

MESSIAH'S MISSION FOCUS PART 1
Matthew 28:16-20

October—Mission Introduction Month
October 5, 2014
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Beginning today and throughout the Sundays of October we will be introducing Messiah's new Mission Focus. This mission focus is not the same kind of mission statement Messiah has done in the past—where we debate over and have lots of words; where no one can remember and recite it; where it is not used very much.

Rather, Messiah's new Mission Focus which was developed by our Vision Team and affirmed by our Church Council, focuses on three words which reflect how Messiah has been doing Christ's mission these past few years.

Therefore this Mission Focus does not send us in some new directions or new visions. Rather, it defines and firms up where God's Holy Spirit is seeking to move us forward in ministry and outreach.

Have you ever tried to use a magnifying glass to start a paper or some leaves on fire? If you hold the magnifying glass in the sun and try to reflect the light everywhere it does not even make these things warm much less start them on fire.

Yet if you capture that sunlight and get it focused like a laser on a small pinpoint the power generated has the energy to start these leaves and paper on fire. A laser focus on one area has the energy to start a flame that can grow into a major blaze of power and possibilities.

The same thing of course is also true in the mission of Christ's Church. If we narrow our mission focus as to what God is calling us to do; if we allow the Holy Spirit to laser focus our efforts for Jesus Christ, it has the power to set a church on fire with new life and transformation power.

One of the problems with most churches today is that their mission statements and focus is way too broad. They often want everyone's words and input so it ends up with too many words; they often want it so politically correct that it doesn't say anything at all; they make it so broad that their committees and people are focused in too many places and are not unified together.

Messiah's new Mission Focus is a laser focused mission centered firmly in Jesus Christ's Great Commission and Great Commandment. Jesus' Great Commission is to *"go make disciples of every nation, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And lo I am with you always to the very end of the age."* (Matthew 28:16-20)

Jesus Great Commandment of course is where Jesus said, *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind; and love your neighbor as yourself."* Jesus' Great Commission and Great Commandment are not optional for us as his followers—these are his marching orders for his church and for all who seek to follow him by faith.

Now a sentence which gives meaning to our three Mission Focus words is: “A Spiritual Journey Through a Jesus Filled Life.” Messiah’s mission affirms that each one of us is on a spiritual journey. This also means that each one of us is also in a different place as far as that journey.

We may be a long time believer; a new believer trying to figure things out. We may be skeptical, questioning, going backward in our journey, or perhaps have even tried to run away. We may feel at home and connected in this church or may feel disconnected and like an outsider.

A Jesus filled life is like that. We are all at different places. The good news of course is that Jesus knows that, expects that. He is there to walk with you and me wherever we are at in that journey. He wants to help us, guide us, lead us each day.

So the first word in Messiah’s mission is “Seek.” One major truth today is that every person is seeking for something, or something(s), in their lives. Some may be seeking for happiness, friendship, for security and a comfortable lifestyle.

Some others may be seeking deeper things like purpose, meaning, hope, love, faith. While others may be seeking to be a good Mom or Dad, a good child or family member, a good employee, a good supervisor, boss, business owner.

All of us are seeking for some certain things for our existence. This is also true in a church like Messiah. We are all at different places in our spiritual journeys, and we are all seeking for different things. Each one of us is uniquely created by God, and each person we as a church are seeking to reach out to is also uniquely created by God.

Therefore it is when we realize and acknowledge this, when we lift up and affirm that Messiah’s mission is to be a church that welcomes those who seek and are seeking, this word has the power to positively shape our mission and ministry for many years to come.

One of the major truths about churches like Messiah through the years is that they have not always been very open to the seekers among us. In fact, there has often been a kind of arrogance in churches that we have the right doctrines; the right hymns, music and worship; the right kind of trained clergy and organizational structures.

I heard someone say one time that our arrogance as churches has sometimes said: We have the right liturgy, worship, textual preaching, Scandinavian heritage, ways of doing things—so if you don’t like it the way we do it, you can lump it.

The problem is that people have been lumping it by the droves. Our denomination is losing members by the hundreds of thousands each year; our Sunday School enrollment in the ELCA is down 60% and our worship as a denomination is down 54% from 1990-2010.

Yet some continue to feel that the problem is everyone else’s—like the contemporary and newer churches that are growing very fast; like people who just don’t appreciate like they should 18th Century liturgies, classical music and instruments; like people who don’t know that they should like this because we like it, grew up with it, or whatever.

Change is very difficult in church—especially for pastors, for theologians, for classical music lovers, for those who grew up with it—these people often have the most difficult time with change because there is a security with doing it the way we have always done it.

Yet when our Mission Focus begins with the word “Seek” it means that we need to affirm and welcome seekers whoever they are. This can be messy because those who seek are not just content with doing things the way it always has been done. And if we are going to reach new people for Jesus Christ; if we are going to allow the Holy Spirit to make new disciples; if we are going to love our neighbors as ourselves we have no choice but to be sensitive to the seekers.

Charis and I listened recently to an Andy Stanley lecture where he challenged us to think about what barriers in our churches are keeping people out? What are those things which someone seeking today would see as a roadblock to coming to our church; to getting involved in our congregation; to being open to hearing the message of Jesus Christ?

Oh I know churches often say they need to be friendlier and more welcoming with better signage—and that is true. Yet what about the roadblocks of hymns and music that they don’t relate to; the robes and ancient liturgies; the preaching that may be dull and not relevant to where they are at; the challenge of getting involved in a place where everything makes them feel like an outsider?

An exercise Andy Stanley suggests is that those of us who are active in the church take a paper and pen, sit in church on a Sunday or whenever, think about and write down all the things we can think about that may be barriers for people coming to our church for the first time.

I know it is hard, but try to imagine you are someone who has never been to church, or who dropped out of church many years ago, or who came out of a different church or denominational background, or who are a youth or young adult. How do you think they would feel at Messiah?

What questions or concerns might they have? What things do we do that might make no sense to them? What barriers and hurdles may seem overwhelming to them if they were to try and connect with our congregation? What are some positive things we do that may spur them on to want to come back again?

Jesus’ Great Commission to “go make disciples,” and Great Commandment to love God and love our neighbors as we love ourselves, should cause each of us to be concerned about these things. Our mission for Christ calls us to do whatever we can so more and more people will come to know Jesus and their Lord and Savior.

“Seek...A Spiritual Journey Through a Jesus Filled Life.” At Messiah the first word in our Mission Focus will empower us in everything we do to think about those who seek and are seeking. Whether it be worship, children’s & youth ministry, fellowship groups, outreach—how can we share Jesus’ love with those around us who seek?

Next Sunday I will discuss the second word in Messiah’s Mission Focus. Please join us as we unite together in our spiritual journey through a Jesus filled life.