

**Small Groups that Don't Work  
(Our Second Strategy to Equip You for the Work of the  
Ministry)**

Matthew 20:17-28

Peter Hiett

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[The worship band plays Invisible... ]

**INVISIBLE**

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Jessica Flame is a silver screen queen  
The world's known her name since she was  
seventeen  
And you'd think her life would be so wonderful  
But she just wants to be invisible

Little Shawntel is in the fifth grade this year  
She became a woman before all her peers  
And at night her step-dad comes to visit her  
And she wishes she was invisible  
Invisible

Chorus:

If I could see with an angel's eyes  
What would I find here?  
And if I saw with eyes of God  
Would anyone ever disappear?

Old man McGuire is just waiting to die  
No one will visit and no one will cry  
And he knows there's nothing left to leave at all  
And he feels like he is invisible  
Invisible

Chorus

Nowhere to run, no place to hide  
The eyes of God are open wide

When no one sees the pain inside  
The eyes of God are open wide

So many people and so little time  
My eyes see visions but my heart is blind  
Only Love can help me see what matters most  
That nobody is invisible  
Invisible

Chorus:

If I could see with an angel's eyes  
What would I find here?  
And if I saw with eyes of God  
Would anyone ever disappear?

Nowhere to run, no place to hide  
The eyes of love are open wide

[Peter prays... ]

And so, Lord God, we thank you that your eyes are open wide, that you see. But, Lord, the problem is, I guess, we hide. And so Lord, through Your word preached, would You sneak into our dark hiding places, draw us out into the light. Lord God, we pray that You would use this offering for that purpose, both here on the mountain, in the city, around the world, even over in Africa, Lord God, to believe You and Your love for us in Jesus the Christ, amen.

August 10, 1988, Veronique LeGuen descended 262½ feet into a cave in South Central France. She would remain in isolation for 111 days, all in order to study the effects of isolation on bio-rhythms and even more importantly, to get the Guinness World Record.

She succeeded and gained the world record, but somehow lost her soul. I read her story and the story of

others several years ago in a fascinating article on isolation experiments in the Sunday edition of the San Francisco Chronicle.

Veronique kept an extensive diary in which she recorded her experience. She said she imagined voices and demons. Although she had light and scores of books in the cave, she wrote, "My only horizon is darkness." At one point she wrote,

I am not here, but I am analyzing myself all the same. I feel evil all around me. This cave doesn't have any meaning anymore. My soul is dissolving in the humidity. I let myself slide into unreality. Nothing is true anymore. I have a feeling that a terrible evil has gotten hold of me: insanity.

G.K. Chesterton wrote that "modern man no longer believes in hell but does believe in 'Hanworth Mental Institution.'" Insanity.

He wrote, "A madman is not the man who's lost his own reason, but the man who's lost everything except his own reason." He argued that insanity is a mind isolated in its own universe. Emil Bruner, the great theologian, wrote, "Every person that is self-centered has an isolated soul."

We talked about that the week before last and how C.S. Lewis pictured heaven and hell. Heaven is a place where people say to God, "Thy will be done." Hell is a place where God says to people, "Thy will be done," where people get to be god of their own universe and so their universe is only as large as their own minds.

Lewis wrote, "Hell is a state of mind and every state of mind, left to itself, every shutting up of the creature within the dungeon of its own mind is in the end hell."

That's the Biblical idea of Hades or Sheol, words that often get translated as hell. Gehenna, the place of consuming fire, also gets translated as hell. Yet God is a consuming fire, and Hades gets thrown into the fire in the end.

Well, Hades, Sheol, Abaddon, death, darkness, the grave are "places of no remembrance" in the words of the Psalmist, "cut off from the Lord's hand."—the Abyss.

This is a picture of Veronique LeGuen ascending from her cave. Her last remarks in her diary referred to looking back at "the terrestrial abyss that led me to the abyss I have inside myself, the one that I am not finished exploring."

The article I read referred to similar feelings experienced by many who've participated in isolation experiments.

This is a picture of Stephania Fellini in a cave in New Mexico. She broke Veronique's record. At one point, she wrote, "Sometimes I feel like I don't exist anymore."

I heard about a tribe in South Africa where the customary greeting is,

"I see you."

"I am here."

"I see you."

"I am here."

They say that because they believe that unless someone sees you, you don't exist.

I find that fascinating because it's the same belief held by another tribe known as the Quantum Physicists. They argue that modern science has shown that things don't really exist apart from an observer.

Lots of New Age folks love that thought because it implies that we are god and create our own reality. Yet if we each create our own reality, we're each utterly alone.

Shirley MacLaine writes,

If I created my own reality, then on some level and dimension I didn't understand—I had created everything I saw, heard, touched, smelled, tasted; everything I loved, hated, revered, abhorred; everything I responded to or that responded to me. Then, I created everything I knew. I was therefore responsible for all there was in my reality. If that was true, then I was everything, as the ancient [Hindu] texts had taught. I was my own universe. Did that also mean I had created God, and I had created life and death? Was that why I was all there was? A chilling wave of loneliness rippled through me.

Yep, I believe that loneliness is referred to as hell.

Yet, on the other hand, if I actually exist and you actually exist, and we both experience the same reality, it implies that someone else is seeing us both, creating us both with His observation or Word, and that Someone must be God.

Perhaps we're somehow made in the image of God such that if we insist on creating our own reality, in some sense we can, and that reality is called hell—cut off from God and not truly real for we're not willing to be truly seen.

On the other hand, if we surrender to being seen, stop hiding, and step into the light, we exist—truly real, eternally living in God’s kingdom.

It’s interesting that in Matthew 25 when the Master judges the foolish virgins He says, “I know [oida]you not.” A more accurate translation might be, “I see you not.” Perhaps they were still hiding like Eve and like Adam in the trees.

Maybe these South African tribesmen were right, unless someone sees you, you don’t really exist.

Well, Stephania Fellini wrote, “Sometimes I feel I don’t exist anymore.”

Veronique LeGuen wrote in her diary, “I am not here, but I am analyzing myself all the same. . . I am not here.”

One year after she emerged from her cave, January 17th, 1990 at 4 a.m., she went to her van and scribbled this note to her husband, “The ten years I spent with you are worth an entire lifetime, but my life is over.” She took a massive dose of barbituates and curled into a fetal position. The next day her husband found her dead and alone... just where the enemy wants us all.

Well, don’t worry. Isolation experiments take a lot of money. Most of us don’t have enough to afford going 111 days without any human contact. You know, unless you’re like Howard Hughes, you just can’t afford that much isolation. However, folks like Howard Hughes and Veronique LeGuen aren’t the only ones that trap themselves in darkness and take their own lives.

There are other forms of power that we use to isolate ourselves, descend into our own caves, and make ourselves invisible so we don’t fully exist.

In The Hobbit, J.R.R. Tolkien wrote about a character named Gollum,

And there in his [Gollum's] hiding place he kept a few wretched oddments, and one very beautiful thing, very beautiful, very wonderful. He had a ring, a golden ring, a precious ring. . . . He wanted it because it was a ring of power, and if you slipped that ring on your finger, you were invisible.

You'll remember Gollum so loves the ring of power, he descends into a cave and there, grows wretched. No end of days, out of time and wretched.

In The Fellowship of the Ring, Gandalf tells Frodo,

"He [Gollum] was altogether wretched. He hated the dark, and he hated light more; he hated everything, and the Ring most of all."

"What do you mean?" said Frodo. "Surely the Ring was his precious and the only thing he cared for. But if he hated it, why didn't he get rid of it, or go away and leave it?"

"You ought to begin to understand, Frodo, after all you have heard," said Gandalf. "He hated it and loved it, as he hated and loved himself. He could not get rid of it. He had no will left in the matter."

Gandalf warns Frodo because Frodo has come to possess the ring, and Gollum was once very much like Frodo.

Remember this scene?

[Peter shows a video clip from Return of the King. Sam and Frodo are near the end of their journey. Frodo is very weak and unable to think clearly or remember truth. Sam is holding Frodo and reminding him of reality. ]

Sam: “Do you remember the Shire, Mr. Frodo? It will be spring soon, and the orchards will be in blossom, and the birds will be nesting in the Hazelthicket. And they’ll be sowin’ the summer barley in the lower fields and eatin’ the first of the strawberries with cream. Do you remember the taste of strawberries?”

Frodo, just barely able to speak: “No, Sam, I can’t recall the taste of food, nor the sound of water, nor the touch of grass. I am naked in the dark...” Frodo has carried the ring of power a long time, and he’s turning into Gollum. He’s slipping into hell, and he has no will left in the matter. In the next line Sam says, “Well, I’ll carry you then.” And he does, he carries him.

Tolkein named Gollum after the Hebrew legend of the golem, a clay man without a soul or spirit, half made. The Golem of Prague was a legalist. Commanded to fetch water, he kept bringing it until the rabbi’s house was flooded.

The Talmud says that a vessel that’s not complete is called a golem.

I suspect Adam and Eve in the garden were golem—half made, not yet fully filled with God’s Spirit, His love. They try to complete themselves with the knowledge of good and evil, the law, for the snake said it



would give them power to become like God. And in a way, it did. They became dreadfully aware of evil—themselves. Immediately, they hide from each other, covered in fig leaves, and hide from God in the trees of the garden. That is, they descended into their caves, hiding themselves in justification, legalisms, the power of the law, and their flesh.

God said, “Where are you?” as if He couldn’t see them. Whatever the case, I don’t think they could truly see God. They had somehow descended into death, Hades, hell.

People argue whether or not hell has an end, but I think we know where it begins. We all have rings of power that entice us with invisibility so we won’t be seen by anybody... safe in hell like old Gollum.

“Above all men desire power,” says Galadriel at the start of the Lord of the Rings.

Power, wealth, prosperity, prestige, legal recourse, the law, even religion, maybe especially religion... I mean the power to justify ourselves. They are all ways we hide our hearts and make our souls invisible... small, wretched, and even more dark.

We say “I am rich. I have prospered, and I need nothing,” not knowing that we are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.

See, we even hide from ourselves. That’s why God’s first gift of redemption was subjecting the world to futility so our power wouldn’t always work.

That must be why Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor.” The poor are the least likely to go insane. They can’t hide from their need. They’re usually the first to cry out, “Yeshua! God Save! Jesus!”

But with power, we hide from ourselves. We hide from God, and we hide from people. For every meaningful

encounter with people exposes our deception, our insane, solitary conceit, the reality that we have created.

Every real person is too big to fit into our self-centered world. They won't submit to our lordship. They won't work for us, so they expose us. Golem in a cave.

This is the second part of what I preached three weeks ago that got interrupted by Katrina and our sermon on creation subjected to futility. But in that first sermon on our vision and strategy, I spoke of how Jesus breaks down the gates of hell. I ended that sermon at the communion table saying, "Let Jesus descend into your hell and blow the gates from the inside out, wide open, as we surrender our self-centered worlds and begin to worship God in His world, the Kingdom."

I wanted to show you a picture of how I imagined those horrific gates, but there wasn't time. It was a picture of the Gates of Mordor in the Lord of the Rings. (The greatest army of men couldn't breach those gates, but something else could and did.)

Well, we said our vision is Jesus and our strategy is worship. We preached about Peter, James, and John on the mountain with Jesus on the seventh day where He is transfigured before them. Peter starts building tabernacles (or churches) and God tells him basically, "Shut up and listen! This is my beloved Son. Worship!"

But Peter, James, and John are utterly terrified of Jesus in glory. He's too big to fit in their self-centered little worlds. The vision is great and will bear fruit later, but it's not here that they receive and believe and take Him into their souls.

So Jesus untransfigures, gets small, and picks them up. They come down the mountain still self-centered and small and empty... golem.

But Jesus has come down with them.

- 1) He has a strategy on the mountain in glory.
- 2) He has a strategy in the valley of weakness.

Our first strategy to equip you for ministry, breaking down the gates of hell, is corporate worship on the mountain in glory.

Our second strategy is fellowship in the valley, in weakness, more specifically, small groups subjected to futility... small groups that don't work.

This is how they work, Matthew 20:17,

*And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside. . .*

Remember, Jesus had appointed twelve guys to be with Him. It's the closest thing to a program Jesus ever did... a small group, and they are His strategy.

*And on the way he said to them, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day." Then [Then, as He was revealing the Gospel of grace... then] the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons [James and John], and kneeling [proskuneo, also translated "worship"] before him she asked him for something. And he said to her, "What do you want?"*

What do you want? When we come to worship His Spirit asks, “What do you want?”

What do I want? You know what I want, Jesus? Sometimes, I think I want to get totally drunk and maybe have sex, wild sex with a busload of showgirls, and then die before the shame sets in. Jesus, I want control. I want my desires fulfilled, regardless of how they de-humanize others. I want power. I want isolation. I want hell...

Oops. Did I say that out loud? I can't say that, I'm a pastor. Let me rephrase, I mean I just want to have Bible studies and do odd jobs for my neighbors. I just want good deeds. I mean, let me weave a lie to hide my wounded heart, my golem, my old man. Hide him, not confess him.

See, I should never say those things simply to the air because there are demons waiting for invitations, but if I say them to Jesus, they're confessions. And then I realize that actually booze, sex, death, self aren't the only thing I want. I'm finding I also want Jesus...

even to be intoxicated with His Spirit,  
even to be indwelt with His love,  
to even die for Him rather than myself  
(sometimes).

It's the new man, but you see, he's not the result of my own will, my old man. I don't want those good things because I willed to want them. It's God's will in me, Jesus in me.

My will, my wanting, is broken,  
and hiding it only makes it more wretched.

Jesus says to the mother of the Sons of Zebedee,  
“What do you want?”

You see, that's what we're trying to hide. We act like the problem is something we can just choose to fix, but the problem is our ability to choose, to want the good.

Our will wants power,  
     the ring of power,  
     the fruit of the tree,  
     to justify ourselves,  
     to save ourselves,  
     to be God.

We want to *be* God  
     more than we *want* God, who is love.

Jesus asks her, "What do you want?" not because He doesn't know, but because He's helping her confess. As we read, we'll see James and John are obviously embarrassed and then all the other guys get mad, but not because the mother of James and John doesn't speak the truth. She does speak the truth. They're just all twelve trying to hide it, but Jesus is helping them all to confess.

*She said to him, "Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom."*

Let them have judgment and power. She wants the ring of power.

*Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?"*

That cup is mercy. It is His own blood poured out in love. That cup is the surrender of power to love.

*You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to*

*drink?” [They said to him, “Yep.”] “We are able.” He said to them, “You will drink my cup [they will suffer], but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.” And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers.*

In other words, a fight breaks out, a stinky, embarrassing, messy one. And listen closely, these guys have been in this small group for three years. Three years! And they had group everyday! They’ve got to be thinkin’, “This group isn’t working. If it was working, we’d have better Bible studies, more group hugs, and warm fuzzies!”

I suppose many of us have quit small groups because we thought they weren’t working, and that was just when they were starting to work.

That is, many of us have quit relationships, friendships, family, marriages because we thought they didn’t work, and that was just when they were starting to work (Golem was being exposed.).

You see what’s happening to the twelve? They’re all trying to hide the fact that they each are a golem, yet no longer can.

It’s easy to make everybody think you have it all together until y’all go camping together for three years. It’s easy to impress folks with your religious act for a couple of hours every seventh day between 9 and 11, but if they lived at your house it would be different.

You know, we’re like Aram in the children’s sermon. We’re like sick people that go to a hospital and hide their wounds, hide their diseases, thinking, “I can’t confess my disease because a hospital’s about health.”

We come to church and hide our sins, and why do we do that? Because we think we can fix ‘em. If the pastor yells long enough, and we try hard enough, we can fix ourselves with our own will, but our will is what’s broken.

What we want is the disease.

We want power and use power to pretend we don’t want power. That is, we pretend to love, motivated by self-centered conceit. It’s the opposite of love. We hide even from ourselves.

But in community, in small groups, our self-centered illusions crash into each other. We lose power, become visible, and Golem is exposed.

Naked.

That’s terrifying.

And yet, we all want to be seen because only when we’re seen do we truly exist, truly live. I suppose it’s what fuels so much sexual deviancy in our society.

I had a dear friend that was a flasher. He had a very public and religious family. So once in a great while, under stress and feeling unable to measure up, he would flash people. Do you understand his heart?

“See me! See me! Would somebody see me, see my shame and love me?”

The problem was, he was flashing the wrong people. He needed to flash the bridegroom, Jesus. He needed to expose His desperate heart to Jesus, and eventually, he did.

I don’t mean he flashed at church, and yet in a way, he did. He shared with a small group how ashamed he was, how he felt he could never measure up, how he longed to be loved for who he was and not an act.

He flashed his lonely heart at Jesus, and Jesus saw, and Jesus covered him with Himself... body broken and blood shed. Mercy.

Well, the disciples think this small group isn't working. A fight breaks out, and now twelve Golems are standing in the light, buck-naked with no fig leaves.

Well, Jesus sees them, and He loves them. And now they begin to see themselves. He tells them how He will heal them and cover them with Himself, body broken and blood shed.

Next verse,

*But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave. . ."*

That is, whoever would be great must surrender power in love. How can they do that? How could they ever want that, to surrender power?

*". . . even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem to do just that... surrender power. On Mt. Calvary He will cast the ring of power into the consuming fire. And get this, the ring of power belongs to Him and came from Him. He will lay His



legitimate power down and somehow He will even lay our illegitimate power down.

When we worship Him, we see Him, ingest Him, and learn from Him. And He helps us lay our power down. He's the parakletos, the helper.

So through community:

- 1) He helps us see our sin.
- 2) He helps us lay it down.
- 3) And He covers us with Himself, body broken and blood shed.

That is, in community we confess our sins, and someone says, "I see you, and in the name of Jesus you are forgiven. I AM is here."

You know, our Reformed Theology didn't do away with the Catholic Confessional. It simply transferred it from a bunch of professional priests sitting in a cathedral to your Christian friends, sitting in your living room.

They are referred to as the "priesthood of all believers," and you are commanded to confess your sins one to another.

I'm asking you to join a small group, but  
 not so that you'll learn some new thing, and  
 not so they'll hold you accountable, and  
 not so you could compare your spiritual machismo  
 and challenge your neighbor with religious  
 pride,  
 not to make life work,  
 not even first and foremost that you'd care for each  
 other.

I'm asking you, Golem, to join a small group in order to  
be seen.

I want you to join a small group in order to lay down that  
ring of power that makes you invisible and makes  
your life hell.

I want you to go to small group and cast it into the fire.  
The fire is God's mercy.

I want you to go to your small group and confess from the  
depths of your being, "I'm a sinner."

Now, I know what some of you are thinking, "Oh,  
great. A lot of good that will do... encounter groups and  
confessionals. The church is supposed to storm the gates of  
hell and defeat the power of sin."

Did you know that outside the institutional church  
in our society, the group that's defeated the most addictive  
and sinful behavior is a group called Alcoholics  
Anonymous? If you've studied AA, you know that all it is,  
is basically an ecumenical, traveling confessional.

First thing you say at every small group meeting is  
"Hello, my name is so and so, and I'm an alcoholic."

Maybe we should start every small group with  
"Hello, my name is so and so, and I'm a sinner." The  
problem is, we normally don't see it or believe it. Well,  
after three years traveling together, camping together, it  
gets easier to see.

You realize that this small group in Matthew 20 that  
appears to be like totally not working will turn out to be the  
most powerful group that ever walked the earth. They are  
called the Church, and the gates of hell cannot prevail  
against them.

Powerful, but not with power stolen,  
but power granted by grace,

the power of love,  
 the power of mercy,  
 the power to lay power down.

In The Lord of the Rings, they send a great army against the gates of Mordor, and yet they know it won't work. The epic battles and titanic struggles only work to reveal that their only hope is another power, a seemingly insignificant power... the power to surrender power in love.

You know, the entire epic is a struggle to surrender the ring of power to the fires from whence it was forged.

All power came from God and belongs to God, especially the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil which we stole, which we hide in. It belongs to God and must be returned to God, who is a consuming fire.

All hope rests on casting the ring of power into the fires of Mount Doom, Mount Judgment.

In order to do that, in The Lord of the Rings, they form a fellowship, a community, a small group. The fellowship is broken and yet it works. They arrive at the mountain on March 25th, about Easter time. By the end of the journey Gollum is exposed and consumed. Frodo is tested and purified, like gold. Gollum and Frodo are like one person, the old man and the new man.

Jesus said if part of you causes you to sin, better to cut it off and cast it from you for it's better to enter life without that old Golem heart or without your ring finger, for instance, than to be cast into the eternal fire with them.

Well, Frodo doesn't have the strength nor will to do it. In the end, Sam carries Frodo and the ring to the consuming fire. Sam had snuck into the Fellowship back at the very beginning. All the troubles reveal Sam as Frodo's

savior. Sam bears all of Frodo's pain and even abuse. Sam is Frodo's helper, his parakletos. (Samuel in Hebrew means "his name is God.")

Well, it's just a movie, but this is how the Church prevails against the gates of hell.

[Peter shows a clip from the end of The Return of the King...]

Frodo and Gollum have been struggling over the ring. Gollum bites off Frodo's ring finger and captures the ring as he falls back into the lake of fire on the top of Mount Doom.

As they are struggling at the top of Mount Doom, the warriors are battling the forces of Mordor at the very gates of Mordor.

As the ring of power is consumed by the fires for Mount Judgment, the gates of Mordor come crashing down. The evil one is defeated and all his servants run in terror of the light.

Amazingly, all the power of the evil one was tied to a ring of power that Frodo kept in the dark and bore on his own flesh, his self.

So, we want you to join a small group, a fellowship  
 that you might be exposed,  
 that you might confess your sin, your stolen  
 power,  
 that you might receive God's power—body  
 broken, blood shed, His life, His grace,

that you might begin to dance with the resonant  
energy of heaven,

that the gates of hell might crumble from the inside  
out as Glory floods every dark corner of the cave  
in which you hide.

Small groups that don't work,  
work when Jesus is in their midst.

Well, Jesus' small group left Jericho that day (a  
week before Easter). They were going up to Jerusalem,  
Mount Zion, Mount Calvary.

In a week, Jesus would sit with His small group at a  
table in an upper room. As Luke records, at that table a  
fight broke out, the same old fight. They began arguing  
over who was the greatest (the ring of power).

In front of them, on the table in the middle of their  
group was broken bread and some red wine. Jesus had just  
taken the bread and broken it saying, "This is my body  
which is for you, take and eat." And when they had eaten,  
"This cup is the new covenant in my blood, poured out for  
many for the forgiveness of sins."

Get the picture? A small group that doesn't work, a  
community that doesn't work, and in the middle Jesus...  
body broken and blood shed.

And the Spirit still whispers, "What do you want?  
What do you want?"

Come to the table, confessing yourself and calling  
on Jesus. Let Him descend into your darkness and blow the  
gates of hell wide open from the inside out.

The black cups are wine; the purple cups are juice.  
Both are blood—fire, mercy, the judgment of God, the will

of God. In Jesus' name, believe the Gospel, receive the Gospel, become the Gospel, amen.

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The words of King David in Psalm 139, "If I make my bed in Sheol, you're there. Even there your hand shall lead me and your right hand shall hold me. If I say that only darkness cover me and the light above me be night, even the darkness is not dark to You. The night is bright as the day for the darkness is as light with You. Thou knowest me right well. My frame was not hidden from thee when I was being made in secret, intricately wrought in the depths of the earth. Thy eyes beheld my unformed substance [my Golem]."

Lord God, we thank You for Your amazing love, that You would descend into hell to get us. And Lord God there's so much about that that's confusing to us, and we don't understand it, and we can't sort out all the pieces. Lord God, we know that You have borne our death. You have borne our iniquity, and with Your stripes You have healed. You have borne our hell in a way that we don't have to because You went to the mountain for us. And yet, Lord God, You do call us, You do carry us to that mountain that we may lay down our old selves, our old man, and may receive Your self, that we may be vessels that are filled with You. And so Lord God, we say, "May we be joined with You in a death like Yours because then, surely, like Paul said, 'we will be joined with You in a resurrection like Yours.'"

And so Lord God, thank You for Your amazing love. And Lord God, may this be a place where You are

always the vision, and Your amazing love infects every part of our broken lives. In Jesus' name, we pray, amen.

We'd like each of you to have a small group that doesn't work but calls on Jesus. That is we'd like you each to have some Christian friends. They may be part of another church. That's cool. But at Lookout, we've defined a small group as three to twelve people who commit to meeting together in order to

- 1) Goof off.
- 2) Grow in Christ.
- 3) Minister His grace.

We have facilitators but not leaders, largely because leaders make groups work and stop fights before they start. But we hope your Golem self is exposed and surrendered to the fire—God's mercy in the midst of your group.

If you don't have some form of small group and you missed the open house last week, you can sign up for a small group in the narthex after the service or form one yourself and just tell us about it.

In your bulletin is a paper titled, "Real Church in an Unreal World." It's our vision statement or maybe God's vision statement. It's not new. It's real old, but it's been rewritten.

I hope you take it home and read it well.

It's what we think God is doing here. Our vision is Jesus. Our strategy is always worship. Our first strategy as a church is corporate worship. Our second strategy is fellowship, more specifically, small groups. I'll talk about our third strategy next week.

They're each represented by circles, yet all the circles overlap. They are all ultimately the same. They are all Christ Jesus in us. You see, we are His Body and His Bride—Real church in an unreal world.

And so, by way of benediction, and also reminding as I do so that there's a prayer ministry team in the back, and they'd love to pray with you, but by way of benediction, may you believe the Gospel, receive the Gospel, and be the Gospel. You are the body of Christ. In His name, amen.

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Relevant Texts and Quotations (from bulletin)

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him. . . ." And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself."

*Genesis 2:18, 3:8-10 (ESV)*

In Jewish legend, the Golem is a reference to a story about a rabbi who made a clay figure of a man and brought him to life using the ineffable Name of God. It's the basis for the story of Frankenstein's monster, the "Sorcerer's Apprentice" section of the Disney movie Fantasia and the Golem character in Tolkien's Lord of the Rings [Gollum]. .



. . The Golem was brought to life by using the unspeakable Name of God and used as a tool to save the Jewish community from its enemies and to help in various ways. But eventually, the stories show that it became uncontrollable and a danger to its maker. The Golem of Prague, for instance, turned out to be a literalist. When he was ordered to bring water from the well into Rabbi Leib's house, he kept on carrying pails of water until the house was flooded. . . . The Golem had no real soul. He was unfinished, primordial. The Talmud says "A vessel that is not complete is called a golem."

*The Door Magazine*

And there in his [Gollum's] hiding place he kept a few wretched oddments, and one very beautiful thing, very beautiful, very wonderful. He had a ring, a golden ring, a precious ring. . . . He wanted it because it was a ring of power, and if you slipped that ring on your finger, you were invisible.

*J.R.R. Tolkien, The Hobbit*

"He [Gollum] was altogether wretched. He hated the dark, and he hated light more; he hated everything, and the Ring most of all." ~ "What do you mean?" said Frodo. "Surely the Ring was his precious and the only thing he cared for. But if he hated it, why didn't he get rid of it, or go away and leave it?" ~ "You ought to begin to understand, Frodo, after all you have heard," said Gandalf. "He hated it and loved it, as he hated and loved himself. He could not get rid of it. He had no will left in the matter."

*J.R.R. Tolkien, The Fellowship of the Ring*

The madman is not the man who has lost his reason. The madman is the man who has lost everything except his reason. . . . Perhaps the nearest we can get to expressing it is to say this: that his mind moves in a perfect but narrow circle. A small circle is quite as infinite as a large circle; but, though it is quite as infinite, it is not so large. . . . If we said what we felt, we should say, "So you are the Creator and Redeemer of the world: but what a small world it must be! What a little heaven you must inhabit, with angels no bigger than butterflies! How sad it must be to be God; and an inadequate God! Is there really no life fuller and no love more marvelous than yours; and is it really in your small and painful pity that all flesh must put its faith? How much happier you would be, how much more of you there would be, if the hammer of a higher God could smash your small cosmos, scattering the stars like spangles, and leave you in the open, free like other men to look up as well as down!

*G.K. Chesterton, Orthodoxy*

If I created my own reality, then on some level and dimension I didn't understand—I had created everything I saw, heard, touched, smelled, tasted; everything I loved, hated, revered, abhorred; everything I responded to or that responded to me. Then, I created everything I knew. I was therefore responsible for all there was in my reality. If that was true, then I was everything, as the ancient [Hindu] texts had taught. I was my own universe. Did that also mean I had created God, and I had created life and death? Was that why I was all there was? A chilling wave of loneliness rippled through me.

*Shirley MacLaine, It's All in the Playing*

Every person that is self-centered has an isolated soul.

*Emil Bruner, Our Faith*

All times are eternally present to God. Is it not at least possible that along some one line of His multi-dimensional eternity He sees you forever in the nursery pulling the wings off a fly, forever in toadying, lying, and lusting as a schoolboy, forever in that moment of cowardice or insolence as a subaltern? It may be that salvation consists not in the canceling of these eternal moments but in the perfected humility that bears the shame forever, rejoicing in the occasion which it furnished to God's compassion and glad that it should be common knowledge to the universe. Perhaps in that eternal moment St. Peter—he will forgive me if I am wrong—forever denies his Master. If so, it would indeed be true that the joys of Heaven are, for most of us in our present condition, “an acquired taste”—and certain ways of life may render the taste impossible of acquisition. Perhaps the lost are those who dare not go to such a public place.

*C.S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain*

Turn, O LORD, deliver my life; save me for the sake of your steadfast love. For in death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who will give you praise? . . . Is your steadfast love declared in the grave, or your faithfulness in Abaddon? Are your wonders known in the darkness, or your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness? . . . Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol [hell in the King James Version], you are there!

*Psalm 6:4-5, 88:1-12, 139:7-8 (ESV)*

“Do not blaspheme. Hell is a state of mind ye never said a truer word. And every state of mind, left to itself, every shutting up of the creature within the dungeon of its own mind is, in the end, Hell. But Heaven is not a state of mind. Heaven is reality itself. All that is fully real is Heavenly. For all that can be shaken will be shaken and only the unshakable remains. . . . For a damned soul is nearly

nothing: it is shrunk, shut up in itself. Good beats upon the damned incessantly as sound waves beat on the ears of the deaf, but they cannot receive it. Their fists are clenched, their teeth are clenched, their eyes fast shut. First they will not, in the end they cannot, open their hands for gifts, or their mouths for food, or their eyes to see.” ~ “Then no one can ever reach them?” ~ “Only the Greatest of all can make Himself small enough to enter Hell. For the higher a thing is, the lower it can descend a man can sympathise with a horse, but a horse cannot sympathise with a rat. Only One has descended into Hell.”

*C.S. Lewis, The Great Divorce*

And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach.

*Mark 3:13-14 (ESV)*

“And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. . . . So the last will be first, and the first last.” And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day.” Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. And he said to her, “What do you want?” She said to him, “Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.” Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are

asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?" They said to him, "We are able." He said to them, "You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father." And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave,<sup>f</sup> even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

*Matthew 16:18b, 20:16-28 (ESV)*

The light shines in the darkness.

*John 1:5a (ESV)*

"Well, let folly be our cloak, a veil before the eyes of the Enemy! For he is very wise, and weighs all things to a nicety in the scales of his malice. But the only measure that he knows is desire, desire for power; and so he judges all hearts. Into his heart the thought will not enter that any will refuse it, that having the Ring we may seek to destroy it. If we seek this, we shall put him out of reckoning." ~ "At least for awhile," said Elrond. "The road must be trod, but it will be very hard. And neither strength nor wisdom will carry us far upon it. This quest must be attempted by the weak with as much hope as the strong. Yet such is oft the course of deeds that move wheels of the world; small hands do them because they must, while the eyes of the great are elsewhere."

*J.R.R. Tolkien, The Fellowship of the Ring*

For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. . . . But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

*1 Corinthians 2:2, 2:7-8 (ESV)*

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

*Philippians 2:5-8 (ESV)*

Life together under the Word will remain sound and healthy only where it does not form itself into a movement, an order, a society, a collegium pietatis, but rather where it understands itself as being a part of the one, holy, catholic, Christian Church, where it shares actively and passively in the sufferings and struggles and promise of the whole Church. Every principle of selection and every separation connected with it that is not necessitated quite objectively by common work, local conditions, or family connections is of the greatest danger to a Christian community. When the way of intellectual or spiritual selection is taken the human element always insinuates itself and robs the fellowship of its spiritual power and effectiveness for the Church, drives it into sectarianism. The exclusion of the weak and insignificant, the seemingly useless people, from

a Christian community may actually mean the exclusion of Christ; in the poor brother Christ is knocking at the door.

*Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together*

And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!" And they began to question one another, which of them it could be who was going to do this. A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest.

*Luke 22:19-24 (ESV)*

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**Lookout Mountain Community Church**

534 Commons Drive, Golden CO 80401

Phone: 303-526-9287 Fax: 303-526-9361

E-mail: [info@lomcc.org](mailto:info@lomcc.org)