

**(Invite Ben and Kathy Adams to share testimony.)**

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**Growing Together in the Study of God's Word has been important to us through our 25 years here. I will touch on some of the opportunities we've had here.**

**My first Bible Study was the Disciple I study. While we were stay at home moms, a neighbor and I made arrangements so we could both attend the Disciple Classes that were offered then. I watched Kim & Mike's 2 children while they attended the evening class with Clark Holt as leader. And Kim watched Abby & Nate while I attended the morning class led by Ken Crooks.**

**The morning of the 1st class meeting, I was disappointed that there were only 2 others and thought the class might be cancelled. But...**

**"Where 2 or 3 are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them."**

**This proved to be true because Edith, Lisa, and I grew together in some great discussions and study of the Old Testament.**

**Ben and I took the United Methodist's 3 day "Walk to Emmaus" a while ago. Jennifer Swenson is participating right now in Plano on her Walk. Ask her about it! If you'd like to attend the Walk, ask someone who's done it. It's an amazing opportunity to strengthen your faith.**

**As told in Luke 24, two men are walking to Emmaus. A stranger walks with them as they lament the death of Jesus 3 days earlier. It is not until they break bread with the "stranger" that they recognized that he is the risen Jesus!**

**Afterwards they said "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"**

**May our hearts burn within us, as we recognize Jesus in our Bible studies and classes.**

**I am so grateful for our pastors for the sermons they deliver each Sunday. But our Christian teachers are not only our pastors. There are many lay persons who want to share their love and study of**

**God's word with us. After our Walk to Emmaus, we studied with the Starrs.**

**Ben and I joined an evening Disciple II class led by Dan Starr and the 10:30 Sunday class led by Kim. The 10:30 class is now called "Faith Quest" and is now led by many individuals.**

**Currently, Ben is attending a Thursday morning men's Bible Study here at Baker and I am privileged to be studying the book of John with the women's study group, "Debra in the Palms" led by Paula Hall.**

**Right now, Ben and I are also attending the 9:00 Sunday class led by our staff. The class uses a video each week and is based on John Wesley's book "Three Simple Rules".**

**So, as you can see, Baker offers many ways we can grow together in study.**

**From our financial gifts, funds are provided for**

- Bibles for the 3rd Graders (they are receiving them in today's service!)**
- Literature, supplies, and videos for the Sunday School curriculum**
- Supplies for Vacation Bible Study**
- Financial support for our wonderful pastoral leaders, music leaders, and staff**
- Operating costs for this building that provides a safe and comfortable meeting place.**

**If you aren't already, please consider participating in the wonderful "Growing Together" opportunities that are offered here and prayerfully consider increasing your support for them financially too.**

**Kathy Adams**

**Last week our Chair of Finances, Allen Scales, presented a timely and honest assessment of our church's financial situation. Perhaps like me your first reaction over this past week was to make a list – of your priorities and your expenses and to fold in some measure of the**

uncertainty that hangs over so many as our economy remakes itself and we reset our needs, our wants, our commitments.

Maybe stewardship of the church was at the top of your list. Maybe you are prepared to respond to Allen's challenge to the congregation to step forward with increased giving over and above your pledge.

We have been members of Baker Memorial for 25 years and there have been times when our family giving has been inconsistent. Some years we virtually ignored our pledge or were irregular in our giving. There were summers where we were no shows. Supporting the church is not like the water bill or gas bill or the mortgage where physical consequences are the result of not paying your bills.

Now we see things differently. Our church life is not one item on a bullet list of commitments or interests or priorities. The church is the hub that all other things revolve around.

Kathy talked of the importance of **“Growing Together”**. I naturally gravitate more to the phrase **“Serving Others”**. Twenty-one years ago, Reverend Ken Crooks and I were at a planning meeting for the churches that would support a new homeless shelter in Aurora known as Hesus House. During a lull in the meeting, Ken leaned over to me and said that glorious double negative: “There is no way we cannot support this!”

There are many ways to serve others. The need is great.

Stephen's Ministers support individuals with one-on-one caring and friendship. We have a charged up youth program that can only get stronger as more young folks realize the power of getting together in the name of Christ. We have 4 high school youth involved in our refugee tutoring on Wednesday nights - they exude the wonder of sharing their gift of education with those struggling to make sense of the world in a language they do not know. We have a corps of cooks, servers and workers who provide a warm meal in a clean well-lighted place every Wednesday. We have a vibrant adult education program and plenty of chairs for new members to join in.

You all can probably add more to this list.

The truth is each of the ways we serve needs to be bolstered by more direction, more energy and more involvement. Some of that comes

from our great staff – ready to guide us to the realization that we as a church are much greater than the the sum of our parts. Most of it comes from us – realizing that putting Christ and His church at the center of everything we do will make reaching our vision by doing our mission a reality. When times are hard and uncertain, we need to focus on the core of our faith and offer even greater support to the church and its mission.

The Bible offers in several places the notion of “first fruits” - where believers reserve the first (and often, best) part of the harvest to God. Farmers offer the best of their produce. Hosts put aside their best for the visitor. In fact, God offered the ultimate first fruit in the sacrifice of his Son.

In practical terms, we offer first fruits today in our giving to the church. One way to do this that avoids the whims of our day-to-day world is to give via the Automated Debit program. It is a way to provide a reliable, timely offering of our first fruits.

Kathy and I have decided to continue our tithing for 2009, via the reliable automatic bank withdrawal program, and to respond to Allen's challenge by offering an extra weekly amount for the remainder of the year.

Just as important, we will continue to offer our time, talent, and treasures in 2010 to advance the vision of making our church a hub of Christ-directed activity radiating out to the world from the heart of St. Charles.

*Ben Adams*