

## **WHY DOES GOD CALL US TO CARE?**

**Matthew 25:34-40**

### **Critical Searching Inquiries Series**

**October 21, 2012**

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One of the most convicting and often true accusations against the church by those outside the church is that we care more about ourselves than about the needy in this world. The accusation that our Christian message is mainly lots of nice words and lots of nice music with very little action, and effort, to actually live out the message of Jesus.

So many look at a church like ours with a beautiful building and surmise that all we really care about is having a beautiful space for our children, or a beautiful kitchen and fellowship hall for us to have more comfortable conversations with our friends. It is easy for those on the outside to accuse us of just investing in ourselves.

In many cases of course these accusations are true. Churches have way too often been more concerned about themselves than they have about others. Oh, some may give benevolence and mission money away to help certain causes—and yet if there are no measurable differences or specific daily actions by the people in these churches.

If there is no concerted effort for the members to reach out in care and service beyond their church then even their giving of money is suspect. The only true gauge of whether the message of Jesus is actually touching people's hearts is if people are concretely putting their faith and words into action.

This is why Messiah's Church Council these past couple years has taken some positive steps to strengthen the mission outreach of our congregation. We sincerely want mission and care for others to come from the very heart of our church.

A little over a year ago Messiah was awarded a community outreach economic grant from Thrivent. As a congregation we in turn raised matching funds which multiplied this money to more than \$13,000. It was a congregational goal we all met together.

The result has been that this grant money has empowered Messiah to help start the Hoffman-Kensington Food Shelf here in town. It has also allowed our congregation to provide help for needy families where their water or other utilities would have been shut-off.

Messiah also provides support to TeachHaiti and just recently sent the \$1,000 raised by serving the three Farmers' Market meals to the ELCA Malaria Project. These two are very important missions which support our brothers and sisters in foreign lands.

Messiah also has a very active Stephen Ministry which provides wonderful lay-caring ministry to many individuals; an active group of quilters who make beautiful quilts for missions; care kits assembled and mission money from our WELCA; and youth mission projects like serving food in a homeless shelter.

Yes, we still have a long way to go before we are the caring and mission centered church that Jesus calls us to be. Yet as we keep God's Word of truth at the center; as we keep allowing the Holy Spirit to grow our faith and lives of service our life together will always be more outward focused rather than focused inward on ourselves.

So the Critical Searching Inquiry today is, "Why Does God Call Us to Care?" Why is it so important that we be a caring and mission centered congregation? What are some important lessons the Bible teaches us about the importance of putting our faith into action?

The first reason this is so important I believe is because mission outreach gives glory to God. Jesus said in Matthew 5:16: *"Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."*

The reason and motivation for which we are to care for others is so that our example points people to Jesus Christ. We are to be his light, his reflection to others. Our love and care is to be seen and experienced by others as something where we want God to get all the credit; where we want him to get all the glory and not ourselves.

We live in a time of course when increasing numbers of people simply live for themselves. Some people's whole motivation is to be the star athlete, the star performer, the star business person, the star parent, the star volunteer. Much of our world today is focused on personal gain, personal success, on personal glory—to be America's idol.

This is why the message of Jesus and of putting our Christian faith in action is so radical. To live a life of service for others; to give up one's personal gain for the sake of another; to share one's time, one's money, one's talents simply so that God may be glorified is a powerful witness to our world today.

In other words, our prayer at Messiah should be as we seek to grow our mission that God be glorified in everything that we do. It should not be about how wonderful Messiah is or about certain lay volunteers who go above and beyond the call of duty.

Rather our prayer is that people see Jesus in us. Our prayer is that they say, "Wow, look at how much they love others." Our prayer is that Jesus and his Holy Spirit may permeate this place. That people may say, "Wow, God is certainly doing great things in and through this church."

The second reason God calls us to care is because all people are created by God and because we can experience Jesus in each person. Jesus said in Matthew 25:40, the scene of the final judgment, *"Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."*

It has been so easy over the years for church people to think that if they just worship God once in awhile; if they simply read their Bibles and pray periodically; if they simply give some money in the offering plate that then they will surely go to heaven when they die. This is the popular idea that being a Christian means just going through the motions.

And yet Jesus makes it very clear that for a saving faith to be real it will be lived out in feeding the hungry, in clothing the stranger, in visiting the sick and those in prison. It is in going and doing hands on caring that you will be able to see Jesus in these people.

The interesting thing about Jesus' words in Matthew 25 is that the righteous believers don't even realize the care they have given to others. They seem perplexed, *"When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?"*

The truth is that those who know Jesus in their hearts by faith, and who have been touched by his love, live lives of care and love for others simply as part of who they are. They aren't doing caring deeds to try and earn their way to heaven or to prove they are good people.

Rather they love because Jesus first loved them. They care because they want to care, not because they feel they have to. They care because they see each person as being God's special creation and they want each person to know the love, and new life of Jesus, in their hearts.

May our prayer at Messiah be that we as people treat every person no matter what the color of their skin, no matter where their life is at, no matter whether they have AIDS or another disease—no matter what their situation is may we treat them as we would treat Jesus. Jesus died and loves every person.

The third reason God calls us to care is because God created us to love and serve others. And if we don't we are the ones who suffer the most. In other words, the reason we need to give of our time, and money, and need to care for others is not just for God's glory or to help people.

Rather God built into each of us the need to live for others. God has given each of us different gifts and talents, and different financial means, so we can carry out his purpose for our lives. God has a special plan and purpose for each one of us.

That is one of the main reasons so many in our country today are sad, lonely and frustrated with their existence. The more we as people focus mostly on ourselves, on our own insecurities, on our own happiness the more life is lacking in meaning. No matter how much stuff we have or how many opportunities there are it never seems to be enough.

It has been said that if you ever are feeling sad, or frustrated, or down about your life go and do something loving for someone else. If you're ever feeling sorry for yourself or if you ever feel like no one loves you go and do some loving things for another person.

Love is not a noun, it is a verb. It is an action word. And it is true that feelings most often follow actions. The fact is that when you do something loving for another; when you serve and help someone in need; when you live a life of care and help you discover the joy and love that God wants you to have each day.

God calls you to care because it is an essential part of how God created you. If you try to live by the promises of this world your life will always be flat. But to live a life of caring, giving and serving you will discover the abundant life Jesus came to give all who will follow him.

My friends, those outside the church are often right when they accuse the church of lots of talk and no action. May we however at Messiah Lutheran Church be a church centered in mission, care and love for others. May we truly reflect and shine forth the love of Jesus...and may we always give God all the glory.