“Third Space”

Happy Wednesday Everyone,

Yesterday I was on a web call with another pastor from NC and a new friend who works for a nonprofit in SW Virginia. Our conversation became a learning opportunity for me as Lisa from Virginia introduced me to several new phrases: one of which is the concept of “Third Spaces.”

This concept was first defined by sociologist Ray Oldenburg. In essence, everyone has locations that they view as one of several types of “spaces.” For instance, one’s “first space” is the place that one would identify with as “home.” First space would be the place where you regularly live, where your belongings are kept, hopefully a place that is safe; a place where you feel like you have ownership. Many of us would likely resonate with our first space being the address where we receive our mail (unless you use a PO Box), or where we might park our vehicles on a daily basis.

 “Second space” would be the places where we gather with some sense of expectation or responsibility. Many of us would attribute our “second space” to being our place of employment. For example: for the teacher the second space would be the school where they teach. For the physician, it would be the office where they practice their medical specialty. Second spaces might be places where we interact with others, however there is an understood transaction to a second space, like doing a certain task to receive compensation.

Then there is the concept of “third space.” I found this quite interesting… Third space refers to a location outside of one’s home (first space) or work (second space) where one might gather, socialize, and build relationships. There is another dynamic that makes something a “third space” and I think it’s the most important dynamic of what makes a “third space.” It’s a place where one might gather, socialize, and build relationships *without any expectation of engaging in a transactional act to participate.* Put another way, a third space is a space without a preconceived agenda. It’s a space to just “be.” Some examples of third spaces might include: an evening walk, a spur of the moment conversation in an aisle at the grocery, reading a book at a library, playing a game of pickleball at a community center, or enjoying music at a concert.

As we get ready to gear our fall programming up (**don’t forget to mark your calendars for “Back 2 Bethlehem (B2B) Sunday” on August 17th)**, I have found myself thinking about how can we create “third spaces” among our community. How can we engage with new and old friends alike in ways that promote opportunity to gather, socialize, and build relationships without agendas? You might have an answer to that question. Maybe you have an idea, or maybe you’d just like to be apart of a dreaming conversation about how we can create “third space.” I invite you this week to think about “what are the third spaces that bring you joy in life?” And may you find blessing in all of your spaces this week.

The Peace of Christ be with y’all,

Pastor Vern