

WINDOWS INTO HEAVEN_10.11.09 // 3.5

Prelude/Welcome

In the beginning... In the beginning there was nothing more than a dream, a hope, an idea, a prayer that someday we'd actually arrive at this point. That someday we'd be standing here in such a beautiful and influential city, standing on the cusp of something large—a movement if you will—of people who want nothing more than to change the metaphor, change the paradigm of “church as we know it,” to create something different, to create a different expression of “typical” church and instead be a people that roll up our sleeves, get our hands dirty, and intentionally experiment in ways that will impact our lives, the lives of others, and ultimately the world.

This is the dream of IKON... and today, in the beginning, we are here to celebrate this new movement that is being birthed in San Francisco. Perhaps you simply stumbled into this community because of a postcard or because of the MUNI ads... maybe you heard about us from a friend or you've been a part of this community for a while... however you came to be here this morning, I'm glad you're here... and I want to invite you to participate in the beginning of this movement.

Some of you, this morning, are here from different parts of the country...you're from churches that wouldn't be deemed “typical”. You've seen in us a great deal of possibility and hope, and you've run along side us to get this dream off the ground. You've come this weekend from Reno, Sacramento, Fairfield, San Diego, and even New York City to celebrate this new beginning in person. To you, we say thank you! Thank you for how you've supported us as a young community from the beginning.

It's been amazing to see the swell of support for our community, and perhaps what a lot of us haven't recognized or even don't know is that there are communities from all around the country that have come together to make this happen... communities in

Miami, Chicago, Boston, Denver, St. Louis, Boise, Orlando, El Paso... in fact this morning over ten thousand people came together in churches from all over the country and throughout the world to pray for us! (Just a fun tidbit: there have been a dozen churches in Liberia, Africa alone who have been faithfully praying for us since the very beginning!)

What we are a part of today, what IKON is right now has been birthed out of a movement of prayer and support from all over the world. That's pretty humbling... but what we've realized is that the work of creating is never an easy thing. It takes a lot of work from a lot of people both in front and behind the curtain to create something new, something beautiful, something different. And for us today, we've reached a creative milestone as all of this prayer, all of this work, all of this support has come together in this very moment.

For several months we've been arranging and creating these new relational rhythms, intentional times set aside for us as a community to spend time together, getting to know one another, and creating community. We've called this first rhythm Family. We've eaten dinners together, grilled out, and have even discovered that SFMOMA closes a little earlier than expected... only to stumble into a great coffee shop and have some good laughs! We've spent time as Triads, smaller intentional communities of 3 or 4 where we spend time being known.

This morning is the launch of our third relational rhythm—our Gathering. This is the place we come together to celebrate what God has been up to in our community, share stories and victories, and simply celebrate what we've been able to be a part of! This is our community, and although because of the excitement and celebration of the morning, the excitement of our perceived “finality” of creation, this isn't our end game. This is only the beginning of our pursuit towards what God created and intended for us!

ACT 1 – IN THE BEGINNING...

In the beginning... it's a statement that's brimming with hope and possibility. And it's the first three words of perhaps the most unintentionally memorized verse in all Scripture:

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” [Genesis 1.1]

It's an amazingly simple phrase, yet it holds so much weight, so much potential, so much possibility: creation... creating... imagination... even hope. And here we are at the very beginning. This verse helps give image to the beginnings of the entire universe, revealing to us a clean slate, a fresh perspective, an unwritten story.

Can you imagine what the earth would have been like? Fresh and new, before disease and disaster entered the story, before war and famine marred our timeline, before oppression and hatred separated and segregated, before poverty and destruction... it's almost as if the world had that new car smell, right?

It's hard, isn't it, to remember something as new?

But here we are, at this moment in Scripture, at the precipice of newness and immediately this is what we're shown:

“Now the earth was formless and empty (you can't get more of a clean slate than that!), darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” [Genesis 1.2]

This is a beautiful reminder to us that in the beginning, God was present, that God's Spirit was intimately involved in the process of Creation.

It's an amazing image: the Spirit hovering over the earth, lovingly surrounding and enveloping this new creation.

It's like the fog here in San Francisco, how it begins to roll in and crest over the top of Twin Peaks. In our last apartment, I used to stand at the window in the evening and watch the fog pour over the top of the hill, spreading out like fingers, wrapping itself around the city and enveloping it in the mist. It's a pretty comforting thought. Not only because of how it reminds me of this image of the Spirit hovering over the waters, but because of what God's presence in this passage signifies.

As we read through Genesis 1 and 2 we learn about this garden that was created for humanity to inhabit called Eden, a lush place full of food and provision where you needed for nothing. In the Midrash, a book of the Jewish Rabbi's understandings/observations/conversations about Scripture, they understood Eden to be a place of wholeness, of togetherness, of completeness. Eden was a place of *shalom*.

Now this word *shalom* is a tricky word for us. We like to simplistically translate this word as *peace*, but honestly that doesn't do justice to the fullness this word encompasses. *Shalom* holds within it the imagery of wholeness... completeness of life with no separation. No separation between mind, body, spirit... no separation between humanity—meaning no violence, no war, no animosity or enmity... no separation between us and creation—meaning no global warming, no pollution, no earthquakes or typhoons, tsunami's or hurricanes... and no separation between us and God.

This is the image of *shalom* and this was the reality of Eden, the reality of the way things were originally intended to be in the beginning.

It's hard to think of the way things were... to think of the way that God created them to be... to think of the way God intended for the world to look, function, be... especially since we're intuitive enough to know that things aren't like Eden. Our existence at this

moment looks far different from wholeness—and even though that may be what we’re seeking, it seems to be so far from our grasp. We see the world, full of separation, full of dissension and disunity between people, between creation, between God, even in our own selves and we can feel how disjointed and out of whack things really are.

ACT 2 – IN THE *NEW* BEGINNING...

In the beginning...

It’s such a beautiful phrase, isn’t it? Brimming with hope and possibility, with newness and imagination, creativity sparking at your fingertips. I think that’s why another writer in Scripture chose to start his work with that very phrase. His name was John, and John used that phrase to hearken back to this very same idea of Creation, this idea of Eden, of remembering the way things were created and originally intended to be like. John wrote to give us a new hope, to introduce us to a new beginning:

“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made, without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life and that life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” [John 1.1-5, 14]

Right here, the writer John is making a stark connection here between Creation and Jesus. He’s reminding us that Jesus was there in the beginning, that Jesus was present at Creation—but not only was he present, he was the mechanism *through* whom Creation was birthed. It’s an interesting and mind-boggling idea that has tremendous implications for us and ultimately how we see and experience reality at the deepest levels.

The writer Paul even makes the same correlation and gives us a deeper glimpse into this reality when he wrote:

“For in him [Jesus] all things were created: things in heaven and on earth (do you see the connection to Genesis 1 here?) visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” [Colossians 1.16-17]

Paul paints an image of wholeness, of creation being restored to the way God intended it to be. And in the center of it all we see Jesus, the mechanism through whom Creation was birthed, and again through whom Creation will be restored. Those two words: *hold together*, sum everything up for us about the deepest levels of reality.

It reveals to us that Jesus is the glue to our entire existence, that Jesus is working tirelessly to restore Creation, to weave together the separation, to heal divisions between race and socioeconomics, to restore families and friendships that have been lost to hatred and pain, to expose systematic oppression in a way that allows for equality to emerge victorious, to bring about a new relationship between God and man that no longer stands at odds but is joined together in working towards a new wholeness, a new restoration, a new *shalom*. Jesus is weaving back together the fabric of reality to the way that it was always intended to be! This is the work of Jesus...and this is the work of the church, of you, and of me.

This is why as a new community, we're beginning in the beginning, why we're starting with this new image of creation and of restoration. It's central to not only who we are as people, but to our understanding of reality and what our role, our purpose in the here and now really is! It's in this idea of creating anew and restoration that we see God's presence in full bloom, that our eyes are opened and our senses awakened to the

reality of God’s presence in our lives—and through that we begin to see wholeness once again.

Theologian Jurgen Moltmann puts it this way:

“Our true hope in life is wakened and sustained and finally fulfilled by the great divine mystery which is above us and in us and round about us, nearer than we can be to ourselves. It encounters us as the great promise of our life and this world: nothing will be in vain. We are called to this hope, and the call often sounds like a command—a command to resist death and the powers of death, and a command to love life and cherish it: every life, the life we share, the whole of life.”

As a community, our deepest conviction is this: We want to see the world restored to the way God intended it to be—full of connectedness and wholeness, vibrancy and beauty and light springing out from life in all its forms. But we know the only way this is possible is through Jesus. If creation came into existence through Jesus, then the only way it could be restored is through Jesus... Jesus is the key to the whole story.

ACT 3 – CO-CREATORS

I think often times this is where we lose steam because we forget to finish the story. We forget to realize that we’ve been called to be the ones that help usher in restoration. Instead we focus in on our self, our own morality, we look to simply be “good” people who live “nice” lives instead of being transformative people with a mission to bring about wholeness and restoration.

God’s command to humanity in Genesis 1, at the very beginning of existence, was to take care of creation. Meaning: take care of our inner-selves, take care of our relationship with God, take care of our relationships with each other, and take care of our relationship with the earth. But we haven’t done a very good job with the divine

imperative, have we? We've been more about "shock and awe", about destruction and separation than truly about creating wholeness. We've become a people that as Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Holocaust Survivor, and Writer Elie Wiesel stated: We've become a people that are indifferent... and that's far from a good thing.

In his amazing speech entitled *The Perils of Indifference* Wiesel says this:

"Of course, indifference can be tempting—more than that, seductive. It is so much easier to look away from victims. It is so much easier to avoid such rude interruptions to our work, our dreams, our hopes. It is, after all, awkward, troublesome, to be involved in another person's pain and despair. Yet, for the person who is indifferent, his or her neighbor are of no consequence. And therefore, their lives are meaningless. Their hidden or even visible anguish is of no interest... Indifference reduces the other to an abstraction... To be indifferent to suffering is what makes the human being inhumane... Indifference elicits no response. Indifference is not a response. Indifference is not a beginning, it is an end. And therefore, indifference is always the friend of the enemy, for it benefits the aggressor—never his victim, whose pain is magnified when he or she feels forgotten. The political prisoner in his cell, the hungry children, the homeless refugees—not to respond to their plight, not to relieve their solitude by offering them a spark of hope is to exile them from human memory. And in denying their humanity we betray our own. Indifference, then, is not only a sin, it is a punishment."

It seems at times that this is who we have become as a people: indifferent. And here we are in the beginning with hopes, dreams and possibilities standing before us, with potential and fervor for what possibly could be, and this is the one thing that we can say—we will not be indifferent.

In the beginning, at the foundation of IKON Christian Community, we will stand tall and pursue the reality that God desired for us to experience. We will not be an indifferent people, because indifference does not bring forth restoration. Indifference doesn't bring forth hope. Indifference doesn't truly change the world... it squashes it...and it kills our humanity. God is waiting.

God is waiting for us to be his people, to be his people who will stand up and work tirelessly towards bringing and creating peace and wholeness wherever we are and wherever we go. And together our collective anti-indifference, will propel us towards making a difference in the people we walk by on the street every single day... to those we work with in our offices... to those we sit next to on the MUNI... to those who prepare our coffee... to those who have no voice... to those who are buried under the weight of economic depression...to those who are enslaved...

You see, we are not here for our own sake. We are here for the sake of God's Kingdom, for the sake of bringing about restoration and healing through Jesus to the world we inhabit. We represent God's coming kingdom in this broken and disrupted world if we intervene on behalf of human rights wherever they are infringed, if we intervene on behalf of this earth as a living world and give practical realization to the community of creation, if we stand up for the rights of the coming generations today, and give voice to those who do not yet have one of their own. This is the call of the church: to live life through God's universal hope, and to represent that hope to the world. We are to be about restoring the world back to the way God always intended for it to be.

The name of our church is IKON, and that's by design. The word very literally means windows into heaven... or windows into Eden. There's a world out there, a world right here that is groaning for our attention that is groaning for the people of God to step in

and bring about healing and restoration... that's looking for us to reveal the way things were originally intended to be... whole.

A Jewish Rabbi once said, "Every time you do a good deed, you are planting seeds in Eden." We stand here right now, ready and able with all we are and with everything we have to start a movement of restoration and healing right here, right now... in the beginning.

[PRAY]

COMMUNION

We talked earlier about the centrality of Jesus to this movement that without him and his resurrection, there would be no point in continuing on. For our sake, he did rise again from the dead and we celebrate that through communion. For us this is central to our movement, a perpetual reminder that Jesus has risen, that the movement is alive, that anything is possible, and together we celebrate.

Up front _____ & _____ will be standing with a loaf of gluten-free bread baked fresh by the wonderful Abby Chew, and a cup of wine provided by the vineyards of Napa Valley. The loaf represents the body of Jesus which was broken for us, and the wine represents the blood of Jesus which was shed for us.

Simply come forward when you're ready and take a chunk of the loaf and dip it into the wine and we'll take communion together when everyone has passed through. This is an open invitation for everyone to respond to the movement of God, however, if you are uncomfortable with this response or simply unsure, there's no pressure to participate. If you wish, you can simply remain in your seat and meditate or pray through the implications of what we've talked about this morning.

Whenever you're ready, please come forward to celebrate the risen Jesus.

[MUSIC BEGINS]

(communion ends)

May the peace of Christ be with you.

[WORSHIP SET]

[OFFERING]

Wow, what a great morning... Thank you for celebrating with us...

Communication Card...

We're a tithing church... what you give helps this community to move forward towards creating a movement of wholeness and restoration within the city of San Francisco.

Boxes...

Thank you for your generosity!

[BENEDICTION]

Each and every week we close our Gathering with a prayer of blessing asking God to create in us and to mold in us something new, something different. This week, I want to leave you with the blessing of the ancient Franciscan monks who desired wholeness and restoration to become reality. Would you please stand with me:

May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers, hard hearts, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that you may live from deep within your heart where God's Spirit dwells.

May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, and war, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in this world and in your neighborhood, so that you will courageously try what you don't think you can do, but in Jesus Christ you'll have the strength necessary to do.

May God bless you so that you remember we are called to continue God's redemptive work of love and healing in God's place, in and through God's name, in God's Spirit, continually creating and breathing new life and grace into everything and everyone we touch.

Amen.