

An Excited Church

Going to Practice

Frankton – 9/27/15

Scripture: John 15.12-17 Jesus chose us to bear fruit

Proposition: We have to GO and Do the five practices to be the most effective at being fruitful.

We're going to see how smart all of you are. I'm going to show you a picture and I want you to guess what it is. I don't think it's too tough; I think you'll get it right off. Don't worry, there will be no grades. No one will flunk and have to stay after worship and clean the chalk boards like we did when I was in elementary school – not that I would had to stay after school and clean the chalk boards. Anyway, back on track. Are you ready to see what this picture is? Ok, here it is. [SLIDE] Can you guess what this is a picture of? You probably want to answer the question with two words: stop light. But then you think for a minute and you remember that if you look in the official driver's manual for the state of Indiana this device is called a traffic signal. What you don't know is this: this particular device has been renamed.

Do any of you know the name Zig Ziglar? Zig was a Christian motivational speaker of quite some renown who died just a couple of years ago. One of his more famous quotes is: [SLIDE] "Confidence is going after Moby Dick in a rowboat and taking the tartar sauce with you." If you get a chance, you should really try to listen to some of his talks. He had a wonderful southern drawl voice and his stories are home spun and remind me of Garrison Keillor kind of stories. [SLIDE] Anyway, getting back to the question, Mr. Ziglar has given this particular device a new name. He has re-named this particular device: a "Go-Light." His idea is that calling these particular devices "stop lights" is just a negative way of looking at things. He thinks we should spend our life looking at things in a positive manner. I think Zig has something here. We do spend an awful lot of our time thinking about the 'stops' in our life, when we should be thinking about the GOs in our life.

Jesus makes it a point to tell his disciples that they are to be about go-ing rather than stop-ping or sit-ting and wait-ing patiently for folks to come to them. The disciples are to be proactive. The disciples are to go and meet and greet and make a difference in people's lives by casting out demons, healing the sick and doing whatever it takes to show God's love and care for all people. [SLIDE] In our verse this morning - John 15.16, Jesus tells his disciples: *I appointed you to GO and produce fruit that will last.* In Matthew 10.7 Jesus says: *GO and announce...that the Kingdom of Heaven is near.* And a very familiar GO verse - Matthew 28.19 – Jesus says: *Therefore, GO and make disciples of all nations....* Jesus calls his disciples to do these things and he calls us to do these things. Jesus calls his disciples and us to GO.

Jesus didn't call his disciples into normal discipleship. Normally a teacher and his disciples would have stayed in Jerusalem, founded a school, admitted only the most promising students, and studied the works and words of the master. But Jesus wasn't normal. He commanded his disciples to scatter, to go to the ends of the earth, preaching and teaching the good news, healing the sick, casting out demons, witnessing about his life, death and resurrection, and living a life as an example to others. Jesus' command ensured that the disciples would go out to where the folks are, not to sit and wait for an interested few to come to them.

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Over the next few weeks, we are going to be studying five different practices of GO-ing congregations; congregations that have taken seriously the idea of GO-ing out into God's world, rather than just flinging the doors open and waiting for the world to come into their church building. These practices were identified by Bishop Robert Schnase in his book "The Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations." In his book, Bishop Schnase, of the Missouri Conference of our own United Methodist Church, discusses the following five practices as imperative for a church to perform in order for it to be successful in its mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ. [SLIDE] They are: Intentional Faith Development., Passionate Worship, Radical Hospitality, [SLIDE] Risk-Taking Mission and Service, and Extravagant Generosity. This church has adopted these five practices as the basis for our work of Building God's Community. We live by them.

In our United Methodist Book of Discipline, our rule book, the mission of the church is stated: to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. These five practices form the core processes by which congregations make disciples. God's Spirit nurtures people and matures their faith through the learning community. God shapes souls and changes minds through worship creating a desire to grow closer to Christ. Congregations offer the gracious invitation, welcome, and hospitality of Christ so that people experience a sense of belonging. And with increased spiritual maturity, people discern God's call to help others through mission and service. And finally, God inspires people to give generously of themselves so that others can receive the grace they have known in Christ.

But these five practices form not only the core processes of congregations making disciples, they also form the core processes for growth in our own personal relationship with God. Followers of Jesus Christ aspire to grow in grace and grow in the knowledge and grow in the love of God. We do so by intentionally seeking to grow into "little Christs" through learning both in our own way and in communion with others. We do so by regularly placing ourselves under the influence of God's spirit in worship. We do so by repeating, learning and deepening our personal practice of gracious hospitality. We do so by practicing compassion for the least, the last, the lost, the lonely and the left out of God's world. And finally we do so by practicing generosity in specific and concrete ways always in response to God's love for us. In these simple practices of Christian discipleship, the prevenient, justifying and sanctifying grace of God becomes visible, real and life changing.

Vibrant, fruitful, growing congregations practice Intentional Faith Development. From the first generations of Christians to the earliest Methodists to the youngest generations of faithful members today, the followers of Jesus Christ mature in their faith by learning together in community. [SLIDE] Churches that practice intentional faith development offer high quality learning experiences that help people understand scripture, faith, and life. Sunday school classes, Bible studies, short-term topical studies, support groups that apply faith to particular life challenges, Kid's Korner, Vacation Bible School, men's and women's groups, camps, retreats, and youth groups are some of the ways churches provide ways of intentional faith development.

Vibrant, fruitful, growing congregations practice Passionate Worship. [SLIDE] God can change lives through our worship service. This can happen in so many ways: a silent prayer where someone cries out to God, an altar call (what I call a "defining moment") to give people an opportunity to accept Christ or re-dedicate their life to Christ, a sermon that so inspires someone that they decide not to take their own life, a song that lifts someone from the muck and mire of

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their days, or just plain old inspiration that helps someone fill up their tank so that they can carry on and love their family and go to work every day. Worship in church should be pleasing to God, who is the real audience for our worship. Passionate worship in the church leads to the fulfilling of our mission together – to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

Vibrant, fruitful, growing congregations practice Radical Hospitality. [SLIDE] Christian hospitality describes a genuine love for others who are not yet a part of the faith community. The Church's members and constituents focus on those folks outside the congregation with as much passion as they attend to the nurture and growth of those who already belong to the family of faith. Christian hospitality refers to the active desire to invite, welcome, receive and care for those who are strangers so that they can find a spiritual home and discover for themselves the unending richness of life in Christ.

Vibrant, fruitful, growing congregations practice Risk-Taking Mission and Service. [SLIDE] Risk-taking mission and service includes the projects, the efforts, and the work people do to make a positive difference in the lives of others for the purposes of Christ, whether or not these people will ever be a part of the community of faith. Risk-taking mission and service is one of the fundamental activities of church life that is so critical that failure to practice it in some form results in a deterioration of the church's vitality and ability to make disciples. When a church turns inward, using all its resources for their own survival and caring only for their own people, then its spiritual vitality dies. Risk-taking mission and service is where we put our work boots on and GO out into God's world to show God's love for them and our love for them.

Vibrant, fruitful, growing congregations practice Extravagant Generosity. [SLIDE] First century Christian communities, the Methodist of the 1700s, faith mentors and models of Christian living today all have discovered a truth as sure as gravity: that generosity enlarges the soul, realigns priorities, connects people to the body of Christ, and strengthens congregations to fulfill Christ's ministries in the world. Generous giving reflects the very nature of God. Those who practice extravagant generosity understand that God first gave to us as a model for us to follow. Extravagant givers don't give because they "have" to, they give in response to God's spirit urging them and in return they get a solid sustaining satisfaction and sense of meaning and connection.

[SLIDE] The five practices are basic and fundamental to congregational and individual strength, but the adjectives used intensifies them toward the unexpected and exemplary. The descriptive adjectives used here are dangerous, edgy, and provocative. Vibrant, fruitful, growing Christians as well as vibrant, fruitful, growing Christian congregations don't stop at practicing friendly hospitality or helpful mission and service or prudent generosity. Vibrant, fruitful, growing Christians and vibrant, fruitful, growing Christian congregations practices are exceptional, extraordinary, and extreme. They are radical, passionate, intentional, risk-taking and extravagant. These very words draw us and cause us to ask provocative questions about our own individual practices and also Frankton First's practices.

These adjectives that Bishop Schnase uses - intentional, passionate, radical, risk-taking and extravagant – they push us to rethink our basic congregational culture, organization and practices. No church that is vibrant, fruitful and growing performs its ministry exactly as it did back in the 1950s, during the heyday of church-dom. No pastor leading such a congregation is practicing ministry as they did in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. Effective congregations change,

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improve, learn, and adapt to fulfill their mission – to make disciples of Jesus Christ. [SLIDE]
The message always stays the same, but the way we communicate the message must change.

People of all ages hunger for congregations that embrace these qualities. They are looking for churches that receive them graciously and invite them in, that connect them to God through authentic worship, that deepen their faith, and that stretch them so as to make a difference in the lives of others through service and generosity. Churches with these qualities form disciples which in turn transform communities, much as Christ transformed communities and our entire world. This church can transform this community through the corporate doing of these five practices. Individually, you can be transformed by the doing of these five practices. Christ modeled these five practices as he went around the Judean countryside changing lives everywhere he went. He calls us to go and do the same; so let's go.