

Launch Sunday

Baptism

September 14, 2025

- Welcome to launch Sunday. Not lunch Sunday, although they are close and we do have lunch today.
- This is a week we do every fall to celebrate what God is doing and discuss the different ways God is moving his kingdom in our church and how you can connect with it.
- We are going to talk about WHY we do this in a few minutes, and why it matters whether you have been here for years or days. But just so you know what to expect.
- We have a baptism (after our first song) which is going to be great. It is a highlight every time we do it.
- We will meet our small group leaders. We will meet our ministry leaders.
- We will hear what the Scriptures have to say about the difference between believing and following.

Part 1: The need to connect

- Let me reiterate, we are glad you are here today.
- I am glad to be back from vacation – one of the few times I get to watch the service online.
- If you are a long time ARAC member, these online videos are a way to stay connected with Sunday morning services. If you are brand new, it is a way to check out the church before you ever step through the doors.
- The bottom line is that engaging in church life can be confusing.
- The problem is that once you have been around a church for a long time, everything feels . . . “normal.” We understand how things generally work. We have gotten comfortable with how we connect. (This is actually true anytime we go anywhere new)
- We knew where things are. We know some people. We understand the routine.
- It can be difficult to remember what it was like the first time.
- I remember the first time I went to a service at a Catholic church when I was 10 or 11. It was so confusing. When to stand, when to sit, when to kneel. Not knowing what was going on and when. Why was Latin being used?
- It is easy to forget that it is no necessarily intuitive to come into a church and know what is happening.
- But there is another potential problem. For those that ARE into the routine, that very routine can be a problem. We are so used to the way things are and what we do, that we miss opportunities to connect with others or serve in different ways.
- We say that the entire reason that ARAC exists in this time and place is “To be a people who invite others to come as they are and be changed.”
- It means we desire to be a people who welcome and love everyone, regardless of the stage of life or faith journey they are on.
- But we want this to matter, that being in this church helps you change.
- Specifically, the kind of change that leads you and me to more completely follow Jesus and to be like him.
- We break it down into three main areas that Jesus himself laid out as the key components of how we are to change. We are to LOVE JESUS, LOVE EACH OTHER, LOVE THE WORLD.
- It's what Jesus modeled and it's what he called us to do. The whole goal of our church is that as a result of us being here, we follow Jesus more completely.

- When Jesus began to preach and teach, and he invited some men to be with him (12 men who became known as his disciples), look at the invitation.

Mark 1:16 As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 17 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people."

John 1:43 The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me."

Luke 5:27 After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him.

- "Follow me."
- An interesting invitation.
- This was a physical following – in other words, travel with me. Be with me. Sit around the fire. Go to new towns. Walk along the road with me. Sleep in the same places as me.
- But there is more to it. It is an invitation to listen to him teach. To learn what he says. To copy what he does. To see him model things and do them.
- Jesus invitation was to not just listen to his teaching or enjoy his miracles, but to learn and copy him. To live life how he lived life.
- And this was not just for the twelve disciples.

*Mark 8:34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "**Whoever** wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.*

*Matthew 24:24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "**Whoever** wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.*

- "Whoever"
- Anyone. Ever. The invitation from Jesus is to follow him. In fact, you might say it this way, a Christian is someone who follows Jesus.
- It took a while for the disciples to get it – even after Jesus rose from the dead, one disciple was asking how Jesus was going to deal with another one of the disciples, and Jesus told him:

John 21:22 Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me."

- When Jesus told people to believe in him, he was not talking as an intellectual belief. He was talking about a belief that caused people to live as he lived. Believe in Jesus was following Jesus.
- You are to follow him. Do what I do. Live how I live. Love others how I love others. Live with the holiness I live with. Treat your enemies the way I treat my enemies. Be generous the way I am generous. Pray the way I pray. Sacrifice everything the way I sacrifice.
- For many in our culture, we have separated these. We believe in Jesus but too often we don't follow. The reason this matters and the reason we do launch Sunday today, is simply this.
- **You can BELIEVE in Jesus all by yourself. You cannot FOLLOW Jesus all by yourself.**
- And since following is what it means to be a Christian, we want to follow.
- This means to follow Jesus is to be involved in the life of other people, letting them be involved in yours, so that you can "be changed."
- This happens two ways at ARAC, and what we will spend the rest of our time doing.
- When you come to be a part of ARAC, it begins by showing up. Being a part of Sunday service. Coming to some larger group events (like the picnic today, or our Christmas banquet). Maybe coming up to be prayed for. Come to the "Welcome to ARAC" class.

- Since, **you can BELIEVE in Jesus all by yourself but you cannot FOLLOW Jesus all by yourself**, we want to move to get connected so we can follow Jesus today. So whether you are brand new to ARAC, or have been here many years, these same two ways apply.
- Get connected in a small group.
- We have a variety of small groups or Life Groups in our church. These groups have a variety of purposes, meeting times, and purposes.
- One of the best ways to follow Jesus is to get connected through one of these groups.
- These groups provide a unique and safe environment to discuss and wrestle with how to apply the teaching of Jesus. It's where we figure out how God wants us to love him, to love each other and to love our world.
- These groups give a relational context for accountability, belonging and care.
- And these groups give a place to enjoy a good time.
- I'm going to introduce our group leaders in a moment, but first I want you to hear from the leaders of just one of those groups.

Part 2: The need to serve

- We realize that not everyone is comfortable jumping right in to meeting in a smaller group (although I think they do a great job of inviting people in).
- But there is one other way to get connected and it is this.
- Get connected in a ministry.

Romans 12:4 For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.

- If you want to grow, to get connected, to be a part of what God is doing, this is a great way.
- Ministry is similar except you are not trying out. You don't need certain qualifications.
- One of the best ways to get connected, to follow Jesus with others, is to get involved in serving in a ministry.
- Similar to small groups, ministries:
- Provide an environment to practice your faith in practical ways.
- Give a relational context to helping, serving others and growing God's kingdom
- Are a place to enjoy a good time.
- You build relationships with people you work alongside. When you advance God's kingdom together, it changes everything.
- In this entire series, we have said that the church is God's way to change the world. This is not an individual thing. The church changes the world collectively not individually.
- **You can BELIEVE in Jesus all by yourself. You cannot FOLLOW Jesus all by yourself.**
- Let's not settle for being believers, but let's be followers.
- God is doing amazing things, you don't want to be left out!