

November 25, 2007

“Community With A Mission”

Acts 2:38-47 NLT

Peter replied, "Each of you must turn from your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 This promise is to you and to your children, and even to the Gentiles--all who have been called by the Lord our God." 40 Then Peter continued preaching for a long time, strongly urging all his listeners, "Save yourselves from this generation that has gone astray!"

41 Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church--about three thousand in all. 42 They joined with the other believers and devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, sharing in the Lord's Supper and in prayer.

43 A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. 44 And all the believers met together constantly and shared everything they had. 45 They sold their possessions and shared the proceeds with those in need. 46 They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity-- 47 all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved.

Pastor Nick and I have spoken the last few weeks about the mission of the church. We are a Forever Family because we are a family or a community with a mission. Our mission is to know Jesus that we may make Him known to others. We are a family because we have Jesus in common, with God as our Father, and the Holy Spirit our guide and helper. We have discovered the love and glorious transformation that is possible through faith in Jesus and because this is such Great News we must share it with others. Our Lord commands us to share it and our love for God and for others compels us to share it.

We tell others about Jesus not because we want to prove we are right and they are wrong; not because we want to look successful. We tell others about Jesus because we love and care about people and we know that Jesus can meet their every need. That is why it is not just about telling others about the love of Jesus, it is modeling the love of Jesus to them. How? By loving each other from the heart and loving our neighbor as ourselves.

Who is our neighbor? Do you remember the parable of the Good Samaritan? Dr. Tommy Harrison, says “It transcends the boundaries of race, culture, religion, ethnicity and economics.

Jesus said that a traveler, probably Jewish, was attacked by a gang of thieves on his way to Jericho. Left to die on the side of the road, a priest and Levite, two religious leaders of the day, passed him by. With hope fading, a Samaritan man approached. Years of prejudice against citizens of Samaria would lead us to expect that he, too, would ignore

the situation. Instead, he stepped down into the ditch, tended the broken body of a man who despised him, and made arrangements for his care and recuperation.

One theologian stated it like this:

The robbers said, 'What is yours is mine and I will take it.'

The priest and Levite said, 'What is mine is mine and I will keep it.'

The Samaritan said, 'What is mine is yours and you may have it.'

All this was in response to the question, 'Who is my neighbor?'"

We are to love all people, helping everyone in need with the same attitude as the Good Samaritan, "What is mine is yours and you may have it."

We are not a club, who becomes ingrown, raising money to keep the institution going, so we can plan more events for ourselves without a care for our neighbor. Many churches have lost their common vision of being a missionary church dedicated to community, discipleship, and personal transformation. Many churches lack an interest in the needy and the unchurched around them. Why? Because they have lost a missionary vision. In doing so they have made themselves irrelevant to the unchurched, who then search elsewhere to satisfy their spiritual hunger.

We need to renew our vision of expecting the miraculous, of seeing glorious transformation in our lives and in the lives of others as we live motivated by love, carrying the Good News of Jesus to those around us in terms they can understand, and with a genuine love and interest in them. We must be a church with a mission.

What might a church look like that embraces the missionary model and seizes the opportunity available to them? What might a church look like whose goal is not maintenance but ministry?

1. The vision of the Great Commission (to make disciples of all nations) and the Great Commandment (to love God and our neighbor) must be our guide. Then we will have disciples making disciples, we will all do the work of an evangelist, there will be spiritual growth, personal transformation, community, and the expectation of the miraculous will characterize the life of the church.
2. We will be more responsive, spiritual, and relevant to daily life. We will look less like an institution and more like the Body of Christ.
3. People will be more deeply involved in their church, and their church will be more deeply involved in their lives. There will not be a separation of church life, work life, and family life. Christians will seek to grow spiritually and that growth will lead them to carry their faith into their daily lives and into all that they do.
4. Church members will be more knowledgeable about the Christian faith, and have a greater commitment to prayer, Bible study, and service.

5. Worship services will be more meaningful and relevant (including the sermon). The congregation will participate with greater enthusiasm and a sense of the presence of the Holy Spirit will pervade the worship services.
6. We will be an authentic community that is not divided over issues but a community working for unity, love and strength. We will model Christ-like compassion, prayer, and patience. Grounded in the love of God and others, and based on the values of the Christian faith, is what will guide discussion and action on difficult issues.
7. Laypeople will play a greater role in the activities of the church through evangelistic activities, and other ministries, small groups, and leadership. Their greater involvement will enrich the church.
8. Church members will be more concerned for the unchurched and their spiritual needs. They will be more compassionate, understanding, and welcoming to them, intentionally reaching out to the unchurched.
9. Racism will lessen as we seek to know and understand those of different races, cultures, and socioeconomic backgrounds, intentionally reaching out to all people in all kinds of conditions.
10. And a transformed church will carry their spirituality and Christian principles as a transforming influence into society as a whole.

So is this all a pipe dream? I don't think so! Like the fruit of mission experienced in the early church, these things grow naturally when our vision is to also model mission. What do we see in the early church? We see community and mission.

We have a vision, a vision of transformation, miracles, spiritual growth, and love. We have a vision to model the early church which was a missionary church - a church, a love community of people of faith, with a mission, called and sent on a mission by Jesus to make disciples teaching them to love God and others.

The church in America doesn't need a tweaking of it's current system, it needs a major overhaul. It's primary purpose is to follow a missionary model replacing a maintenance mentality with an evangelistic focus, reuniting community and mission as it was in the early church. In this model The Great Commandment (to love God, others) and The Great Commission (to share Jesus making disciples of all people) becomes the heart of the Church's work.

We are part of the denomination call the Church of the Nazarene and we are their missionary outpost here in Patchogue. You must perceive yourselves as disciples making disciples by bring the Good News to those around you. The core value of our church community is love based on the Great Commandment. The offer made to you and to the unchurched is the glorious transformation of lives. The result of participation in the

church community and a commitment to something greater than yourself – a commitment to God – is a feeling of profound joy.

How do we become a part of the church? According to Acts 2:38-42

"Each of you must turn from your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Those who believed are added to the church. They joined with the other believers and devoted themselves to the church's teaching and fellowship, sharing in the Lord's Supper and in prayer.

Then in vs 43-47 we see that they had a deep sense of awe as then came to expect the miraculous. All the believers met together constantly and shared everything they had...no one was in need. They worshiped together, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity-- all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved.

These verses provide a summary of what the early church was about; it provides a model that can be applied to the modern church, as well.

When a church body emphasizes strong worship and solid biblical teaching in an atmosphere of true fellowship mixed with consistent evangelism, it will be healthy. And a healthy Christian community will attract people to Christ. What are you doing to make your church a healthy place that will draw others to Christ?