



Core Values

Week 2: Acceptance

Lori Lampert - 08/10/2025

There is a scene in the movie *Wicked* that came out in 2024 that brings tears to my eyes every time I watch it. And for the record, that is a *lot* of times. If you know me, you know I love musicals, and when *Wicked* was released on the big screen I was so excited. I had already seen the stage musical twice.

Even if you haven't seen the movie you will probably recognize the characters if you have ever watched *The Wizard of Oz*, another favorite musical of mine. And no, I didn't see it when that first came out in 1939. *Wicked* is a prequel. It was written primarily to explain the story of the relationship between Glinda and Elphaba. Glinda becomes the Good Witch of the North and Elphaba the Wicked Witch of the West in the *Wizard of Oz*. This is how it all began.

In *Wicked*, Glinda and Elphaba are young women starting their first year away at school. Which seems to be the only thing they have in common. Glinda walks on to campus and immediately is embraced as popular. Everything about her is perfect. Her color is pink. Pink clothes, luggage, dorm room furnishings. You name it, she's got it, in pink. And she really, almost innocently, expects everyone else to be like her. Including her amazing hair flip.

Enter Elphaba. She was born green. She has lived being marginalized by others due to circumstances beyond her control. She has not planned on

attending this school, but her father insists she does to watch over her sister. Elphaba is popular in a different way. She stands out as different. She is purposely being insulted, ignored, made fun of by the other students. So of course to make the story even better, these two end up being roommates. They sing a wonderful song called *What Is This Feeling?* Answer, loathing.

The scene I love the most happens when Elphaba bravely comes to the Ozdust Ball.

She is immediately laughed at as she enters wearing what will become her signature black hat. Instead of running away, or even turning from the crowd, she begins to dance, alone. It is a strange dance. Even as the ridicule increases, she doesn't stop. She looks people in the eyes and continues in all her greenness to dance.

And because Glinda has begun to see the goodness and beauty in Elphaba she steps up and joins the dance, mirroring Elphaba. In doing so, the dance becomes something more. It becomes a shared experience, an understanding, a friendship.

Others see this, and they too begin to dance. Acceptance becomes contagious and the world is a little bit more loving. A bit more beautiful. A bit more healed from pain and prejudice.

Maybe the reason I love this scene so much is because it shows me how far I still need to travel and what is possible. I admit I struggle with acceptance. Both of who I am with all my flaws and foibles. And others. I want to learn to create a dance that brings the two together. I want to live more and more like Jesus. Do you?

Acceptance. That is the value of The Downtown Church we are going to talk about today. Brian began last week unpacking the first of our five values. Look at how we define community.

Community: We live in relationship with others in downtown Springfield, and we have the obligation and privilege of positively impacting the lives of those in our community and the world.

Acceptance. I remember clearly when we were sitting around the table as a vision team in 2014 wrestling with what we would determine would be our values. Values are significant. They tell us and others who we are and what is important to us. They are boundaries within which we would live as we grew The Downtown Church. They guide our actions and decisions for ministry. And they hold us accountable.

Before we landed on acceptance as a value, we first discussed using the word *tolerance*. But something just didn't sit right with us. Tolerance sounded too much like saying: I will put up with you. I will tolerate you. I may not like you or love you. You may annoy the heck out of me. But, because I am a Christian I will tolerate you. It felt arrogant and judgmental for followers of Jesus Christ who have been given the commandment to love God and love their neighbor. Shouldn't we do more than tolerate one another?

We landed instead on the word, acceptance. And we define the value in the following way:

Acceptance: Recognizing the uniqueness of each child of God, we will intentionally engage and build relationships with all people we encounter as we live out our call to love God and love neighbor.

Acceptance. As Jesus accepted people. He didn't just tolerate them, although at times as I read his words I can sense an eye roll directed at Peter, or an impatience with those who haven't caught on yet. But I always find in Jesus the acceptance of who a person is and the possibility of transformation into who they might become if they will choose to follow him.

Look with me at the Gospel of Mark, chapter 5. It is one chapter among so many that tell of the way Jesus accepted people. I invite you to read the

whole chapter and sit with these stories. Three different people will interact with Jesus. One a demon-possessed man, marginalized and ostracized. One a terrified leader of the synagogue with a dying child. One a bleeding woman who has been labeled unclean for 12 long years.

Jesus has taken a boat across the sea of Galilee. There he encounters a man with an unclean spirit. We don't know exactly what that means but we do know this person was living outside the community among the tombs. He was no longer able to be restrained, which means that at one time he had been shackled. It says in verse 5:

⁵ Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones.

There is nothing in this picture that would cause you and I to approach this man. And if he had run up to us as he did to Jesus who among us would have stayed? But this is Jesus. The one we seek to follow. He sees the man as he is. Accepts him in all his illness and dysfunction, in all his woundedness and pain and steps into his life. Jesus heals the man who then wants to come with him.

¹⁹ But Jesus refused and said to him, "Go home to your own people, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and what mercy he has shown you." ²⁰ And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone was amazed.

What if Jesus had never crossed the lake? What if Jesus had turned away from the loud voice and the bruised and bleeding man? Instead, Jesus turns toward him. Speaks to him. Heals him. Acceptance.

²¹ When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him, and he was by the sea. ²² Then one of the leaders of the synagogue, named Jairus, came and,

when he saw him, fell at his feet ²³ and pleaded with him repeatedly, “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live.” ²⁴ So he went with him.

There is a story of another encounter right here. We will get back to Jairus. A woman who has been bleeding for 12 years joins in the crowd following Jesus. Bleeding would have rendered her “unclean”. Unable to participate in the synagogue, often removed from interacting with others. She just wants to touch his cloak. She believes this will be enough to heal her. We don’t know how she has come to believe this. She presses through the crowd, touches the cloak of Jesus, and he knows it. He stops, he intentionally seeks her. The woman, the unclean, the stranger, is accepted into an encounter with Jesus. And he speaks these words

³² He looked all around to see who had done it. ³³ But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. ³⁴ He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

What if Jesus had never stopped? What if Jesus had ignored her? Instead, Jesus speaks to her. Engages in conversation with her. Acceptance.

Back to the leader of the synagogue, Jarius. One of the synagogue leaders. He is part of the system that would later be responsible for the arrest and death of Jesus. But for now, he is a desperate father whose daughter is dying. As Jesus walks with him, Jarius receives word that the worst pain imaginable has happened. His 12 year old daughter has died.

³⁵ While he was still speaking, some people came from the synagogue leader’s house to say, “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?” ³⁶ But overhearing what they

said, Jesus said to the synagogue leader, “Do not be afraid; only believe.”

They arrive at the home where they find people weeping and wailing. Jesus brings only the father and mother into the room where the child was.

⁴¹ Taking her by the hand, he said to her, “Talitha kum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!” ⁴² And immediately the girl stood up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. ⁴³ He strictly ordered them that no one should know this and told them to give her something to eat.

What if Jesus had walked on? What if Jesus had refused to enter the house? What if Jesus had already decided to have nothing to do with a leader whose understanding of God was different from the truth Jesus came to teach? Instead he enters. He enters into the pain. He responds to the need and touches the child. Acceptance.

Three stories in one chapter, and we can find so very many others throughout the Gospels that illustrate how Jesus encountered a wide variety of people. How he accepted them. How Jesus saw people in all their uniqueness and diversity. How Jesus healed, changed, taught and engaged with them. Young, old, rich, poor, believers and nonbelievers.

Perhaps nothing more powerfully shows his love than when Jesus is on the cross, dying. He sees the soldiers who have crucified him, he sees the thief next to him, he sees his mother at his feet. He sees it all, and in the midst of his own horror, speaks words of comfort, words of hope, words of acceptance. *Father forgive them. Today you will be with me in paradise.*

Let me read our definition of acceptance again.

Acceptance: Recognizing the uniqueness of each child of God, we will intentionally engage and build relationships with all people we encounter as we live out our call to love God and love neighbor.

Each child of God. *All* people we encounter. Bold, brave words that require much of us. And they should. If we are to be the body of Christ that positively impacts our community—heals the brokenhearted, shares the grace we have received, causes people to understand they are valued and loved by the Creator of the Universe—we must accept one another. Who we are right now, with all our mistakes, with all our flaws, with all our pinkness or greenness.

Like Jesus, we must not turn away from those who have been marginalized, from people who have been shunned and shamed. Like Jesus, we intentionally engage. We join in their dance. It may feel very strange. Yet, no one is meant to dance alone through life.

And as you and I dance together, The Downtown Church dances, the community dances, and maybe, my friends, in the name of Jesus Christ the world can learn how to dance together.