

Mission Possible

Sterling UMC
October 4, 2009
Matthew 28:16-20

Today is week three in our study of what it means for us to be a Five Talent Church. Thus far we have looked at the ways we can invest ourselves in the area of worship to know and love God. Then last week we looked at Fellowship and Member Care, to learn to love each other.

Today we are looking at missions. Did you know that you were made for a mission? In John 17:18 (Msg), Jesus prays, "In the same way that you gave Me a mission in the world, I give them a mission in the world." Note the phrase "in the world." Last week we talked about how you need a ministry in the church. Well you need a ministry to the Body of Christ, the family of God. But you also need a mission in the world.

Today we're going to look at the common mission that we all share together with every believer. We are given that mission in Matthew 28:19 (NIV), "Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations..." In John 20:21 (NIV), Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." So, in essence our mission, as Jesus followers, is to continue what He started. And what was it that characterized Jesus' mission while he was here on this earth? It was ministry to the poor. It was to reach out in love and compassion to meet the needs of the least, the last, and the lost.

How do I do that? I must dare to reach beyond my world. We are called to share the sacrificial love of Christ with the world around us. Love demands I move beyond my comfort zone to people with different backgrounds, different education, different language, different economics. Galatians 6:2 (Msg) says, "Stoop down and reach out to those who were oppressed. Share their burdens, and so complete Christ's law." What is Christ's law? Love your neighbor as yourself.

God says our actions are proved by our love. James 1:27 (Msg) says, "Real religion, the kind that passes muster before God the Father, is this: reach out to the homeless and the loveless in their plight." You know, when you read this book and you read about Jesus, you read that Jesus always rooted for the underdog that people in that society wanted to ignore, the powerless, the poor, the left behind, the imprisoned, the orphaned, the widowed, the aged, the mentally ill, the social outcasts, sick, the lepers. If Jesus were alive today, do you know who He would be hanging out with? He'd probably be out caring for those that everybody else wants to kind of turn their back on.

Now here at Sterling we have a number of members who are reaching beyond themselves. They are reaching out to people who are different from themselves to show God's love to the needy. But that number is far too few. We have got to be more outward focused. We must be more intentional in looking beyond ourselves, beyond

our own walls and go out in the name of Jesus Christ to share his Good News with our words and deeds. This morning at the end of this service you will have an opportunity to do that. You will see on the green card you were given a variety of ways in which you can say, "You know what? I'm going to break out of my own insulated bubble, where everything is clean and orderly, where everything is fixed and predictable, and I'm going to do something like Jesus. I'm going to reach beyond my world and intentionally reach out to those who are overlooked by other people." I don't want you to leave this building today until you have found a way that you can do that.

Friends, one day we're going to stand before God and He's going to do an audit of our lives, and He's going to judge if we really learned to love or if it was just all talk. Did we ever really do anything that showed love or did we just say we loved? The Bible says one day Jesus is going to separate people into two groups: sheep and goats. And He's going to say to one group, "I was hungry, and you fed Me. I was thirsty and you gave Me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited Me into your home. I was naked, and you gave Me clothing. I was sick and you cared for Me. I was in prison and you visited Me." Matthew 25:25-26 (NLT) If you go back and read the rest of that verse, Matthew 25, people are going to say, "When did we do that for you, Lord?" And He says, "When you have done it to one of the least of my brothers or sisters, you've done it to Me."

Now, you don't have to leave Sterling to do this. You can find so many needs right here in our own back yard. There are so many people in this world that are sick. So many people who are hurting. So many people who are lonely. So many people longing for someone to reach out to them, to take a minute to be concerned for them. All around us every day there are those who long for someone to reach out his or her hand to say, "I care. I love you."

I submit to you this morning that Jesus is here. We see Jesus Christ all around us. He is here in Sterling, He is in our community, our nation, our world. We hear his voice in the desperate pleas that flood our church each week from people with no food, no electricity, no money to buy needed medication. We see him in the face of our next-door neighbor who speaks a different language. We see him in the lonely faces that stare at you as you walk the halls of the nursing home. We see Him in the anguished faces of people whose lives have been devastated by natural disasters. We see him in the face of a single mother who desperately needs a home to call her own. We see him in the face of the homeless who walk the streets of our cities seeking shelter from the elements. We see him in the pleading eyes of a child in Africa who doesn't know when his next meal will come. We hear Him in the cries of a young girl who has been abused and abandoned by her family. You may even see him in the face of someone sitting on the pew with you this morning. We encounter him in the searching hearts of countless men and women, boys and girls who do not have the peace in their hearts that comes from knowing him as their Savior.

We cannot become content in taking the easy way out. We can't be satisfied to get someone else to do the dirty work. We can't rewrite Jesus' words to suit our own ways and to ease our conscience:

“...I was sick, and you made sure the pastor visited me.”

“...I was hungry, and you kicked in an extra buck to the Benevolent Fund.”

“...I was naked, and you gave your garage sale leftovers to Goodwill.”

“...I was a stranger, and you were too busy to even acknowledge my presence.”

That is not what Jesus intended. Jesus said, “When you give a banquet, don’t invite your friends or relatives, or you rich neighbors. Instead invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed.”

In other words everyone is invited. All are welcome at His table. Jesus calls every one of us to minister to all including the least, the last, and the lost and this what we must do: not because we will get something in return, not out of a sense guilt or obligation, not just because it is the “politically correct” thing to do, not just so that you can score some extra brownie points, but this is something we must do because it is what the church is all about. It is why we exist.

My friends we have got to take up that challenge. If we are going to truly make a difference, if we are going to see our society changed, if we are going to see families restored, and lives transformed, then we have got to continue to kindle that Spirit in our hearts and lives and burn with a passion to see lost souls saved. Find a way today to spread the love of Jesus Christ in a tangible way with those whose path cross yours. It will impact the eternal destiny of other people.

We may not be able to meet every need. We may not be able to touch every life and reach every lost soul. We may not be able to feed every hungry child, or to house every homeless person, or to care for every sick person, or to minister to every imprisoned spirit. We may not be able to fix every person, but we can love every person. But to those we can reach and to those to whom we can minister it makes a difference; it makes a difference to our Lord.

One day Fulton Sheen, the famous Catholic bishop, was in a leper colony over in Africa, and he was repulsed by these open cancerous, cankerous sores on the bodies of everybody laying there in the dirt. And he walked by one man laying there and he not only had leprosy, but he had a bunch of other skin diseases too, and he was covered from head to toe with oozing open wounds. And as Fulton Sheen leaned over to talk to him, the cross that he was wearing on a chain around his neck broke. The chain broke and it fell into one of those open wounds. He said, “You know, for a minute I was just repulsed. I wanted to just kind of step back. And then all of a sudden I was filled -- I was overcome for this love for this person who had nothing,” and he said, “I reached into the sore and I took up the cross.” That, ladies and gentlemen, is what Christianity is all about. It is about healing broken, messed up lives. If we’re not doing that, I doubt we’re Christians. Because that’s what it is all about. The whole business of Christianity is healing hurts and helping people. It’s love. Now, I’m not going to kid you, if you get involved in your mission in the world, it is going to cost you. It will. It is going to break you out of self-centeredness and comfortable things, and it is going to cost you time and energy and effort and money and may even your privacy sometimes; but God has promised eternal rewards.

Do we care? If we care, we must share. Listen to this last verse from Acts 13:36.

“David served God's purposes in his own time.” That’s my prayer for you. That’s my

prayer for our church. As we strive to become a Five Talent church that we will serve God's purpose in our generation, in our time. I can't think of a better testimony to have on your tombstone, "she served God's purpose in her time," "He served God's purpose in his generation." What is more important than that -- doing what God put you on earth to do? And that's my prayer for you and it is my prayer for me; that people will be able to say it about me, that I served God's purpose in my generation. And I want them to say it about you. So here's the test to know if you have completed your mission or not...are you still alive? If you're still alive, your mission is not completed. So as we close, you got four possible responses. You can say like Moses, "who me?" Or you can say like Jonah, "not me." Or you can say it like Habakkuk, "why me?" Or you can say like Isaiah, "send me."

The most dangerous prayer you can pray is "God use me." I dare you to say it. Do you have enough courage to say, "God use my life?" Watch what happens! Little becomes much when you put it in the Master's hand.