

Sermon for October 11, 2009

BMZ Church

Text: Acts 6:1-7

Title: "Go Deep"

Introduction: Last week I asked if anyone had our church's purpose memorized. I'm not sure if that was a fair question. Here's why: we have not talked about it very much recently. Get ready for that to change.

This is our purpose: "The purpose of BMZ Church is to build a community of faith where the unchurched, de-churched and over-churched can become deeply committed Christians."

Unchurched = people who have never really been a part of a church before.

De-Churched = people who once were involved in a church, but dropped out.

Over-Churched = people who have been part of a church for so long, they forgot why they are there.

We want to work with these people so that they can move toward becoming deeply committed Christians.

Let me ask a question as we start: "What is a deeply committed Christian like?" What does a deeply committed Christian look like, act like, talk like, etc.? If we know that one of the most influential men in history would have converted to Christianity if he could have found any "Christians" that were deeply committed, what does a deeply committed "Christian" look like?

Like Christ ... right?!? If we are supposed to be followers of Jesus Christ and we are supposed to resemble Jesus Christ, what does that look like and how do we get there?

Here is one of my frustrations ... how come people attend church for years and years and years and years (40, 50, etc.) and they are still the same people today that they were then? Nothing has changed. Over-Churched! Is that what Christianity is about?

Ghandi said that if he would have found any "Christians" who actually resembled their Master (Jesus), he would have converted to Christianity. That's huge! If we are not becoming more and more like Jesus Christ as the days, months, years go by, then I challenge if we are really "Christian".

We are to become more like Jesus Christ. Do you know what Jesus was like? Jesus was a world-changer! The people that followed Jesus had their lives transformed and they became world-changers too.

What does a deeply committed Christian look like? A person transformed by Jesus Christ until that person is singularly focused—serving the Kingdom of God with their entire lives ... just like Jesus did!

Now, what is the Church? The Church, as Jesus desired it to be, is an army of deeply committed Christians who are singularly focused—serving the Kingdom of God with their entire lives! Jesus says that we will have the strength to storm the gates of hell and bring people into the Kingdom of God ... reaching out of God's back yard and pulling people into a life of world-changing, relationship deepening, hell-gate storming, unconditional loving, eternal adventure!

There. Now I'm all excited ... we'd better PRAY!

**PRAY NOW!**

Before we go any further, let me invite you to take the insert out of your program. On one side you will find our Scripture for today and on the other is a brief outline of how we are going to talk about “ESSENTIAL”. You will find there are blanks that need to be filled in. That’s your job. Our job is to let you know what to put in the blanks ... listen carefully and watch the screens! When we are done here, take the outline home and refrigerate them so that you are reminded of the things we are going to learn this morning and so that you will read the Scripture again. We believe that in order to grow deeper in our faith that we have to spend more than one hour a week with our faith. For those of you listening on line or Ipodding, you can download the program and fill-in-the-blanks also!

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.

That’s a problem. BUT, it’s not a numbers problem, it’s a spiritual problem! You see, the churches of today (not just United Methodist) have decided to advertise to the world that Jesus came, taught, led, healed, fed, he walked on water and transformed people’s lives and the world he lived in. Jesus suffered and died on a cross and came back to life to prove that you and I, if we have a right relationship with God through the forgiveness offered by Jesus hanging on that cross and dying, can also EXPECT eternal life in Jesus’ Paradise! We have advertised those life-giving, world-changing facts by saying, “BUT, it doesn’t really matter.”

In order for the church (movement ... “go into Jerusalem [today], Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth and tell people about me.”) to be who God wants it to be, we need to be inviting to all age groups, including the generation that comes after me.

How? Four things we are going to learn that the Church needs to focus on to invite back a generation lost and not lose the next one. Last week we talked about becoming ONE like Jesus and God are ONE.

For the next generation (and I’m talking about people my age, 43, and younger) to be willing to come back, they need it to be SIMPLE. Many who were interviewed said that Church was too confusing. If they are going to be part of a Church, they need to know why and how. Here’s HOW:

## **I. Simple Steps**

### **A. *Make it Clear***

1. Clarity of our purpose and our steps to getting there is vital.
2. **What** is our purpose? “To build a community of faith where unchurched, De-Churched and Over-Churched can become deeply committed Christians.”

3. **Why?** To be Life and World-Changers (Jesus' Chore List)...
4. **How?** KNOW GOD. LOVE PEOPLE. SERVE THE WORLD.
5. What do we DO at BMZ Church? KNOW GOD. LOVE PEOPLE. SERVE THE WORLD.

B. *Get Them Moving*

1. In order for people to become "Deeply Committed Christians", they have to KNOW GOD. They have to spend time in Scripture and worship and prayer, etc. They have to get it in their heads!
2. In order for people to become "Deeply Committed Christians", they have to learn to LOVE PEOPLE the way Jesus showed us, whether that is in classes or small groups or serving for Food Pantry or going on Mission Trips; we have to learn to love people unconditionally. They have to get it in their hearts!
3. In order for people to become "Deeply Committed Christians", they have to learn to SERVE THE WORLD the way Jesus showed us. If we are not finding ways to help God's Kids who are in need, we are not experiencing being a "Deeply Committed Christian".
4. If we want Deeply Committed Christians at BMZ, we have to move them through these three areas ... have to do **all three** in order to transform the world the way Jesus did!
5. This movement can start with any of the three ... SERVE THE WORLD = we are going to go to Kentucky to rebuild houses. Want to go?!? KNOW GOD = Want to come to worship/Bible Study/Wednesday Night Sunday School with me? LOVE PEOPLE = We know that we have to be in relationship with other Christians to grow in our faith through classes or small groups or sharing book marks...
6. If people are not moving and growing, then they are the same person in 40 years and still have not been affective in serving God's Kingdom.

C. *Line It Up*

1. To Keep things SIMPLE, this will have to be used in all ministry areas of our church ... Sunday School, BMZ Youth, Man Group, Women, Food Pantry, Missions, etc.
2. All that we do around here ministry-wise has to line up with: KNOW GOD. LOVE PEOPLE. SERVE THE WORLD.

D. *You no lose Focus*

1. One of the problems in Churches today is that they do a lot of good stuff, BUT, it's not the GREAT STUFF that God calls us to!

2. If whatever we are doing as a church does not line up with the WHAT? WHY? HOW? Of what we do here, then we need to quit doing that!
  3. When we are trying to serve God's Kingdom and change the world, we don't have time to be off-task...
- E. *Time for Change*
1. My Dad had his first heart attack around the age of 42. Over the next 17 years, he had 7 more heart attacks. Then, after he had open-heart surgery, he decided to change. He is odd.
  2. Approximately 600,000 people have open-heart surgery in America each year. Each patient is told by his/her doctor that they have to change. Quit smoking. Quit drinking. Change your diet. Exercise more. Reduce Stress.
  3. They are told that it is ESSENTIAL that they change, or they will die.
  4. Do you know how many patients ignore their doctor's advice of "Change or Die"? 90%.
  5. In other words, a vast majority of people would rather die than change!
  6. The Christian Church in America is dying. Would we rather die than change or would we rather change than die?!?

## II. **We Have a Problem**

- A. I just have to make sure that we are clear on this ... of the 18-22 year-olds that dropped out of the life of the Church, 97% said that it was at least partially because of a "Life Change" (job, school, baby, move, new house, etc.).
  1. During that same "Life Change" they did not drop out of their families.
  2. They did not drop their friends.
  3. They did not leave their educational systems.
  4. They did not drop their social activities.
  5. They DROPPED CHURCH LIFE.
- B. Why? Because CHURCH, although it is the only thing in their life that has a lifetime guarantee (eternal lifetime guarantee), is NOT ESSENTIAL.
- C. There is not an understanding that what we talk about here every Sunday is Life and Death for eternity!

So, again, the first thing we need to do in order to lower the drop-out rate and hopefully get some people coming back is to be SIMPLE ... UNDERSTANDABLE ... What, Why, How.

The second thing we need to do is:

## III. **Go Deeper**

Many pastors think that if they water down God's Word a bit, they can keep people coming. "As long as we don't demand too much and keep telling people that they are okay, they won't quit."

Research shows that the opposite is true. Young people want the truth. They want it real! Teenagers and young adults are smart!!! They know when you are telling half-truths...

Our Scripture for today is from Acts 6:1-7. Jesus has lived and died and come back. He has ascended into heaven and left the Apostles with a "CHORE LIST". Peter, John and the other 10 Apostles have been growing the Church in Jerusalem (latest was 5,000 men, not counting women and children). Now, remember, church for them was that the people were all selling their stuff and giving it to the Apostles to distribute among all the believers. Everyone had a place to sleep, food to eat, clothes to wear ... and the Christians watched out for each other and cared for each other as they spread the word about Jesus being the Son of God and the Good news that Jesus is way more interested in your future than your past... but the early Church had people who were complainers too. Listen to this:

### **READ ACTS 6:1-7 NOW!**

A couple of things here: Too much for the Apostles / Pastors to do. They knew that prayer and preaching were very important for the Church. They knew that they were the ones to do that, so they found some other people to take care of food distribution!

Some think that the pastor has to do everything, but if the teaching, praying and preaching suffers, the whole Church suffers. They are important!

Notice who they got to lead the food distribution: 7 Greek-speaking men (same as the widows who were getting slighted!) who were filled with the Spirit of God, were wise and were respected by the other believers for their wisdom and faith!

Now, for those of you who would like to be in leadership positions, keep these in mind ... wise and filled with God's Spirit and other people notice it! For those of you already in leadership positions, make sure you are asking God to fill you with His Spirit and with wisdom as you serve...

Did you notice the result? The job of food service was off the Apostles' plate (so to speak) and they were able to focus on preaching God's message and praying. What happened? "The number of believers greatly increased in Jerusalem..."

Because the people used their gifts and did their part and the pastor was able to focus on praying and preaching and helping people deepen their faith, the Kingdom of God grew just like Jesus ordered them to do!

In order for the church to be resuscitated (it's dying, ya'll), the people have to grow deeper in their faith...

#### *A. The Pastor*

1. Again, it starts with the Pastor. The Pastor has to teach the Bible and give truths in order for the Church to grow (not die).

2. We cannot compromise on the teaching of Scripture. If we water it down, the next generation will skip out!
3. So, here is my promise to you: I promise that when you come here, you will learn something new or be reminded of something you forgot about our faith from Scripture...If not; let me know. Then, I will ask, “If you already know it, how are you living that Scripture out every day?”
4. We have way too many people who think that this book (Bible) is the greatest book ever written ... for OTHER PEOPLE!
5. We have to learn Scripture and apply it to our lives.

**B.** Small Groups

1. One hour a week devoted to our faith is not enough to actually grow into a deeper relationship with God.
2. Try that with your spouse ... “One hour a week to a great relationship!”
3. We have to spend time together in studying our faith and our Bibles. We offer classes. We offer you bookmarks to get together with your friends. Stop thinking about it and DO IT!
4. I am hoping to train for another half marathon for next spring and I will find every excuse in the book to not start training (rain, cold, tired, tweaked my knee, etc.). If I run with a partner, we can push each other and hold each other accountable.
5. Same with studying your Bible. You will find every excuse not to do it ... unless you are with a partner or in a group!

**C.** On Your Own

1. Again, if we are going to truly grow, we have to pick up the Bible on our own. We have to read ... even when other people are not around.
2. We offer you the “Old Testament in a year” scriptures in our program. Start there...
3. We offer you the insert with the Scripture on it and encourage you to refrigerate it and read it throughout the week. Read the scriptures around it ... post the whole series on your fridge and re-read the Scriptures.
4. Read from your weekly bookmarks before you meet with your friends.
5. WHY? Because research shows that when people hear Biblical preaching in worship, spend time studying their Bible with other people and read on their own; the drop-out rate goes way down!

Wow, Stan, that’s kind of dry ... read your Bibles... We’re dying—we don’t want to hear “Change your diet and exercise” either!

Let’s Pray!

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