

Text: Mark 8:31-38

Title: "Great Expectations"

Introduction: Over the last few weeks, we have been talking about the mainline Christian Church in the United States and how it is slowly (not so slowly) dying. Here's what we know:

United Methodist Church nationally has lost over 2 million members in the last 40 years. Last year the United Methodist Church lost 73,000 people in attendance on any given Sunday. That is 73,000 fewer people attending worship in UMCs in 2008 than attended in 2007 in the United States. In 2007, Wisconsin UMCs averaged 40,000 in worship across the state on any given Sunday/weekend. In one year in the United States, we lost ALMOST TWO Wisconsin Conferences. According to some studies, if the United Methodist Church loses people at the rate they are, in 44 years there will be no more United Methodist Church in the United States. That's a problem!

Of the 73,000 people who dropped out of the United Methodist Church last year, 70% were in the age group of 18-22 year olds... that's 50,000 people—in ONE YEAR! This trend has been pretty consistent over the past 20 years or more. That means that we have lost almost a whole generation! The 18-42 year olds are almost non-existent in the United Methodist Church.

And it's not just in the seats. The average age of UM clergy nationwide is 57 years old. We are DYING!

It's not just in the United Methodist Church. Nationwide, mainline denominations (Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist, Church of Christ, etc.) are all losing members and attendees rapidly. In the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America since 2002, there has not been a year when they have lost less than 50,000 members. Over 50,000 members per year!

Again, I do not think that it's a numbers problem. It's a **SPRITUAL PROBLEM!** Why do I say that? Because Jesus is not worth it! For most people who claim a faith in Jesus Christ, it's not worth it for them to make the necessary changes to their church in order to meet the 18-42 year olds where they live. To many it does no matter that Jesus offers us forgiveness of sins, a great adventure serving God's Kingdom in this life and eternity in Paradise. It doesn't matter that Jesus was tortured, mocked and hung on a cross to die because He **LOVE US!** It doesn't matter that Jesus showed us how to love people unconditionally and care for people's individual needs.

The Church's motto has been, "We've Never Done It That Way Before" for so long that we have no idea what we are doing or why we are doing it.

Jesus (LORD) commanded that we go into all the world (Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth) and make disciples for Him. Jesus chose to use a tool called the Church to accomplish that mission. It's not happening!

If we are going to live, we have to address the actual problem (70% of all people who drop out of a church in any given year are between the ages of 18-22 years old) that has been happening for 20 years. Now, we need to figure out how we are going to keep or get back that age group of people. In order to do so and to have our Church live, we have to change some things.

Last week = 100% of all open-heart surgery patients are told by their doctors that they must change their habits (drinking, smoking, over-eating, lack of exercise, stress, etc.) or they are going to die. Do you know the percentage of patients that refuse to change? 90%. 90% of open-heart surgery patients have decided that it would cause them more pain to change than to have open-heart surgery again or die. ***“Until the pain of where I’m at outweighs the pain of change; I’m not changing!”***

So, we’ve been studying the statistics compiled by Thom and Sam Rainer in their book *Essential Church* and trying to find out what we need to do to revive the Christian Church. In order for church to become ESSENTIAL again, statistics show that we need to do four things:

1. Be SIMPLE – Church is too complex and confusing for people of the next generation. It’s important that we, as a faith community, become ONE as Jesus and God are ONE. What do we do here? KNOW GOD. LOVE PEOPLE. SERVE THE WORLD.
2. Go DEEP – Too many churches out there are not challenging their people to go deeper in their faith. The pastors are getting so caught up in doing Everything that they don’t have time to study, preach and pray. A pastor cannot take people DEEPER unless they have a chance to go deeper themselves.
3. That brings us to our 3rd thing we need to do: Have GREAT EXPECTATIONS! Since the pioneer days, the Christian Church in America has struggled in this area. In the past, the number of members made the church look good, so the expectations were kept low.

I. Low Expectation

- A. History of Membership – fill the membership rolls ... just come one Sunday and we’ll get you signed up.
 1. Beef up the numbers and look good.
 2. Hopefully, those people will come through with a few dollars at the end of the year.
 3. Once they are members ...
- B. Volunteers – You can’t ask people to be too involved because they are not being paid ... Tell me if this sounds familiar: “Hi, this is Pastor Stan. I’m wondering if you would be willing to serve on the holy silverware committee. How much of your time will it take? Oh, don’t worry about that. They actually meet ONLY two times a year and I’m not sure if you are even required to be at the meetings. No. There is really no work outside of the meetings so it will take VERY LITTLE EFFORT on your part. So, can I put you down for that? Great! Again, thank you for your willingness to be part of something that JUST DOESN’T MATTER!” It’s not ESSENTIAL!
 1. They’re volunteers, right? We really cannot ask volunteers to put forth too much effort or they will quit!
 2. Let me say this ... they are quitting BECAUSE we are not asking much!

- C. Result = people leave and don't come back... we lose members fast and people do not see a need to attend worship or any other function of the church. "If the pastor and church leadership don't think it's worth it for me to invest my time and energy into, why would I think it's important or ESSENTIAL?"

II. High Expectation

Here's what else we know ... Church's that are HIGH EXPECTATION are keeping the people they have and they are growing. Why? Because the leadership shows how ESSENTIAL the Church is to their lives! In order to be a HIGH EXPECTATION Church, we need to do a few things right.

- A. Clarity ... Got to be clear on what we are doing (SIMPLE)
1. **What** (purpose) are we doing? "To build a community of faith where unchurched, De-Churched and Over-Churched can become deeply committed Christians."
 2. **Why** do we want to do this? Because Jesus said to make disciples for Him! Is Jesus Lord?
 3. **How** are we going to carry out our Purpose? (*Know God. Love People. Serve the World.*) "Hey, what are you all doing over there at BMZ Church?"
- B. Discipleship ... High Expectation Churches also challenge their people to go deeper in their faith (does any of this sound familiar?).
1. Many churches REQUIRE their Members to take one or two discipleship classes every year (Bible Study, Book Club, Vital Christianity, etc.). Fall-Winter-Spring Semesters.
 2. We are not making this a requirement ... Yet!
- C. Small Groups (5 times more likely to be active in church than those who attended worship services alone, p. 213)
1. We have been attempting to ease everyone into this idea with our *bookmarks*.
 2. We encourage you to get with one or more other people regularly to keep growing in your faith. It takes more than one hour a week to become "a deeply committed Christian".
 3. By next fall, we should have the small group system into place for BMZ.
- D. A Difference of Generation ...
1. Some of you are thinking, "Why do we have to keep talking about these 18-42 year olds so much? What about us, we are older than they are..." Here's why: If I go to the doctor with a heart condition and a hang nail; I really want the doctor to take care of the heart condition ... get it?!? We have to address the problem!
 2. For those of you who did not know, personalities and life realities have changed through the generations. For example:

- a. *Industrials* (born before approximately 1945) ... loyalty to company. If the church is open, we go. If the church needs money we give. Why? Because I'm a part of that company.
- b. *Baby Boomers* (born 1945-1964) ... kind of like industrials, but ask more questions about why certain things are being done the way they are. They will still come and give and help though, even if they don't like the answers.
- c. *Generation Xers* (born 1965-1980) ... Gen X, Gen Y, Gen Z, etc. all want answers to their questions, and if they don't get the answers they want, they are GONE! If it doesn't make sense or if the church is not doing what it says it does, they are GONE. "We've always done it that way" is not an answer!
- d. Hmm ... I wonder what Jesus would say about HIGH EXPECTATION? *Caesarea Philippi!*

READ MARK 8:31-38 NOW!

III. Peter and Jesus

- A. Jesus Speaks about Death for 1st Time (v. 31)
 1. At this point in their ministry together, Jesus has mentioned some about his death, but not enough for the disciples to even catch on.
 2. So, this, after Peter declared him to be the Messiah, the Son of God, is the first time Jesus has told His disciples clearly that he must go up to Jerusalem to die.
 3. You can imagine how confused the disciples must have been. They knew from their Scriptures that the Messiah was the one who would take over the country, defeat the enemies and bring peace to Israel.
- B. Peter Pulls Jesus Aside (v. 32)
 1. So, Peter (the spokesman / loud mouth) takes Jesus aside and tells him to stop confusing the disciples with all this talk of death. He *also* wanted Jesus to stop scaring them ... they knew as disciples/followers of Jesus, what happened to Him would happen to them!
 2. Peter did this out of a deep love for Jesus and complete ignorance of the Kingdom of God. Peter thought that Jesus would do all the work in bringing peace to Israel.
 3. BUT, Jesus was High Expectation = He expected the disciples to give their lives to the Kingdom of God! Jesus was about saving the whole world and chose to use a full team / Church to do it!
 4. So, Peter = Good intentions; but didn't understand.
- C. Jesus Shoves Peter Out of the Way (v. 33)

1. Response = Jesus looks at disciples (they were in agreement with Peter) and then said to Peter ... Get Away!
2. The disciples wanted the Glory that was supposed to come from being with the Messiah, but not the suffering that is also predicted in the Old Testament prophecies.
3. Jesus had to remind them that the glory only came after the suffering ... (college tennis team). Satan's way is to attempt to have glory without suffering. Jesus way = Glory *through* suffering (It's Not About Me!).
4. Jesus is working to CHANGE the way the disciple's think. He has high EXPECTATIONS of them! THEY and WE are EXPECTED to work for God's Kingdom.

IV. **Grab a Cross**

A. Want to Follow Jesus? (vs. 34-35)

1. Easy Decision for the Disciples. They watched people be fed, healed, transformed and made better. People were running to meet Jesus because they knew that if they could get to Jesus their life was going to get better!
2. It's going to cost (High Expectation!). "Turn from your selfish ways..." Can't do life the way you've been doing it!
3. If you hang on to the life you want for yourself, you will lose it. If you make your desires for yourself a higher priority than what Jesus wants for you, you will get to the end of your life and feel empty!
4. You are going to be wondering what you accomplished. At that moment, it won't matter how much money you have or how much stuff you have. You will feel EMPTY!
5. BUT! "If you give up your life for My sake (Jesus), and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it."
6. Jesus is saying that if you give over control to Jesus (there's HIGH EXPECTATION!) ... "Jesus, let's do my life your way!" ... when you get to the end of this life, your sense will be: I would do it again! That was great!
7. Do you ever ask yourself about your life, "Is this all there is?" If we do life Jesus' way, we won't have time to ask that question! We will know that we are changing the world for the better. We have made a difference ETERNALLY for ourselves and for those we love!

B. What's it Worth? (vs. 36-37)

1. And then Jesus emphasizes it. What if you gain the world (this life) and lose your soul (next life)? Remember the proportions of those lives. Grain of sand on a beach...
2. What if you have a lot of money and are really famous and have a lot of stuff and you are the ultimate American dream success story for 70 years?

3. Is it worth it to spend the next million or so years in anguish, tortured because you didn't listen about Jesus and swallow your pride and do life His way?!? Is it worth it?
4. The reality is that we all know that this life ends ... the question is: is there something after this?
5. This is another one of those where I don't want you to have to hear from anyone, "I told you so!"

C. Ashamed (v. 38)

1. In the last few years, I have heard my Dad say numerous times, "Stan, I am so proud of you." Ya'll, there is nothing like that!
2. I think that we all want to hear from people that we love and respect that they are proud of us. We might not admit it, but for each of us, I bet that there is at least one person we would love to hear say to us, "Wow am I proud of you!"
3. I really don't want to meet up with Jesus after this life and hear anything but, "Well done, I'm proud of you."
4. In order to do that, I cannot be ashamed of Jesus here in this life!
5. I wonder how many ways we show that we are ashamed of Jesus ... deny knowing Him to the people around us? The way I talk or don't talk about my faith ... the way I act in order to still be cool around certain people ... the way that I don't let other people know how a faith in Jesus Christ has transformed my life for the better ... sharing with other people how I've experienced forgiveness in my life, etc.
6. In order to make sure that Jesus is not ashamed of me, I will pass on those *high expectations* to the churches that I serve. I will challenge people to go deeper in their faith and love people and reach out to the world for the Kingdom of God.
7. KNOW GOD. LOVE PEOPLE. SERVE THE WORLD.

Closing Statement = Jesus has very HIGH EXPECTATIONS for each of us. The Church needs to remind the people of that. It's the job of the Church to make DISCIPLES of JESUS CHRIST! ... To create deeply committed Christians... to change the world. Deny yourself, pick up your cross and follow Jesus.

Let's Pray

Outline and statistics for this Worship Series taken from Thom and Sam Rainer's book, *Essential Church?* among other resources.