Bros at Fiddler's Elbow at 6:30 pm
Oct 26: Council of Ministries at 5:45 pm

Happy Birthday to: Oct 2: Andrew Burnett. Oct 3: Lynn Christensen, Alyssa Meadowcroft.
Oct 4: Miranda Cannon. Oct 5: Celine David. Oct 11: Weston Hall. Oct 12: Alan Fox. Oct 15:
Solomon Guilkey. Oct 16: Pat Ditton. Oct 17: Lois Moser, Taylor Hekking. Oct 18: Morgan Hekking,
Judge Brown. Oct 19: Steve Walker. Oct 23: Mackenzie Wolters, Oct 26: Lisa Benham. Oct 27: Lisa
Keysaw. Oct 29: Monty Rogers. Oct 30: Harriett Arreola.

The new Church Directory is ready! They are in a basket on the table outside the parlor door. Please take one per family as you leave church.

Bible Studies:

Seekers - North will meet at the home of Peggy Keiffer, 2379 East St. Mary's Drive, SLC. For information call Peggy at 801-582-9378. New members are always welcome.

Seekers - South will meet at the home of Audrey Kenyon, 4422 South Doris Way, Holladay, Call Audrey at 801-948-4171 for more information, New members are always welcome.

Pastor Curtis' Wednesday Morning Bible Study at 10:30. We are studying Isaiah.

Burnetts' Bible Study is studying Hebrews, Wed evenings at 7:30 at Ken and Ann's home.

Lunches of Love: Wednesday Mornings at 11:30. Come help us pack lunches. We need fruit cups, snacks, crackers, cookies, pudding cups etc for the lunches. Don't forget to bring loaves of bread on Communion Sunday and place them in the baskets in front of the communion

AB GIRLS are collecting hygiene items and snacks for the homeless. Please purchase items from the Dollar Store. Items will be placed in a zip-lock baggie for distribution.

Examples: toothbrush, toothpaste, deodorant, shampoo, soap (hotel toiletries are great), personal feminine hygiene, sanitizer, razor, shaving cream, Kleenex, wash cloth, hand towel, gloves, thermal socks, wipes, lotion, snacks (crackers/cheese spread, beef sticks, canned items with flip top lids), and candy (not chocolate). Anything a homeless person could use. We will be making bags for men, women and doggie treat bags for companions. Remember just pick up items at the dollar store. Your generosity will go a long way. We need items by Sunday, October 18. There are collection boxes just outside the sanctuary door or items can be left in a bag on the AB GIRLS room door knob.

Questions? Talk to Stephanie Gosdis or Rachel Winzenreid.

Help us fix the sanctuary sound system—Third Friday Bingo on Oct 21. All the funds collected that night will go towards improvements to our sound system. Grab some friends and come have some fun.

White Cross-- We will once again be participating in the White Cross mission. You may pick up a white cross next Sunday during People Need People Dinner, buy what is on the cross and return them by Oct 16th. This year we are collecting for Cordova Community Christian Center in Cordova, Alaska. Here is what they need:

Visa or Walmart Gift Cards, construction paper, dry erase markers and erasers, black and blue pens, #2 pencils, colored pencils, glue sticks, paste, masking tape, watercolor paintsets, jump ropes, beanbags, a twin quilt are just some of the items we need for this mission. You can also give cash to Joyce Urry so she can purchase the gift cards. For more information talk to Joyce.

The Starch Solution Workshop (Oct 4 & 11)

Tue 5:30 PM-7:30pm · Amy's Home

Tuesdays, October 4 & 11, 2016

\$75/person (Includes 2 dinners, handouts, and the book) \$100/couple (Includes 2 dinners, handouts, and the book)

Reservations required; Seating is limited.

Amy David, 801-634-8305 For summary of benefits of Whole Food Plant Based Lifestyle see the following infographic. Give yourself a Gift of Health by choosing whole plant foods. Benefits of Plant-Based Lifestyle: Healthier weight, lower cholesterol, blood pressure and blood sugar. Prevent or reverse heart disease. Lower risk of cancer. Prevent and reverse diabetes. Improve symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis, auto-immune diseases, constipation. Fewer medications. Lower food costs. Why not enjoy all these benefits by eating the most delicious and nutritious foods?--