

Sunday Sermon

2/18/24

Series: Made for More

Passage: Luke 15

Title: A Missional People

Good morning, Church! Please turn in your bibles to Luke 15 Today, we are continuing in our series “Made for More.” It’s a series about the church, God’s people, and how God wants to use his people to bring real change to people’s stories. And we heard last week that our church is part of a larger conference of churches, the NAB, that has identified four God-aligned targets or goals that we, as the church, should be going after.

Last week, we saw that God desires his church to be a people who engage cross-culturally. The kingdom of God is a multicultural kingdom. He has a heart for all people – for people from every nation, tribe, and tongue to hear the good news of Jesus Christ and come into a saving relationship with him. And not only is it God’s heart for his people to be culturally diverse, but also that we wouldn’t be afraid to reach across cultural lines and love a world not like us – to love people who don’t look like us, talk like us, hold the same values. Why would we do this? Because that reflects the love of Christ.

And this brings us nicely to our second target, that a people “made for more” are **a people who live missionally in this world.** Now I know that this should not be a new concept for us, but I also understand that for many of us this can be a difficult concept. So before we jump into our text, I wanted to frame our thinking with a story from this past week.

Many of you know that I am a driver for the Elderberry Express. If you don’t know what that is, it is a service the town of Pittsford offers as a way to care for the Elderly and disabled, driving them to appts, shopping, etc. I do it to be missional. To be a blessing to our community. To be a representative of Jesus Christ and Pittsford Community Church in our community. To be a tangible picture for God’s love for all people, by taking care in some small part of the widows.

This past Thursday I was tapped to give a ride to a woman. She was a 92 year old Jewish lady. Well as it always does, it took about 15 seconds for her to find out that I was a pastor and what church I belong to. And for the entire time, there and back we talked about the church, faith, family and Jesus Christ. It was a beautiful conversation. I didn’t force my way in. My goal was not to convert her. I wasn’t there to change her. I wasn’t there to be her Savior. I didn’t have to manipulate the conversation. God opened the door simply because I was there looking. I had chosen to be a loving presence in our community. Knowing that, as I go, I am an ambassador of Jesus as salt and light in this world. And because of that, a Jew felt loved by a Christian, a Jew heard the gospel in a non-offensive way, and a Jew permitted a Christian to pray for them.

And so, I wanted to give you this concept this morning, hopefully it will be helpful to some of us. In a sense, being missional is not so much about disciple making as it is about disciple hoping. The goal is finding, but the call is to look, with the hope that by my looking some may be found.

It's about planting seeds, with the hope that God might cause something to grow. We often operate in terms of cost/benefit analysis. I took these hours out of my day, out of my sermon prep, out of my family time to go and do this thing – and we weigh it: lots of converts/zero converts, harvest/no harvest, benefit/a waste of my time. But that is not how God's kingdom seems to work.

I was talking this week with one of our missionaries that our church supports, Marc Porpilia. He works as a chaplain with Hockey Ministries International. He was telling me that for one of his chapels he drives 6 hours in one day – 3 there, 3 back – to do a 30 minute chapel with maybe 3-6 young men. Cost/benefit analysis would say, "Not worth it." He's not leading people to Christ every week. Heck, sometimes people don't even show up. Why does he do it? Because he cares. Because that's what God has called him to do, and sometimes what God calls us to do seems extravagantly wasteful.

The prophet Jeremiah has one of the longer books in scripture. He was a prophet for let's call it 40 years. As far as we can tell he had two converts his entire ministry. You don't think he had conversations with God, "Are you sure this is what you want me to be doing? It seems extravagantly wasteful. Why even look?" And the answer to that question is a simple one, God says, "Because I care."

Hear the words of Jesus from Luke 15. There are three parables in this chapter, I'll be reading the first two – verse 1-10. (read and pray)

Becky and I just finished watching a documentary about the life of Abraham Lincoln. It was incredible to wade out into his story as he encountered and had to respond to the impossibly difficult task of leading a nation through a civil war. In many ways, I think we think about the civil war in a theoretical sense. "Yeah that would be terrible, yeah that must have been hard" without ever truly stopping and allowing the weight of the war wash over us.

We were a nation in turmoil. Deeply divided opinions. Deeply divided convictions to the point where there was hatred for the other. Violence against your brother. And ultimately secession from the union. It was a hard time in our nation's history. But in the midst of the turmoil, Abraham Lincoln became the right man, at the right time, to not only lead the nation through war, but then to begin to put the nation back together again. How many people would want that job? Yeah, how about, "No thanks."

After the war, many in the North wanted the South crushed. Lincoln wouldn't do that. Many wanted harsh punitive judgment against the offenders. Lincoln wouldn't do that. Many wanted the Southern states, leaders, people to forever bear a scarlet letter reminding them of their lesser and defeated state. Lincoln said no. Why? Because he cared about that which was lost. He cared about this country. He cared about its people. He cared about unity, and freedom, and life. These people had been lost and Lincoln's heart was to bring them home again, to bring that which was precious back into the fold. Many people said, "You can't do that." He said, "Watch me." Many said, "They don't deserve that." And that was the truth, but Lincoln's heart was for reconciliation even over what would have been a just retribution."

Listen to this quote, **“With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan.”** – Second Inaugural Address, March 4 1865.

With quotes like that, you can be sure Lincoln was reading his Bible. That heart is not unlike God’s heart. That work is not unlike God’s work. And here’s our truth this morning: God calls us to be a part of that work. **That is what missional is – it is having a heart disposition toward our neighbor.**

Now I recognize that definition is simplistic (especially for the good Baptist), so as part of that understanding we can talk about sharing the gospel, and disciple-making, and what it means to love others well – those are all good and necessary things. But under the umbrella of the concept of being a missional people, what we are talking about is a way of life.

Because missional ministry ultimately comes out of our identity – understanding who we have been made to be in Christ, that as his people we are salt and light in the world, and that we have been sent by him into the world.

Which means that missional ministry means having a meaningful presence outside the walls of the church building – being a living and loving presence in our neighborhoods and community. Because ultimately missional ministry – having a heart disposition toward our neighbor - reorients the focus of God’s people from “club member” to “change agent.”

The heart of God for his people is that, alongside the invitation to “come and see” Christ, we would also “go and be” a living presence, an extension of the ministry of Christ, to bring God’s life and blessing, and to reflect his love and care for this world.

How do I do this? Jesus says, **“A new commandment I give to you, that you would love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”** – John 13:34-35.

Look at Luke 15 with me this morning. It begins with a picture of tax collectors and sinners drawing near to Jesus. Now that in itself should be amazingly profound to us. Tax collectors and sinners? We would think that these people would be repelled from Jesus. Tax collectors were hated outcasts. In many ways they had abandoned their faith and abandoned their people to chase personal comfort and the almighty dollar. Sinners were just that, sinners. Known for doing everything that Jesus didn’t do. Valuing everything that Jesus wasn’t promoting.

In many ways, sinners is a blanket term to mean everyone else who isn’t “one of us.” People of other religions, sexual persuasions, political affiliations – our neighbors, our co-workers, those in our broader community, those who have been absorbed into mainstream culture. That’s who that is talking about. Why on earth would these people be drawn to this guy?

Answer: Because he loves them. At the core of who he is, they discern that he is someone who is authentic and genuine in his care for them. I love this verse from 1 Peter that reveals to us God's heart for us. **"Cast all your anxieties on Him because he cares for ("cares about, is concerned with") you."** – 1 Peter 5:7 He cares - not only about your health, your life, your flourishing, but you. He loves you. He's for you. He wants you.

That fact that God cares, that God is concerned about every individual life, is at the beginning of what it means for the church to be missional. And the question we must ask is: Do we have God's heart? Do we care as Christ would care?

v.2 - "The Pharisees and scribes grumbled, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.'"

That word receives is the word "Pros-deck-omai." It's a compound word – pros – "toward, with regard to;" and deckomai – "to take hold of or grant access to."

Another interesting use of this word is found in Matthew 15:43 when it says that **"Joseph of Arimathea, who was a respected member of the Jewish Council, was also himself (prosdeckomai) waiting/looking for the kingdom of God..."**

What this is pointing to is a disposition of heart. Having a willingness to bring something close. A willingness to give access. To meaningfully engage.

Jesus granted access into his life those not like him. He receives them. He eats with them - has relationship.

Now some have tried to take this concept and pervert it to justify sinful action as something Jesus is not concerned with. It doesn't mean that. Show me one place in scripture where Jesus wasn't concerned with morality or a right heart leading to right action. What we see is that Jesus doesn't condemn, but in the same breath even in that he says, **"I don't condemn you, go and sin no more."** It's not saying everything others believe, and do, and say is truth and good. Receiving is not endorsing, but it is loving.

And when people started complaining about it you know it triggered something in Jesus because he tells, not one, not two, but three parables. In other words, this concept is important – why? Because it's important to God. It strikes right at the heart of who God is, of the *Missio Dei* – the mission of God, why Jesus was sent. It strikes right at the heart of the identity of his people as we should be like God. At the identity of his church as an extension of Jesus' ministry here in this world. Again, keeping good theology, not compromising on truth, but alongside that having the right heart.

In the first parable he tells a story of a shepherd going after a lost sheep – a sheep that had wandered away. In the second parable Jesus tells a story about a woman tearing apart her house to find a lost coin. In the third parable, he tells a story of a man who loses two sons – both of whom he chooses to go out to in order to bring them back into right relationship.

We could focus on any of them this morning with the same conclusions. Why does the shepherd go after the lost sheep, wasting hours/days hoping to maybe find it? Why does the woman tear apart her house, sweeping, sweating, seeking hoping to maybe find her lost coin? Why is the Father looking, watching, waiting - hoping that maybe one day his lost son would return?
Answer: Because they care.

It may seem like a waste of time, and a waste of resources, and not worth the cost. But why do I do it? Because the truth is that Jesus left way greater, and went way farther, and spent way more in the hopes of getting me.

Jesus Christ died for the tax collectors and the sinners. So that we might be found by God. He took our sin and shame so that we might be saved and brought back into the fold, into the family, into relationship with him.

As was the work of Lincoln after the war in bringing reconciliation and peace to our nation, Christ's work was to ***"tear down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility between us and God...so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to those who were (look at this) far off and those who were near."*** – Eph. 2:15-17

Beloved, that is God's heart and call for his church. The only way those far off see Christ and hear the message is if we become an incarnational presence, if we "go and be" his light and love in this world.

The goal is finding, and there is great rejoicing when the lost are found, but the means is looking – it is disciple-hoping. Tax collectors and sinners drew near to Jesus, all of them had access to see and to hear him, but not all of them chose to follow. So be it, shake the dust off and keep looking, keep receiving, keep being a loving presence ready to give an answer for the hope that you have, because along the way we have the hope that some will be found.

Missional living at its core is an openness to God, to care about that which he cares about. To be a loving presence in people's lives. To have a heart disposition toward our neighbor. And to enter into a space through which we can bring God near that people might encounter him. You say, "How do I do that?"

In closing I'll give us 5 practical steps to living intentionally: Care, Pray, Share, Invite, Leave
Care about others

Pray that the Lord would open up opportunities

Share, as the Lord opens doors, the good news of Jesus

Invite others to follow

Leave the results up to God

Made for **MORE**

Made for More: Targets for God's Church

1) A people who engage cross-culturally.

Made for More: Targets for God's Church

- 1) A people who engage cross-culturally.
- 2) A people who live missionally.

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“With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan.”

– Lincoln, Second Inaugural Address, March 4, 1865

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The core of missional living:

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- Reorients the focus of God's people from "club member" to "change agent."

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good work, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." - Eph. 2:10

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“A new commandment I give to you, that you would love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

- John 13:34-35

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“Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.”

- Luke 15:1

Made for **MORE**

***“Cast all your anxieties on Him
because he cares for you.”***

- 1 Peter 5:7

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‘This man receives sinners and eats with them.’”***

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“Joseph of Arimathea, who was a respected member of the Jewish Council, was also himself (‘prosdechomai’ - waiting, looking) for the kingdom of God...”

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5 Practical Steps to Living Intentionally:

- 1) Care
- 2) Pray
- 3) Share
- 4) Invite
- 5) Leave

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5 Practical Steps to Living Intentionally:

- 1) Care - Care about others
- 2) Pray
- 3) Share
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5 Practical Steps to Living Intentionally:

- 1) Care - Care about others
- 2) Pray - Pray that God would open doors
- 3) Share
- 4) Invite
- 5) Leave

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- 1) **Care - Care about others**
- 2) **Pray - Pray that God would open doors**
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