

EMPOWERING GOD'S PEOPLE SOWING

When I was a boy in the late 1960's, my family bought our first color TV. It looked very much like this. How many of you remember TV's like that? It was state-of-the-art at the time, and I thought we were really living rich. Color – not black and white – COLOR TV at home. Wow! The picture wasn't always clear. It often was fuzzy, but we didn't care as long as we saw the fuzzy images in COLOR!

Now-a-days, technology has advanced so that ALL TV's are color. And no TVs have fuzzy pictures anymore. Stores only sell flat screen, high definition TVs. Most likely you have a HD TV in your home.

I have to say that next to fire, the wheel, and sliced bread – HD TV is right up there as one of man's greatest inventions! The crispness and the clarity is just amazing! And it doesn't matter what you're watching – whether it's dancing with the stars, or watching the Browns lose – no matter what the program is, you see it with clarity and crispness.

We – St. Paul Lutheran Church – are a gathering of followers of Jesus Christ. Some of us here are seekers – checking it out, asking questions, investigating – and we are glad you are here! Most of us here, however, are FOLLOWERS of Jesus Christ. Our lives, our hearts, our values, our attitudes – should look like Jesus' life, His heart, His values.

So we can ask: what does Jesus' life look like?? And the Bible gives us a crystal clear picture of Jesus' heart, and life, and values. It's not a fuzzy picture at all.

And the crystal clear picture of Jesus' life is that He would regularly take time to deeply and intimately connect with God our Father. He regularly would get off by Himself to spend several hours in prayer, in conversation with the Father. “Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night *praying to God.*” Luke

6:12

Jesus also made it a priority to spend time with a group of believers. Jesus hand-picked 12 men (get this): “Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve – designating them apostles – **that they might be with him** and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.” Mark 3:13-14 Jesus spent time with them. For 3 years He did life with them, invested Himself into them, He mentored, and taught, and loved these 12 men. It was a high value to Jesus to have His own group, to live in community with other believers.

And Jesus always had a radar that would hone-in on people who were far from God spiritually, or suffering and oppressed. Jesus would go

OUT OF HIS WAY for people who were in the world around Him whom He could influence. Mark records for us: “That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons” Mark 1: 32-34

So we see crystal clear, 3 dimensions in Jesus’ life. The Bible tells us real clearly that there were **Three dimensions in Jesus’ Life**

1. UP: Intimacy with the Father
2. IN: Loving relationships with other believers
3. OUT: Influencing people of the world

As FOLLOWERS of Jesus, do our lives reflect these values, these patterns of life? To be honest, yes, we here at St. Paul, DO all 3 of these dimensions, and we also have room to GROW in all 3 of these dimensions in our lives. For example, being here this morning or worshiping by live stream - this is part of an UP relationship with God. It’s good and right, and important to worship God, to hear His truth applied to our lives, and to receive Jesus’ forgiveness. So, way to go! Keep it up. And yet, how many of us pray the way Jesus did? With earnestness? As a priority? Depending on God the Father for *everything*?

Christ-followers like us here at St. Paul, are also pretty good at the IN dimension to the Christian life. We generally love other believers, and are loved by them. We encourage other believers, and are encouraged by them. Yet, we have plenty of room to grow in this dimension too. How many of us make it a priority to plug into a Bible study group? How many of us are genuine and vulnerable enough before another believer that we ask to be held accountable by another believer? That we admit our personal struggles with sin, and temptation, and addictions?

Over the past 2 years, we here have been engaged in a process called “Seasons of Discovery.” This has primarily been focused on the “OUT” dimension in our spiritual lives. We have shaped a new vision. We began moving to be more outreaching – especially to families in the community around us. The covid19 pandemic came along and mucked-up reaching out to others person-to-person. Yet, social distancing creates MORE need in our community for the hope and help of Jesus – not LESS need. So today, and for the following 2 weeks, we are going to begin to turn our attention once again, back to focus on Jesus’ calling us to be OUTward oriented.

It matters that we do this. It matters because if we don’t, this church or any church will be real self-focused. And that is the pathway that leads many churches to die and close up for good.

It matters because this country and this world is broken, and men and women need the redemption and hope and forgiveness only Jesus freely gives. It matters to every human being far from God, who lives within the range of this church. And there are thousands and thousands and thousands of them who may, yet, be redeemed from a Christ-less eternity.

It matters to our heavenly Father that we are outward oriented like Jesus, because He gave up the very best that He had — the life of His Son — to buy back the human creatures that, for some reason known only to him, He loves so much. It matters to our God more than you and I can imagine.

In today's Gospel reading from the Bible book of Luke, chapter 10, Jesus is sending His disciples OUT. Jesus sent the disciples to people. To homes. To the places where those who do not know the Gospel live, work and play.

God does not just send us out to places. He sends out to people. The Gospel is about people. It's about loving people where they are, in their world.

Jesus gave His disciples these instructions:

"When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you. Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house. —Luke 10:5-7

This means that we must understand people -- what they think, and where they stand in relationship to the Gospel. We don't go into the world with a "one-size-fits-all" approach. We go speaking "peace" which is a word in the first century, announcing that God's peace through the Messiah had come. It's a way of saying that God had come to save his people, or that God had come to bring the kingdom of God on earth. We announce the peace of God, and here we see that Jesus instructed his disciples to see if there was a "person of peace" in the home where they announced this peace.

In other words, is there a person who is open to the Gospel and ready to hear what Jesus means for them?

I have seen God put people like this in my own life over the years — people who want to hear about Christ.

I remember a neighbor. We were both 30-something Dads, with kids the same age. We became friends. He had no relationship with God. Then when Easter came around one year and his wife asked him about going to church, he asked my opinion whether Easter or Christmas was more important. He wanted to know about both. So I explained both what Christmas and Easter are really about. I had been praying for an opportunity to talk to him about faith in Jesus. And one day when we were

hanging out, God just lobbed this softball right down the middle of the plate at me. I couldn't believe how amazingly God answered my prayers!

I remember a young man who hit bottom when he was sent to 60 days in jail on a drug possession charge, and how hungry he was to find out how he could be forgiven, and turn his life around through the power of God. He could get released for couple of hours and we spent a lot of afternoons together.

Jesus once told a real famous story about how some people are real open to the Gospel and want to discover what Jesus means in their life. Their life transformation is a *miracle*! Jesus' story about this you may know as the Parable of the Sower. A man goes out and scatters seed in a farm field. But only some of it grows to produce a crop, because of the conditions of the soil. Some is rocky ground and the young plants get no root. Other seed is eaten by birds before it grows, and still other seed lands among the weeds where it gets choked out. But some of the seed fell in places that were very receptive to the seed. Therefore the farmer would have focused his spreading of the seed on the good soil.

In Jesus' own life and work, the peace of the Kingdom of God, went out to all people, but only those who were ready to receive it actually understand it and embrace it. And if you look at Jesus' ministry, He focused His attention on people who wanted to embrace what He was saying. He focused on people who were like "good soil." He focused on those whom Jesus called "persons of peace."

This may seem new to us when it comes to sharing Jesus' message in our world. Yet we understand how influence works in human lives.

For instance, imagine a total stranger calls you out of the blue, and says, "You need to refinance your house, and I'm the guy to do it with." How many of you would likely sign up right on the spot?

Or suppose somebody you've never met walks up to a lady and says, "I know the person you should spend the rest of your life with — my cousin. And I've set up a blind date for the two of you this Friday, the day he gets out on parole. You can trust me. He's the one for you." Are you likely to go ahead?

When it comes to what matters to us — our finances, our relational lives, our futures — we don't usually put ourselves in the hands of total strangers. We listen to people we trust. Friends influence friends. And if this is true in general, it is most especially true when it comes to the ultimate issue in life: people's eternal destiny.

If people are going to be reached for Christ, for the most part they will not be reached by strangers. They won't be reached by televangelists. They won't be reached by the radio. They'll be reached, primarily, through

friends. Through people they know, and trust. Like my neighbor friend who asked about Christmas and Easter.

There's a real important pattern in the New Testament that I want for us to be clear on. Let's take a look at Acts 16:14. Paul was on a missionary journey. And we read that "One of those listening" [to Paul] "was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. 'If you consider me a believer of the Lord,' she said, 'come and stay at my house.' And she persuaded us."

Lydia was a business woman. She had influence. She and her whole household were baptized. That would be a group of brothers and sister, and brothers-in-law, and sisters-in-law, and nephews and nieces, and parents, and friends. This would be 30 to 40 people.

Lydia was not only open to the Gospel, but also she had influence upon others. This is one of the ways that the good soil produces 100, 60, or 30 times what is sown. When we build relationships with those who have connections and influence with others, then there is potential for the Gospel to spread quickly.

During this pandemic time, people are more concerned about issues of life and death, and the meaning of their lives. People today are discovering that having a nice house, a steady job, an active family schedule on are NOT the answer they are seeking. When faced with isolation and uncertainty, people now are more open to caring friendships than we have seen in a long, long time. The time is more ripe to be a Lydia, influencing others, than we have seen in a long time. Today, neighbors are again getting to know neighbors, and finding ways to care for their neighbors.

So as you look at the people in your life, who do you know who may be real eager to hear about Jesus and the difference He makes in life and eternity? Who in your life may be "persons of peace?"

How do you spot Persons of Peace?

People who LIKE us.

People who LISTEN to us.

People who SERVE us. When I think of those qualities, I zero in on a guy I know in my neighborhood. Who is it for you, who likes you, listens to you, and is there to help you when you need it? Who in *your* life trusts you, and you can build on your relationship with him or her?

Jesus sent the disciples out and he told them to stay in the communities where they were well-received. He told them not to move around. Why? He wanted them to build relationships with people.

For most people before they hear the Gospel, they have to see the Gospel and even experience the Gospel many times before they are ready to embrace it. This is why loving and serving other people the way Jesus has loved and served you is so important.

There is a common myth that people should be able to hear the Gospel message one time and then the Holy Spirit always and immediately works faith into their heart. That does happen occasionally, and it's awesome when it does. But generally that's just not how it works. It usually takes many discussions of the Gospel over many years.

We will continue to do outreach projects together, as a church. Many of you support and participate in these events like the Fall fest, Summer J.A.M., and the Easter Party. Those are good, and we share the news of Jesus at every one. We hope that by serving the people of our community in these events we will begin a relationship. And we pray that these relationships will yield fruit.

Yet each one of us can build relationships with people God has put in our lives. Many of you already show love to people around you in practical, tangible ways. This is great! We want to show the Gospel to people. And we pray for God to create opportunities for us to discuss what Jesus means *with* people.

So, why not, as a Follower who sees Jesus' life with clarity, follow His heart, His values, His way of living and loving? Each of us can invite 1 person or a couple closer, to further establish the relationship. No agenda. Just relationship. Just love them as a person God loves and whom God has put in your life. You might:

Front porch Walk in the park

Happy Hour Meal

Why? God loves you so much that He has turned your life around! He gave Jesus to live and die and rise for you. You have forgiveness, and hope, and freedom to live in love for God and others, and heaven coming to boot! You've been blessed so lavishly by your loving God.

And, it's just natural that we want everyone to know that Jesus lived, died, and rose again for them, and that whoever trusts in Him will receive forgiveness and eternal life. So we demonstrate the Gospel of God's love in tangible, loving ways. And we share words of the Gospel with people, answering their questions, and discussing the greatest gift of all.

We will sow the Gospel in our words, our deeds, our worship, and our being with people. And we pray for a harvest of 30, 60, or even a hundredfold!