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Meeting location  
Marshall Middle School  
25 S. Pontiac, Janesville  
Pastor:  
John Swanson

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*Declaring the greatness of God and serving  
others for joy and His honor (II Cor. 4:5)*

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February 1, 2000

Dear

My oldest two sons, Jared and Justin, when they were 11 and 9, were complaining about going to church one Sunday morning. It was just too boring! I asked them how they would feel if Michael Jordan (We lived in Illinois and they were Bull's fans ☺) was going to be at church that morning giving out autographs. They told me they would be very excited and eager to go. So I told them, "Someone far greater than M.J. will be in church this morning. The God who made M.J. and gave him everything he has will be there." I'm not sure that my little analogy made any difference in their attitude that morning but I have often thought about it as I have wrestled with my motivation to come to church on Sunday mornings.

This past week, as I was reading in the book of Acts, I was reminded of this analogy as I read Acts 10: 33, "Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us." Here is a verse to help all of us, pastor and congregation, prepare for and participate in Sunday morning worship. These words were spoken by an officer in the Roman army named Cornelius. He was in charge of an occupying force in the Jewish town of Caesarea. However, he was a believer in Yahweh, the God of the Jews. He regularly prayed to Yahweh and sought to obey the parts of the Jewish law that commanded generosity to the poor. God sent an angel to tell him to send for the apostle Peter because Peter had a message that God wanted Cornelius to hear. So Cornelius sent two servants to get Peter and called together his family and friends to hear what Peter had to say.

There are three things that we need to hear from Cornelius as we think about coming to church on Sunday's. First, we are gathered together in God's presence. God is uniquely present when people gather to hear his word taught. God has designed that his work of saving people is done through the preaching and teaching of His word. This fact is attested to throughout the Bible. Consider these three statements from Paul, "I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." "I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men, for I did not hesitate to proclaim to you the whole counsel of God." "Now I commit you to God and to the word of His grace which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are being sanctified." (Rom. 1:16, Acts 20: 26-27 & 32).

Second, I as the preacher, must take very serious that I am to declare what God commands. This is why I am so committed to preaching from Bible passages. The only way I can have any assurance that what I am saying is what God commands is if I seek to say what God has said in His word. It is a very serious business to stand in front of people each week and say what God commands. Quite honestly, it is hard for me to assign that kind of authority to what I say. It seems the height of arrogance and presumption for any person, including myself, to take the position that I am declaring what God commands to be said. Yet, if the Bible is to be believed that is exactly how I am to view what I do each Sunday. Please pray that I would be faithful and humble in this work.

Third, Cornelius' description of what was happening in his home on that day challenges you and every other member of the congregation to come to church with a great expectation of hearing God speak. This is such a

difficult thing to do because the whole enterprise seems so human. The chairs are hard. The words are spoken by a human being who has as many problems as you do in following Christ. The sound system doesn't work all the time. There are so many things, both internal and external, to distract and make it all seem so...human. Yet, each week we gather together in the presence of God to hear what he has commanded to be spoken.

Let me urge you to take a moment this Sunday, on your way to church, to remind yourself and those with you, that you have been invited to gather in the presence of the greatest being in the whole universe to hear what he has to say to you. Let me urge you to ask God's help to have a proper respect and anticipation in gathering together this week. Please join me in asking God to use His word to give us a flaming love for Him and jubilant faith in Christ.

Depending on God to be present,