

Sermon for September 27, 2009

Boscobel & Mt. Zion UMCs

Text: Ephesians 6:10-20

Title: "Where's Everyone Going?"

Introduction: 9/11 = I graduated from seminary/graduate school in 2001. As a reward from my wife, she arranged a trip for us to New York City. Not only did I get to go to New York City, because of my wife, I got to go to the U.S. Open Tennis Tournament! It was great! I got to see many of my favorite tennis players in person and in action. I even got to see John McEnroe practicing on an outer court. It was so cool...

The day we were scheduled to fly home, there were severe thunderstorms moving through the area and we were grounded and our flight delayed until the next morning. The next morning as Sarah and I sat at the gate waiting for our flight to be called, we were told over the loud speaker that our flight would be delayed. Soon after that we were told that we needed to go and get our luggage and re-check it when we found out what time our flight was rescheduled for. What a hassle! As Sarah and I went back toward the luggage claim, we saw on a TV monitor that one of the twin towers was on fire because an airplane had flown into it. Weird!

As we came around the corner to the ticketing area, Sarah headed toward the escalators to go down to wait for our luggage. I was going to see if I could get any information about rescheduling our flight and then meet her by the luggage carousel. As I approached the ticket counter, someone behind the counter yelled, "Evacuate the building!" All of the ticket people jumped through the baggage scale openings and ran out the door behind me. People were all headed out the doors ... fast! I yelled at Sarah right before she got on the escalator and we went out those doors too...

As we stood outside of LaGuardia for the next few hours, we heard all sorts of rumors before realizing that we had been attacked. Now, I'm not sure many Americans were aware that we had enemies that were serious about taking the United States down, nor do I think many of us thought that the type of attack that happened on 9/11 was possible...

Let's Pray ... **PRAY NOW!**

At this time, I invite you to take the insert out of your program/water bottle. On one side you will see our Scripture for today and on the other you will see a brief outline of how we are going to approach this message. I hope that you all will take time to not only fill in the blanks, but also jot down whatever other things might be helpful in your faith journey or the faith journey of others. For those of you listening on line or IPoding, take time to download our program off the web site and you also can fill in the blanks and take notes from today's message...

Now, last week we began this worship series, "Essential". The idea behind it is that there are certain things in life that are ESSENTIAL: water, air, food, shelter, chocolate, etc. There are things that we, as human beings, cannot live without. I believe that when we talk about our Spiritual lives, Church is ESSENTIAL to our faith journey with God through Jesus Christ. The problem is that over 2/3 of the American population disagrees. As a matter of fact many people describe worship and Church as "optional" and not ESSENTIAL.

Last week we found out that Jesus plan was that the Church be ESSENTIAL to the faith life of people. He charged his Disciples/Apostles with a chore list: “Go to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the entire world and tell people about Me!” We have a job to do. God’s plan was that people would find Jesus ESSENTIAL to their lives and that the tool that God was going to use to make that come alive was the Church!

We, as a church and as churches, are called by God to do our part to help people realize that without a faith community (Church), they are dead Spiritually ... in this life and the next! We have to be ESSENTIAL for people to realize that their faith is ESSENTIAL. The Church is the tool that God chose to use to share Jesus with the world. We have to be the “Church”, like God intended.

We know that in the United Methodist Church in the State of Wisconsin, the membership has dwindled from well over 150,000 to around 80,000 in the last 40 years. The population of Wisconsin has gone up over that period of time, but most churches have shrunk in that time period. We are not ESSENTIAL. We are not seen as vital to people’s lives ... to the vast majority of the population of Wisconsin the Church is Not a Life or Death matter! We are NOT being the Church!

Now, the majority of the statistics that are being used for this worship series are from LifeWay Christian Resources and Rainer Research and specifically from a book by Thom and Sam Rainer titled, *Essential Church*. They have interviewed thousands of people who attend worship, used to attend worship, have never been part of a church, have dropped out and come back to a church, etc. What they wanted to find out was: Why? Why are so many avoiding the church setting as a way to grow in their faith?

Here’s what they found out ... for people who have dropped out of the life of the Church and decided that it’s not ESSENTIAL to their lives (vast majority of dropouts are between the ages of 18 and 22) ... the Rainer’s found out that there are a top 10 reasons why people quit attending worship and church activities:

I. Top Ten and Seven Sins

A. Top Ten Reasons People Stop Attending a Church

1. Want a Break from Church ... it’s not ESSENTIAL (we don’t take a break from breathing and expect life to get better, do we?)
2. Church Members too judgmental or hypocritical (more on this later...)
3. Moved away to college (18-22 year olds)
4. Work responsibilities (work schedule prevented attendance)
5. Moved too far away from home church (not ESSENTIAL enough to find another church)
6. Life got too busy (not ESSENTIAL)
7. Didn’t feel connected to people in church (relationships are important)
8. Disagreed with Church’s beliefs on political or social issues
9. Chose to spend time with friends outside the church (relationships again)
10. Only went to church to please others (In their time in church life, they didn’t find anything ESSENTIAL for *themselves*!)

B. Seven Things Churches are Doing to Clear the Pews (7 Sins)

Over the past 40+ years, there are certain things that Churches do that help them make sure that they are NOT ESSENTIAL to the lives of young and old alike...

1. Diluting Biblical Truth

- a. Too many churches out there are watering down the Word of God.
- b. “Well, we don’t want to offend anyone, so I’ll just preach that I’m okay and your okay and God’s going to love us no matter what, so go ahead and live how ever you want.”
- c. Most people see right through that. When our Scripture says one thing and the vehicle that is supposed to live out that Scripture (the Church) says another thing, people see those inconsistencies!
- d. Why do I need Church? They don’t believe what they say they believe! Hypocrites.
- e. “I know that the Bible says that sex outside of the marriage covenant is a sin (“Go and sin no more” – Jesus), but our society has changed, so go ahead...” will make us NON-ESSENTIAL!
- f. Response: “Okay, I don’t need to be part of a Church. I can live however I want and not be concerned about my eternity or what’s best for me here in this life.”
- g. Essential Churches preach and teach Biblical Truth and let the people deal with it.

2. No “Heart Burn”

- a. No Evangelistic Passion
- b. No sense of “I have to tell people about Jesus Christ!”
- c. No “I have to bring my friends into God’s Back Yard!”
- d. Essential Churches follow the Chore List “into all the world”.

3. Not Relevant

- a. I believe that Scripture holds the answers to life. Why do you all walk out of here on any given Sunday thinking, “Stan was talking to me!”? Scripture applies to our lives.
- b. But, we have to ask the question of how we relate the unchanging Truth of Scripture to the ever-changing community that we live in.
- c. If what we do doesn’t make sense to the people in our culture, or is not inviting to them, it doesn’t matter what the Message of Jesus is.
- d. Essential Churches are Relevant to the people in their community.

4. Inward Focus

- a. Dying / Non-Essential Churches are focused on themselves ... how are WE going to survive? How are WE going to make ends meet? Let's do a fundraiser for OUR electric bill so WE can stay open for US.
 - b. ESSENTIAL Churches look outward. They look to be in Mission. They look for ways to serve OTHERS for the Kingdom of God.
- 5. Personal Preferences**
- a. Dying Churches are in constant conflict over personal preferences.
 - b. Dying Churches forget their purpose as a Church of God's Mission in the World and argue about who was supposed to clean the coffee pots last, I don't like the worship music, what the pastor is wearing, etc.
 - c. ESSENTIAL CHURCHES keep the minor things minor and major things MAJOR!
- 6. Comfort**
- a. Churches that are NOT ESSENTIAL have a tendency to do the things that they have always done. They know how it's going to go. Dying Churches are not comfortable with people that do not look or act like them attending their church functions.
 - b. ESSENTIAL Churches push out of their comfort zone and try new ministries to reach people that are the least and the lost for the Kingdom. That is messy work!
 - c. ESSENTIAL Churches are willing to be uncomfortable personally in order to build the Kingdom of God (chores)!
- 7. Not Knowing Scripture**
- a. Too many churches out there that do not give sound Biblical Teaching.
 - b. When people don't know Scripture, they cannot live the way God teaches us to live.
 - c. They do not then experience any transformation in their lives. Then, church is not ESSENTIAL!
 - d. ESSENTIAL Churches teach and preach God's Word as God's Word and people's lives are transformed. Then those people have something to share with others.

II. We Are Losing the Battle!

- A. Some people think of Church as a competition. "Well, it's hard to compete when there are so many options on Sunday mornings (or Saturday nights)."
- B. Some people think that it's just a case of our society changing and that's just the way it is now. "Every other church is losing members too, so that's just how it is."
- C. This is not a competition; it's a war.

- D. What many forget is that we are told in our Scriptures that we are in a spiritual battle. We are clearly told; even as Jesus was tempted, that this life is a fight ... we just have to decide which side we are going to fight for!

Our Scripture for today is from Ephesians 6. This is Paul writing to the Church in Ephesus about what it takes to be the “Church”.

READ EPHESIANS 6:10-12 NOW!

III. The Enemy

- A. Best way to be vulnerable in this life, is to *NOT* acknowledge that there is an ENEMY that wants to take you down. If, in your mind, that enemy does not exist, you are an easy target!
- B. Keep telling yourself that there is no Satan and you will be attacked when and where you least expect it.
- C. Think 9/11. We never imagined that we would be attacked on our home soil and certainly not in that manner. Who would have guessed that our own commercial airlines would be the weapons used to attack our nation?!?
- D. That’s how Satan attacks ... when we don’t expect it and in ways that we don’t think we are vulnerable!
1. Satan knows your weaknesses better than you do.
 2. And, Satan, being the “father of all lies”, will try to convince you that he doesn’t exist ... that you don’t have problems in the areas that you are weak ... and that you will not be actually sinning if you just do this little thing or that little thing...
- E. Do you know what I never remember hearing before 9/11? The term “Homeland Security” is new to me. Well, as we continue in our Scripture, Paul offers us God’s version of “Homeland Security”.

READ EPHESIANS 6:13-20 NOW!

Why do we need armor if we aren’t going to be attacked? That’s why Paul says that we need Spiritual Armor ... we **WILL** be attacked! **SUIT UP!!**

IV. God’s Armor

- A. BELT = Truth – Satan is a Liar. In order to fight someone who is lying to you, you have to be armed with the Truth. Guess who said, “You will know the Truth and the Truth will set you free”?
- B. BODY ARMOR = “Righteousness” or in a Right or Good relationship with God – The Body Armor covers all of our vital organs ... heart, lungs, etc. If we are living the way God wants us to, we are covered. If not, we are vulnerable.

- C. SHOES = Peace from Good News – two meanings here: 1) Peace comes when we are in a Good Relationship with God, but, also, 2) The shoes remind us to GO and tell others about God as well. The person with the most Peace is the one who is living AND sharing the Good News of Joy HERE and Eternity THERE through a faith in Jesus Christ.
- D. SHIELD = Faith – In order to stop the attacks of Satan ... lies, hateful thoughts about other people, doubts, desires to sin, gossip, worry, “it’s all about me, etc. ... we have to have Faith that what we believe is real. In Paul’s time, war shields were 2x4 feet and interlocked with the shield of the soldier next to you. A great reminder that there are times that we need each other to support our faith.
- E. HELMET = Salvation – The helmet protects the brain / our thoughts. Satan loves to convince us that our logic does not agree with God’s truths. When we know our Scripture, it’s harder for Satan to get us to doubt or pull away from God.
- F. SWORD = Word of God – This is our offensive weapon. The Word of God pierces our hearts spiritually, kind of like sword pierces the body physically. Some of you have told me, “Stan, you were talking right to me today.” That’s God’s Word ... it sometimes hits us like a ton of bricks!
- G. PRAYER (vs. 18-20) = Now that we have armor and a good weapon, how will we fight? With the strength and energy that comes from calling on God’s power through prayer! Pray always and stay alert ... pray for alertness to the attacks of Satan.
- H. Why are people leaving the Church? Because we are losing the battle! Many so called, “Christians” are not suited up for war! We have to get closer to God in these ways of faith and Truth in order to win the battle for people’s lives!

V. ***Why Do They Leave?***

- A. These younger generations are looking for something different. There are some things that matter to them, that have not mattered as much in our history.
- B. It’s a new day and we have to meet the next generations where they are at.
- C. What are they looking for?

Next Week: Barnes and Noble, Hypocrites, the Man, and getting SIMPLE. Do not miss next week. We will be finding out direction for our churches that each of us needs to KNOW! Be here!

Let’s Pray!

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