

From the Pastor's Desk

Dear Friends in Christ,

It is a busy time of year. Jr. High Confirmation and Graduation Sunday are upon us this coming weekend. The school year is down to its final two weeks. With Pentecost this coming weekend, we are leaving the Easter season behind us. And with the Memorial Day weekend now behind us, as well, summer has unofficially gotten underway.

Because Memorial Day weekend sends many of us in different directions, it was probably not the ideal weekend on which to bring our **“Joining Jesus on His Mission”** sermon series to a close. For better or worse, that is the way the timing worked out. However, because the conclusion of the series is critical to the process of putting into practice what we have considered over the past couple of months, I'd like to use this space to review on paper the two points covered this past Sunday: the importance of prayer and the role of the “missional community.”

In Sunday's Scripture readings, we were reminded of the importance of prayer. In Acts 1:14, we read this description of the earliest Christians: *All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer.* Later, when the early Christian Church (numbering only about 120 at that time) faced an important decision as to whom would serve as the replacement for Judas amongst the apostles, we read that they prayed about that decision. Prayer was not their last resort, what they did when nothing else worked. Instead, it was their first resort!

In Sunday's Gospel reading from John 17, our Lord Jesus also spent time in prayer at the end of His life and ministry. In fact, the entirety of the chapter is known as Jesus' “High Priestly Prayer.” The earliest followers of Jesus simply put into practice what they had learned from Jesus Himself: prayer is vital to our lives.

In keeping with that, in Sunday's Epistle reading from 1 Peter 5, the apostle Peter in verse 7 invites and urges us also to give everything to God in prayer: *[Cast] all your anxieties upon Him, because He cares for you.*

If we are going to successfully put anything into practice which we have considered in recent weeks

when it comes to going along with Jesus and being everyday and neighborhood missionaries, prayer must be a vital part of the entire process. Prayer should never be something we do only as a last resort. Instead, it should be our first resort. Before, during, and after every part of what it means to live our lives with a missionary mindset, prayer is the single most important thing we can do.

That means that if you would like to begin to live your life as an everyday missionary but aren't quite sure how or where to do so, or if you need the courage to do so, begin by taking those concerns to the Lord in prayer. Similarly, if you are searching for the first step, or the next step, in making a connection with one particular neighbor or with someone else in your life, or if you have started thinking about throwing a party for your neighbors but aren't quite sure how to go about it, simply begin by praying about it. And then see what happens!

In Chapter 18 of his book, Pastor Finke also suggests another way to utilize prayer in the process of being a neighborhood missionary: creating a Prayer Map of your neighborhood. On a map of your neighborhood, simply plot your neighbors, along with their names. Then begin to pray for them by name. If you know them already, ask them how you might be praying for them specifically. If you don't know them, ask them as you are getting to know them better.

The **“missional community”** is an important way, once we have started, to stay intentional and inspired for being everyday and neighborhood missionaries. In Chapter 19 of his book, Pastor Finke introduces this idea in a helpful way:

Imagine missionaries from all across a foreign mission field coming together on a regular basis to share their stories of what they've seen God doing in their respective mission fields. Imagine them having the opportunity to share with each other what they've been learning through trial and error and both what is working and what isn't working. Imagine them receiving from each other things like support, insight and accountability.

What do you suppose would happen? Such gatherings would undoubtedly encourage them, inspire them to continue on, and better equip them for continuing on in their mission fields.

As the missionaries meet, they are well aware, of course, that their mission isn't being fulfilled by meeting together. Their mission can only be carried out in the mission field! However, they also know that without meeting, they could very easily wear out and give up, which makes their meeting together vital to the success of their missions.

Now imagine that similar missionary gatherings were happening, not just across a foreign mission field, but across a local mission field – such as our own community. What if local missionaries came together regularly in the same way – for support, encouragement, insight, and accountability? That is the idea of a missional community.

When we start to see our daily lives as a mission trip, and then participate in such a missional community in addition to gathering for Sunday worship, such gatherings provide an opportunity for us to gain insight and confidence and to share our stories with one another. Such communities help to protect us from the inevitable: getting busy and distracted from a missionary lifestyle, or getting stuck and frustrated. Missional communities reinforce the reality that we need each other.

Pastor Finke suggests that these kinds of local gatherings revolve around five questions (slightly reworded below), which correspond to the Five Mission Practices:

1. Seeking the Kingdom: How did you see God at work this week?
2. Hearing from Jesus: What has Jesus been teaching you in His Word?
3. Talking with People: What kinds of conversations are you having?
4. Doing Good: What good can be done around you?
5. Ministering through Prayer: How can the rest of us help you in prayer?

In the end, however, it all comes down to sharing our stories with each other – the stories of what God is doing in our lives and in the lives of people around us. Our Sunday gatherings around Word and Sacrament are equally vital, of course, to our lives as Christians. Pastor Finke suggests that the congregations who have both vibrant Sunday worship *and* vibrant missional communities are the congregations seeing the most growth – spiritually, missionally, and numerically.

One thing we rarely have the opportunity to do, though, in the context of our Sunday service is to share our mission stories with each other. Our mission stories help to reinforce our mission values. Our mission values, in turn, reinforce our mission practices (see above). Finally, our mission practices help to ensure (by God's grace, of course) that we have more mission stories to share!

Pastor Finke shares in his book that he tells those he trains that if they are only going to do one thing as a result of everything he covers in *Joining Jesus on His Mission*, this should be it: start gathering with some friends and asking each other the Five Questions. When we do that, we become much more intentional about looking for what God is doing around us, being in His Word, and putting our good intentions into practice. And when we hear each other's stories, we become inspired, and we learn from each other – from both our successes and our failures.

In his book, Pastor Finke shares a few helpful do's and don'ts when it comes to missional communities. He also provides some FAQs, such as: How many people should be in a missional community? And who should we invite? And how frequently should we meet? If you haven't ordered a copy of the book for yourself, you may wish to do so. It is also not too late to order a copy through the church office. However, if you'd just like to borrow a copy of the FAQs for reference, please feel free to ask in the office.

In conclusion, maybe one or two, or a few, of you feel that the Lord might be leading you to start such a missional community. As I mentioned the past two Sundays, that has been my prayer since before this sermon series began – that at least one (and maybe more) would begin amongst us. If that includes you, and you'd like to talk it over, please feel free to stop by and ask for some help, and maybe we can figure it out together. Julie and I are going to be praying in the coming weeks about starting one of our own, so we'll be trying to figure out the same things. Or just start meeting, give it a try, and let me know how it's going!

In the meantime, in the coming weeks you are invited to consider sharing your "everyday mission" stories with the rest of the congregation. Have you had an encounter or a conversation with someone you'd like to share? Do you have a neighbor for whom you have been starting to pray intentionally? Are you planning to host a party for your neighbors? Or maybe you just want to start a missional community of your own and invite other members to join you. Share your stories (your failures included!) anytime by sending me an E-mail or by writing something about them and dropping them off in the office. I would love to fill my office door this summer with examples of what Jesus is doing in our lives and the lives of the people around us!

I will plan to continue my summary of *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* next month. Until then, continued blessings to each of you in Christ, our risen and ascended Savior!

In His Service,

Pastor Derek Riddle

Board of Elders

Summer will soon be upon us, at least according to the calendar and the year of 2017 will be half gone. According to the church calendar, Pentecost is upon us. May the Holy Spirit guide us like He did with the apostles to proclaim Jesus' death and resurrection and see the WORD grow in us. "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." (John 15:7) Abiding means "keeping in fellowship with". We keep in fellowship with God when reading His Word and confessing our sins daily, and as we receive the fruit from God that strengthens our faith and gives us a stronger love for God and others. Summer is upon us, and we can enjoy the warmer weather, and the family vacations, and the backyard BBQs. Enjoy your summer, and keep abiding with family, friends, and Jesus.

A little reminder from the Board of Elders to the congregation that it is customary that we remain seated in the pews at the conclusion of the service until Pastor has walked down the aisle to the back, showing our courtesy and respect. Thank you.

From the Board of Evangelism:

On June 10th from 10-4 at the Rogers City Springfest, the Board of Evangelism will be hosting a BAKE SALE with all the monies going to the hygiene pantry. Please, we will need baked goods, so if you could help that would be wonderful. Keep our mission in your prayers....it is such a great outreach program. CARING, REACHING, SHARING, TEACHING....this is our mission statement. This event fits right into that mission statement. God's blessing! Any questions? You can ask any board member.

The Lutheran Hour

The Lutheran Hour can be heard locally on Sunday mornings at 7:00 a.m. on 92.5 FM and at 11:00 a.m. on 1450 AM. You can also listen on-line or via podcast at www.lutheranhour.org. Now you can also download the new Lutheran Hour Mobile App to your mobile device. Instructions for doing so can be found at www.lhm.org/apps/.

June 4

"Filled, to Overflow!"

Lutheran Hour Speaker: Rev. Dr. Gregory Seltz
Isolation, distraction, and pride can lead to spiritual numbness, but Jesus fills us with life that overflows to bless others.
(John 7:37-39)

June 11

"Never Alone"

Lutheran Hour Speaker: Rev. Dr. Gregory Seltz
You can be certain about the place to meet God, His plan of salvation, and His presence.
(Matthew 28:16-20)

June 18

"Look Back, See What God Has Done"

Lutheran Hour Speaker: Rev. Dr. Gregory Seltz
God not only kept His side of the bargain-- He kept our side of the bargain, too.
(Exodus 19:2-8)

June 25

"What God Says"

Speaker Emeritus of The Lutheran Hour: Rev. Dr. Ken Klaus
Are you listening to what "they" say-- or what God says?
(Isaiah 43:1-3)

Stewardship Corner

One of the best known and beloved psalms is Psalm 23, the Shepherd Psalm. There we learn that the Lord is our shepherd. And since He is our shepherd, we will not want. We will not suffer want because the Lord, our shepherd, will lead us to green pastures and beside still waters. In other words, the Lord, our shepherd, will provide for all that we need in both body and soul.

Yet, we often live as though this is not the case. We live as though we actually suffer from want, that the Lord, our shepherd, will not provide for all that we need. And thus, we live as though the Lord is not our shepherd. And that means that we live as though we are not the Lord's sheep.

How do we do this? We do it when we put anything else before Him and His provision for us. When we think that going to work is more important than receiving the gifts that He won for us on the cross, a violation of the First and Third Commandments. We do it when we fail to give generously of the first-fruits of what the Lord has provided for us because we think we don't know what the future will bring, even though He has promised that He will lead us to green pastures and still waters. We do it when we think that the Lord is only in the business of helping those who will help themselves, we do this because we have a mind set on earthly, temporal things and not on heavenly, eternal things. We do this because we have stopped hearing the call of our shepherd, which comes through His Word.

The Word of God is how our shepherd calls us to Himself. Through that Word, the Holy Spirit gathers and enlightens us with His gifts. Through that Word, we are kept holy and nourished in the one true faith, the faith that follows our Shepherd wherever He leads us. He promises to lead you to your true home, to the land flowing with milk and honey, to a better country, not of this world, but a heavenly one.

And so, here's the good news: The Lord is your shepherd still, even, and especially, for wayward sheep. For Jesus seeks and saves those who are lost. He finds the lost sheep and carries them back to the fold. He is the shepherd that lays down His life for His sheep. The Lord is your shepherd. Let us live then as His sheep.

Taken from www.lcms.org