

The Externally Focused Church

The Power of Service

Frankton – 5/1/16

Scripture: Luke 10.30-37 The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Proposition: Service is always about meeting others' needs or helping others succeed.

Today we continue a series of sermons I am calling [SLIDE] “The Externally Focused Church”. Remember, I am using a book of the same name for the backbone of this series. I read it and was totally enamored with the book, and I hope you will be enamored with some of the things I bring to you from the book. We began by defining a few terms. Internally focused churches concentrate on getting people into the church and generating activity there. At the end of the day what is measured is the number of people and activities within the church. Externally focused churches are internally strong, but they are externally oriented. Because they engage their communities with the good works and good news of Jesus Christ, their communities are better places in which to live. These churches look for ways to be useful to their communities; to be a part of their hopes and dreams.

Much is written and spoken today about an “incarnational” approach to ministry – where we move beyond the words and try to embody the message we are proclaiming. When we think of “incarnational ministry,” we naturally think of Jesus – God in Christ’s human body. You have probably heard something like this from the pulpit: “You may be the only gospel they ever see, the only Bible they will ever read, so you need to become Jesus to these people. And that probably makes us feel good to think that we are like Jesus when we love and serve others. In fact, Jesus does talk about incarnating himself in the lives of people. However, maybe not in us.

In Matthew 25, Jesus talks about the sheep and the goats. To the sheep he says that when he was hungry, they fed him; thirsty, they gave him a drink; naked, they clothed him, etc. His followers are confused and asked him when they have seen him in any of these situations and helped him. And Jesus tells them: [SLIDE] *...when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!* [40] Notice Jesus doesn’t say, “as if you were doing it to me” which would imply a metaphor. He says: *...you were doing it to me.* So, it is not those to whom we minister that meet Jesus; it is the ones who are doing the ministry that meet Jesus. Mother Teresa understood this passage very well. She described her ministry and going out and looking for the dying, the cripple, the lonely, the unwanted, the unloved – “Jesus in disguise” (her words). Are we willing to find ‘Jesus in disguise’?

There are dozens of scripture passages that describe God’s heart for the disenfranchised in a community. A large part of the theology in the book of Exodus shows God’s heart for the poor, the alien, the widow, and the orphan. Over a dozen proverbs give us wisdom along those same lines. Several places in the gospels (in addition to Matthew 25 which just mentioned) preach the same sermon. There are passages in Acts and Paul’s epistles as well. Scriptures always inform us of the way things should be from God’s perspective. They give us a glimpse into God’s heart and the kind of heart he wants us to have. When people understand scripture and what God wants them to do, their lives are transformed. Externally focused churches that are salt and light to their

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communities have strong scriptural convictions regarding their ministry outside the walls of the church.

So let's look at one of those scriptures scripture in some detail. Let's talk about the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Most of you know the story. A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when he was robbed and left for dead. Two 'religious' types walk by him on the road, but fail to do anything. Then a third person comes – a hated Samaritan; someone we would expect to check the almost-dead man's pockets for anything the robbers might have missed. Instead the Samaritan felt compassion for him. He went to him and soothed and bandaged his wounds. He put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn where he continued to care for him overnight. The Samaritan then left the innkeeper some money so that the beaten man's care could continue, promising the innkeeper that he would pay anything extra the innkeeper might need to care for the man.

So let's look at this story for just a minute. First of all, the Good Samaritan [SLIDE] didn't avoid or ignore the beaten man. Remember that two 'religious' types ignored the man. Most ministry opportunities that God puts in front of us happen at the intersection of the unexpected and the interruption. The phrase "by chance" is the operative phrase. We may not go out expecting to find a ministry opportunity. In fact, our schedule may be interrupted by a ministry opportunity, much like the Good Samaritan's schedule was interrupted. God puts opportunities in front of us and we get to decide whether to be the Samaritan or the 'religious' type.

Second, the Good Samaritan [SLIDE] offered medical help. With the cost of medical and dental services skyrocketing over the last few years, offering medical or dental help would be a tremendous help to folks who might desperately need it but can't afford it. There are many people who have to make the decision on a monthly basis to buy medicine or buy food, to buy medicine or pay the rent or to buy medicine or pay the utilities. Is there some way we could help provide medical or dental care to the folks in Frankton who need it. Or can we help them another way, through food, rent, utilities, so that they can pay the medical bills.

Number three is that the Good Samaritan [SLIDE] provided transportation by putting the wounded man on his donkey. One of the ways the poor are isolated is through a lack of public transportation, particularly in small towns like Frankton. If folks without automobiles can't get to work or to school, they can't climb out of poverty. Is there anything we can do to take shut-ins grocery shopping or to doctor's appointments? Dave Workman, pastor at the Vineyard Church in Cincinnati says, "It takes between twelve and twenty bumps before people come to Christ." A bump is defined as a 'refreshing encounter' with a church. How can we find opportunities to be a 'bump' for Christ?

The Good Samaritan also [SLIDE] provided lodging and companionship for the beaten man. He actually took the injured man to an inn and stayed with him throughout the darkest hours of the night. I can picture him talking with the wounded man, encouraging him with his words and his presence. Is there something we can do to provide lodging or companionship to the 'least of these'? Lodging may not be as critical in this small town, but certainly companionship is really needed. Can you volunteer at a shelter in Anderson? Can you volunteer for Habitat for Humanity?

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I find it very interesting that the last thing the Good Samaritan did for the beaten man was that he [SLIDE] provided money. And even then, he didn't provide money directly to the beaten man; he gave it to the innkeeper for the beaten man. So much good can be done apart from money. We've just talked about several things the Good Samaritan did, and we can do, apart from money. What folks in need need most is people who care. They need relationships more than money. Don't get me wrong, sometimes there is no substitute for giving money. Particularly if that is the only thing you can do aside from praying. Money is needed to pay for medical expenses (like the Good Samaritan did), heating bills, rent, gasoline for a car, food, and a whole slew of other things.

So those are five ways in which the Good Samaritan helped the beaten man. But we don't know how the parable really ends. We don't know whether the beaten man ever recovered or if he died. We don't know if he said thank you to the Samaritan or not. We don't know if he ever saw the Samaritan again or not. Which leads me to this: [SLIDE] "But what if we serve and nothing happens? What if we do all this stuff for people and they don't respond?" I know a pastor who confessed that one of the hardest things about one of his church's ministries was to do all the work and never be thanked by those they helped. While some might respond to our serving them with gracious words of thanks, some might even be lead to Christ later down the road, there will be some people who simply have no response to your service. That's ok; it's happened before.

Jesus knelt by a tub of soapy water before he shared a meal with his disciples. He washed his disciples' feet, his last recorded act of service before he went to the cross. What did the disciples have to do to deserve their feet being washed? Have faith? If so, Jesus would have skipped Thomas, the one who needed proof of the nails. Demonstrate loyalty? Well no, then he would have passed by Peter, the one who would deny him. Behave honestly? Then he should have skipped right over Judas, who betrayed him for a bag full of money. No, he washed the feet of every disciple because the act was about Jesus, not about them. [SLIDE] Service is only truly service when it is done without the expectation of a payback.

Knowing that only one of the ten lepers whom he healed would return to give him thanks did not prevent Jesus from healing the other nine. [Lk 17.11-19] Healing was what the Father called him to do, whether people thanked him or not. One day Jesus would surrender himself to a hammer and some nails that would pin him to a cross. He would willingly give his all so that all could believe and have eternal life. Did he know that not all would believe? Absolutely! Did that prevent him from dying for our sins? Absolutely not! In the same way, we are to serve those around us, not so we can hear "thank you" but for the reward we will receive from God.

You've heard the expression, "No good deed goes unpunished." It's right more often than we would like to think about. Not all people we serve will respond in a way we would like. Worse yet, some of the people we serve will turn on us. But it's all happened before. If we want to follow the footsteps of Jesus, we must follow the same path he walked. After Jesus healed a man with a shriveled hand, Luke tells us that the Pharisees, rather than being excited, were furious with Jesus and began discussing what they were going to do with him. [6.11] Peter and John were called on the carpet of the Sanhedrin to give an account for an healing a cripple. [AC 4.9] We would like to think that our ministry to others will always result in repentance, conversion, and admiration, or at least a "thank you," but it doesn't. However, that shouldn't keep us from loving and serving, because that is the calling of a Christian.

