According to Mark . . . November 2017

Many of you might have noticed I’ve been driving a slightly different car the past few weeks. Well, there’s good reason for that, because I had been driving along looking down at the screen in my car, which now controls just about everything, including the radio, climate control, and navigation and, in between playing with the on-screen choices, I had taken my eyes off the road and rear-ended a driver making a left turn at close to 40 miles an hour. Needless to say, when I recovered my senses a few seconds later and exited my car, the wheels were both hopelessly bent and I knew I would have to be towed out of there. The other driver exited his vehicle and opened his arms toward the sky as he looked at me and said, “What the [heck], man, were you paying attention? What’s going on?”

It’s a good question, for many things. And the short answer was, “No, I wasn’t; I’m sorry.”

We are in the midst of our stewardship campaign right now, the Journey to Generosity and that question becomes ever more poignant as we think about the role of our church, TCC, in each of our lives. We are making a huge difference in the lives of many people; if you’ve been to worship lately, you see it, feel the energy, and know that our church, while ever-changing toward the future, is succeeding in its revitalization mission. We committed three years ago to embrace the community and start facing outward to serve others. And we’ve done that: we now serve community suppers every third Wednesday, and this last month we served over 80 people for a free, hot, nutritious meal. We provide mental health services to the community through a partnership with Family Continuity that allows us to give folks access to a local resource regardless of their ability to pay. We do these things because Jesus tells us to heal the world, to feed the hungry, to care for the disenfranchised and brokenhearted (the “poor in Spirit” in Sermon on the Mount speak), and to spread the word of God’s love at all times. Did you know we did these things? Are we paying attention?

We have committed ourselves to a way of acting that community-facing vision, The Bridge Initiative. We had a wonderful young woman give her testimony about what TCC means to her and how she has grown in her faith because of who we are and what we are doing, so much so that she invites her friends to come and see, too. She has come from a place of where the church was a boring obligation only a few years ago to realize that she cannot imagine her life without her faith, the church, her friends in Youth Group, and the fellowship we experience when we gather. What’s going on?

Maybe we don’t see what’s happening in our church because we, too, are fiddling with so many little details in our lives we’re taking our eyes off the road ahead. We are turning the corner from re-vitalization to being a vital faith community. And a vital church is a church in which the members know that they belong to God, heart, mind, soul, and Spirit. So this year I have asked the church membership to re-think what the church means in their lives: is it a vital part of each of us we cannot live without? And if so, can we prioritize our time to give a little more to a needed project or Sunday School class, our talent to serve on one of the boards or lead a community initiative, and make giving a priority with our rent, mortgage, food, gas, insurance and other household expenses rather than fitting it in at the end of our bills? Are we paying attention to what is required of a vital church? What’s going on?

I had to re-commit myself to doing things differently when driving. Like not fiddling with the radio or changing the temperature or anything else while on the road, but to do that before I leave, or if necessary, pull over and make those changes before proceeding. Because I don’t want to risk anything bad happening through my inattention, and if I make a few simple good changes, I will not just be safe but always keep my eyes on the road ahead, and arrive safely.

So I ask each of us: what re-commital can we do for us to ensure that our church travels safely on the road ahead? Are we so busy doing that we are practicing distracted driving? Or can we put God’s grace at TCC in proper perspective for our collective future, and give a little more this year?

Commitment Sunday is November 12. I ask that we prayerfully prioritize God’s grace in our lives and work in the world as something that is vital for both purposes. Thank you, friends, sisters, and brothers, for joining me on the Journey to Generosity. Together, we will journey safely and well.

Pastor Mark