

Sermon for October 4, 2009

Boscobel & Mt. Zion UMCs

Text: John 17:20-26

Title: "Simple"

Introduction: My earliest memories as a child were of church. As the youngest of five children born to a United Methodist pastor, our lives revolved around the church. The first church I really remember was the UMC in LaFarge, WI. LaFarge was a town of around 600 people. My Dad also was the pastor of the Methodist church in the Dell community. We lived there for 6 years. I moved there right before I turned 3 years old and lived there until between 3rd and 4th grade.

When my Dad was pastoring there, the attendance at the churches went up around 300 people in attendance. So, here's what I thought: Everyone goes to church. If half the town is coming to our church and there are at least a couple of other churches in town; everyone goes to church!

As I grew up, this became my assumption. Church was so much a part of *my* life that I assumed that church was part of everyone's life. Here's the deal: in the 1960s and 1970s, that was way closer to true than it is now, 40 years later. In my lifetime, the membership in the United Methodist Church in Wisconsin has dropped by around 70,000 people. At the same time the population in Wisconsin has increased.

If those 70,000 people were attending another Christian church that would be one thing, but here's what we know about the Christian Church in the United States...

Nationally, the United Methodist Church has gone from 10.6 million members in 1960 to 8.4 million members in 2000 while the population in the U.S. increased from 180 million to over 280 million. The trend continues...

We are not alone. In the 20 years between 1987 and 2007, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America lost 600,000 members nationally. Since 2002, the ELCA has lost not less than 50,000 members per year.

These are just examples of nationwide Christian Church losses.

With that information in front of us, I think that it's a good time to PRAY!

PRAY NOW!!

At this time, I invite you to take the insert out of your program. On one side you will see our Scripture for today from the Book of John. On the other side you will find a brief outline of how we are going to approach becoming the Church that Jesus had planned again. Please take time to fill in the blanks and jot down whatever else you see or hear that you think might help you in your faith journey or the might help people you know in their faith journey. Take this home and refrigerate it. Read the Scripture again this week and look over your notes to be reminded of what we've learned. For those of you listening on-line or IPodding, I invite you to download our program so that you can fill in blanks and take notes too.

Why do we care about the decline in the Christian Church? Because as followers of Jesus Christ, we have a chore list: "Go into Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth and tell people about Me." – Jesus.

If we are to carry on what Jesus started while He was on earth 2,000 years ago, we need to be *growing*. I believe that God desires a relationship with each and every person you know and don't know (that covers everyone!). We know that God wants that

relationship, and we know that Jesus ordered us (remember: He is Lord) to do the introductions. We are to bring people face-to-face with Jesus Christ and invite them to get to know Him. If that is the case, the Church has failed to carry out Jesus' orders in the United States over the past 40+ years.

It's time to change that! I want to hear Jesus say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." I want the same for each one of you. In order to hear that, I think we need to be the ones in this moment in history that say, "That's enough. It's time for the Church to be the Church that Jesus Christ intended again (a movement with a purpose). This movement that Jesus initiated is not dying on my watch!"

Just a quick reminder for those of you who were not here last week: 7 Sins the Church has been committing that's helped kill the Church:

1. **Diluting the Word of God** ... "I'm okay; you're okay."
2. **No Heartburn** ... we cannot help but share the Good News!
3. **Not Relevant** ... makes no sense to the people in 2009.
4. **Inward Focus** ... Take care of ourselves and let others take care of themselves. That's not what Jesus taught!
5. **Personal Preferences** ... "I want what I want, even if it kills the church! It's all about me!"
6. **Comfort** ... "Honestly, God's mission is uncomfortable (It's all about me!)."
7. **The Church has not taught Scripture** ... people have no idea what we stand for or Who we stand for!

Alright, let's get at it ... We know that 70% of the people leaving the Church today are between the ages of 18-22. Most never return. We have lost whole generations of people over the last 40 years. The only age group that is losing more people is the 100% in the age ranges of 60-100 years old. Of those, ZERO (0) are returning! They are on to the BIG CHURCH!

So, the only age group we can really do anything about is the 18-22 year olds ... how do we keep them and how do we get them back!

- I. **Why People Leave** -- Why are so many 18-22 year-olds leaving the Church?
 - A. Not My Parent's Faith
 1. I grew up in an era where you went to church ... why? Because that's what you do!
 2. In my generation and before, many people go because of a sense of loyalty to God.
 3. The generation after me? They want to be shown WHY they need to go to church!
 4. For many of them, they see church as a social circle for their parents. They have found social circles in other places.
 5. Please understand that many young people still have a faith of some sort, they just don't connect that faith to the church setting ... In other words, the church has failed to show the connection between a real relationship with God and the group of people that sit in pews on a Sunday morning.
 - B. A Different Kind of Community

1. The next generations of people are looking for “community” and that does not happen with people meeting together for an hour a week pretending that everything in life is okay.
 2. Young adults are looking for meaningful relationships to keep them accountable for their relationship with God.
 3. They look for a common ground and goal with other people. We have that ... through Jesus Christ. Jesus is kind of the glue that holds the community together. Community happens when we carry out the mission that Jesus sends us on.
 4. Okay, so this is weird. Community and tight relationships among us happen when we do what Jesus says ... “Go into Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.” When we reach outside the walls of the church, the church gets closer on the inside! Cool!
- C. Life Changes
1. College, new job, new baby, etc. causes people to reset priorities ... often, if church is not seen as ESSENTIAL (life or death); it takes a back seat to other life happenings.
 2. Again, we have failed to make it a priority for them while they were children and teenagers.
- D. Which Hypocrisy Really Matters?
1. Now, we all know that the greatest cop-out for people who just don’t want to go to church is to say, “The church is full of hypocrites!”
 2. My response? DUH!! If church was only for people that were perfect, it would be pretty empty. We are all trying to improve and get better, right?!? Anyone here got it all figured out and is absolutely done sinning?
 3. BUT, what most of those who dropped out of church between the ages of 18-22 said was that it wasn’t the hypocrisy in the church that caused them to drop-out. The hypocrisy they spoke of was in their home ... My parents acted one way in church and another way the other 167 hours of the week.
 4. Our children watch us... and I fail often; BUT, I’m striving to get better for my kid’s sake!
- E. The Buck Stops Here
1. The number two reason that people dropped out of the church, was “church or pastor related reasons”. Mostly, pastor related!
 2. For those who did not drop out of church, one of the main reasons they stayed is because the church and, specifically, the pastor made them feel part of the church!
 3. The teens could understand the sermons and the pastor was kind and caring to them specifically!

4. If the pastor teaches and preaches in a way people can understand, hopefully they will catch on that church is ESSENTIAL to the mission of Jesus Christ!
5. These days, people are naturally skeptical. I can preach kindness and compassion and unconditional love, but if they don't see it; they're out! SO, the BUCK STOPS HERE!

II. Close the Back Door

- A. In my 10 years here, I've watched a lot of people come and check out the church (Refrigerator door) ... they might even come a few times or a few months, but eventually they disappear. Do you know why?
- B. I know why. It's because we have a hard time closing the back door. Gandhi said that he really liked the person of Jesus Christ and the Christian faith. The only problem he saw was that the people were not like their Master.
- C. If we were like our Master (Jesus) we would be ONE.

Our Scripture for today comes from John 17. Jesus is in prayer right before he goes out to the Mt. of Olives and is betrayed. Here is what he prays:

READ JOHN 17:20-26 NOW!

III. The Lord's Prayer

- A. Did you catch what is happening here? Jesus is praying to the Father (Trinity stuff here?). He is praying, not only for the disciples there with him, but "for all who will ever believe in me through their message (v. 20)."
 1. Jesus is praying for us! You and me!
 2. We believe because those original disciples carried on the message and story of Jesus Christ.
 3. Jesus is praying to God Almighty for US!
- B. When Jesus left this earth, God/Jesus chose the "Church" to carry on God's mission. It's the Church's job to tell the world about Jesus and invite people to follow Jesus as Lord and Savior (repeat)!
- C. Jesus wants the Church (that's us) on the same page when it comes to the mission and purpose of the Church. "May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me."
 1. The ONLY way that the people of this world will know that God loves them? If we (the church) have UNITY!
 2. If you and I cannot get along; if you and I cannot work out whatever petty differences we have; if you and I cannot put away our grudges and personal preferences; if you and I are not TOGETHER FOCUSED on the Kingdom of God ... we are not the Church!

3. "If We Are Not ONE; We Are DONE!" Chore list ain't happening until we have unity.
- D. And here we are:
1. I'm going to continue to hold my grudge, because life is about me.
 2. I'm not going to forgive that person, because life is really about me.
 3. I'm going to quit and run away and not talk about what's bothering me, because life is really all about me.
 4. I'm not going to use my energy learning to love those people, because life is all about me.
- E. Here is a quick insight ... and I really don't want to tell you later in your life or later in your eternity that "I told you so", so please listen today. LIFE ... IS NOT ... ABOUT YOU!
1. Life is about the Kingdom of God!
 2. Everything we do or say in this life is either building up or tearing down the Kingdom of God ... there is no in between!
 3. When we choose to hold grudges or gossip or tell lies or quit on other people; that has nothing to do with unity and the Kingdom.
 4. Jesus is praying to God Almighty that we, the Church, will be ONE as Jesus and His Father are ONE!
 5. If we are not ONE; we are DONE!
- F. Let me tell you something—and I don't want to scare anyone here, but we are at a critical point in history. The Church, the movement that God wanted to carry the Good News (forgiveness for all ... your past is not nearly as important as your future) to the world is DYING! We are at a point in history where if we do not revive Her (the Bride of Christ), we might not be able to.
- G. Let me tell you something else—BMZ Church is at a point where we can be a great influence in the revival of small town churches in Wisconsin and beyond.
- H. IF, and ONLY IF, we are ONE!

IV. **Keep It Simple**

- A. One of the things that people said after they visited new churches was that they were confusing. If you don't know all that individual church's traditions and ways of doing things, it's really uncomfortable.
- B. If we are going to be ESSENTIAL to people in 2009, we have to keep things SIMPLE. SIMPLE meaning UNDERSTANDABLE.
- C. How many of you can recite our Church's Purpose? Yeah, me neither ... it's meaningful. It's important, but hard to remember it all.
- D. Today, we get on the same page. We bring some UNITY to BMZ Church. If anyone ever asks you what we do at BMZ CHURCH, I want each of you to be able to answer clearly.

- E. We have a chore list to do, and in order to do that we have to be working as One Body!
- F. Ready? Ready to become ONE in our understanding of what we do here? Here it is: KNOW GOD. LOVE PEOPLE. SERVE THE WORLD!
- G. In order to be followers of Jesus Christ, we must do these three things. If we are going to go “into all the world” and make disciples for Jesus Christ, we must do three things: KNOW GOD. LOVE PEOPLE. SERVE THE WORLD.
- H. More on these three next week. In the mean time, we got to get right with God and each other...

COMMUNION (don't bring your offering until you reconcile with your brother)
Communion is about UNITY. We are all gathering at the same table to celebrate the same sacrifice by the same Lord and Savior!

Let's Pray!

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