

Dissonance

Usually these paragraphs focus on common themes of our spiritual journey. This time is no different, but perhaps a bit more pointed. In this transitional season, we are having a series of congregational conversations to explore, highlight and define, not only where we want to go - but where we currently are. There is much to celebrate and embrace. God has been generous to us beyond our merit. I've witnessed open hearts with commitments that are Spirit led. So the prospect of our tomorrow is bright! But, only the most naive would see a rosy picture with no thorns. An honest look in the mirror reveals things that are better to name than to ignore. Our corporate imperfections do not cancel the good God is doing. But if unnamed and unaddressed, they can impede the good to come.



At our *Table Talk* on the 15th, I explained my own investigations and observations. I rummaged through records of congregational surveys and feedback from the past 17 years. I noted the things we hoped for and the needs we recognized. There are patterns and repetitions in what we said. There is also dissonance. Dissonance is a tension that is unresolved - an inconsistency. It is the space between what we say and what is real. Now hear me - every person, family, church and organization has dissonance. No one is free from a distance between what we want and what we are. Praise God that He can reduce that space by His Spirit. The concern is not that dissonance exists, but that it is often unrecognized. It's the dissonance we don't name that hurts us. So let's name them.

Here are the observations I submitted at our meeting.

- *We want a deeper work of God, but confess we are complacent.*
Our heart's longings do not fit well with the confession of apathy.
- *We see community as one of our dominant strengths, but admit that community is one of our clearest struggles.*
There are pockets of connection around us, but also pockets where people feel isolated and unknown.
- *We want to free people to exercise their giftedness, but struggle with finding volunteers.*
We remember when ministry was less staff driven but find it hard to recruit people to serve among us.
- *We have a fondness for our traditions, but want a new work from God.*
We grip the memory of what church use to be among us and are unsure or wary of how God's new work might affect that memory.
- *We profess to readily identify as Christians who carry good news in our spheres of influence, but we see little evidence of evangelistic intent and impact.*
God is always active with the gospel but corporately, evangelism is not on our radar.
- *We say we want visionary leadership, but struggle to fill leadership roles.*
While we value our leaders, invitations to serve (ie Elder's Board) have been declined repeatedly.
- *We see our ministry programs as a strength, but admit to spiritual hungers they are not satisfying.*
We appreciate the effort and efficiencies of our ministries but sense a machinery running without oil.

These observations are not infallible and I offer them recognizing my own shortfalls. They are intended as part of a conversation we can have with each other, but more so - a conversation we need to have with God. Every dissonance named has a institutional layer but they are fundamentally matters of heart and soul. So what should we do?

Rather than jumping to solutions (our default reaction), I ask you to do this. First consider, "*Do these observations fit?*" Do they apply to us as a whole? If so, it's healthy to name them. Next, I invite you to accept them. If they are true of us, rather than dodging or defending, simply accept the poverty of our spirit. Pride may offer rationalizations but humility finds grace. Finally I hope you will hold these things before God in prayer. It is in the light of His Spirit that we find both truth and hope. He knows what we are. He is our Redeemer. The gospel still has power to save us.