

Christ Lutheran Church

Share God's Word and Share Christ's love

July 1, 2018

How to grow a church a little, a lot, and all the way. Part 3 of 3

Mark 5:21-43

The pressure was on. The pressure was on for Jesus. People demanded his attention. Crowds swarmed wherever he went. His reputation was as a miracle worker and a healer. The pressure was on for him, because he only had so much time before he went to the cross. It was only a matter of time before he was crucified.

A woman who touched him in the crowd drained some of Jesus energy. Was she slowing him down on his way to heal Jairus's daughter? And did the fact that he wasn't there in time to heal her, mean that she was no longer worth the time out of Jesus schedule? Both the woman with the bleeding issue and Jairus's servants were concerned that they were bothering Jesus on his way to do more important things.

Everyone else seemed to think Jesus was wasting his time and energy while he had better things to do. But Jesus was more purposeful than that. Jesus stopped to ask, "Who touched me?" The disciples and everyone else would have wanted Jesus to keep moving.

As a church we have plenty of work to do on our mission to grow the church and make disciples and maintain our current ministries and find the lost and care for the grieving and dying and on and on it goes with the needs for us to do the ministry. We can do a lot of things to improve our productivity as a church, our stewardship of our resources, and our time management.

Two parables illustrate how God wants us to use our time and energy. The good Samaritan stopped to help a man beaten on the side of the road. The Priest and the Levite were too busy doing ministry to stop.

The other parable that is of interest to us on this subject is the wandering sheep. There was only one lost sheep. But there were 99 other sheep to take care of. Why would the shepherd go after the sheep and lose the other ninety nine. Finding one was not worth losing ninety nine. That's what worldly productivity would dictate.

But we are not of this world. We have a different way of looking at the productivity of ministry. There are some that kind of need Jesus more than others. There are those that need to hear a word from Jesus more than others.

Specifically this woman needed to hear that it was her faith that was vital. Also it was important for the people to realize he wasn't there to just raise dead bodies from the dead. He was there to make a transformation of the person. If the girl was sleeping or dead, it made no difference in the spiritual transformation Jesus was bringing. Her "rising" was part of a spiritual nature.

It's easy to lose focus when we are doing ministry when we start talking about efficiency. I'm guilty of it just like anyone else. For example we have been working really hard on our budget at Christ Lutheran so we can be more efficient with our money. In particular, Christ Lutheran school is a key part of our campus and our main identity in this community. It's easy to get wrapped up in that and forget our school exists to transform the lives of children and parents spiritually. S

The harvest is plenty, but workers are few. In my first sermon on this subject of growing the church we talked about if we plant the seeds of God's Word, God will help them grow. That holds true because God is the one who actually grows the church and is the main part of the action, but there is a job for us to do. It's to pick the harvest.

You shouldn't pick a fruit, or harvest grain, or butcher some beef, if it's not ready. If it's ripe there is no point. Sometimes our focus is on picking, picking, picking until we get lucky and pick something ripe.

Look out for the people who are ready. Notice the person who is seeking spiritual help. Notice the person who does not just have a physical need, but a person who has a spiritual need.

Think about the rich and the poor. Other countries like Guatemala are poor. But 90 percent of them are Christians and they know that physical needs being met for them doesn't effect their eternal salvation. That explains why many of them are so content.

We on the other hand live one of the wealthiest countries in the world. We have plenty of stuff. But there comes a time when people realize there has to be something else that truly fulfills. When that happens, they start searching. And they are ripe for the harvest.

But rich people aren't the only ones. This person, or that person, or whoever it is can randomly show up in our lives in who knows where. Maybe just as we walk along through our busy lives and our busy ministries we might need to stop and do something that seems really inefficient.

We need to be aware also not to cast our pearls before swine. There are people who are not ripe and we waste ministry time and energy by giving them the Gospel. That precious Gospel that Jesus died for our sins and rose from the dead is a unique jewel that we have to offer to the world.

Even Jesus tried to keep some of his ministry to a limited group of people. He spoke vaguely in parables. Occasionally he only brought a few disciples. Sometimes he stepped away from the crowds to do a miracle and to give a snippet of teaching to just one person.

I often thought that the fight against abortion was a cause worth dying for. And it is. Much like the Gospel, promoting life on this earth is extremely important. In our country abortion is literally killing us, not to mention the emotional and spiritual consequences.

So for years I've made a note of it in my sermons. But usually it was just creating a kind of giant guilt trip for women who had abortions. In our town in Ohio we had a magnificent pregnancy center. They had ultrasound machines, provided diapers and parenting training. They help unwed mothers, some who were getting pregnant in high school. Some as young as 13 and 14 years old would get pregnant.

We had speakers at our church that would talk about all the great work that the pregnancy center was doing, and it was quite inspiring. I'd even like to say I had some pretty good sermons about God's forgiveness, not just about moral and physical, and emotional trauma that women go through.

But nothing, nothing was more powerful than having a lady come and speak about how she had an abortion. She talked about how she felt guilt, remorse, pain and even lost the ability to have children because of her abortion. But what was more powerful than anything else is how she talked about the forgiveness she had found in Christ.

She searched and searched for peace and comfort in her life. Someone shared that Gospel of Jesus in her life from one person to another. And our congregation in Ohio stood stunned after what she said. We had her speak after the worship service, because you know that might not be cool for a woman to talk in front of people and preach like a pastor.

After the worship service and after the women spoke one of the men I really respected in the congregation said to me. No offense pastor, but that was the best service we ever had. Ironically, it wasn't really part of the worship service.

At any rate it was one of the most powerful things that happened in our church, and it's these kinds of stories of transformation that make the biggest difference. It's these lives that are transformed that help the church see what they are looking for. If we want the church to grow, which means bring people to Jesus, then we would be wise to find these kinds of people. Many of them are not brave enough to tell their stories in front of a crowd.

And what's more important than these people telling these stories is us finding the people who we can transform. God will transform them when they are ready, and let's be ready ourselves to focus on lives transformed by Jesus and by his Word. If we do that then we begin to see that growing the church is kind of like what Jesus did. He forgave their sin he rose the dead. He rose people into eternal life.