

MESSIAH'S MISSION FOCUS PART 3
Matthew 22:37-39

October—Mission Introduction Month
October 19, 2014
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These Sundays in the month of October we are introducing Messiah's new Vision/Mission Focus. The first word is "seek;" the second word is "connect;" the third word which I will explain more about this morning is "impact."

"Seek – Connect – Impact...A Spiritual Journey Through a Jesus Filled Life." This is Messiah's vision/mission as the Holy Spirit leads us forward in the days to come. If I were to ask each one of you personally this morning why you go to church, or why you are a member of this church, it is obvious that your answers will most likely vary greatly.

Some of you may worship and are involved in this church because that is what you have always done. Life for you from the time you were a child has always included weekly worship and faithful church involvement.

Others of you may come to church because you think you have to attend if you hope to go to heaven someday; you may like the music and really like singing in the choir; you have some family and friends you like to be with; perhaps you feel like your spouse or parent(s) make you go; perhaps you have never really thought about why you are part of the church.

One of the major changes in our society these past 50 years is that going to church and being a member of a church is just not seen as being as important as it perhaps was when some of us were growing up. Also, increasing numbers of people today grew up in homes where they never went to church; or where they went mostly on Christmas and Easter.

Some may have had a bad taste in their mouth after feeling forced by a parent to attend confirmation or to attend church. Some others may have been turned off by the music; the lack of energy; by being bored through sermons; by church infighting and complaining.

Yet the most common reason today for not going or being part of the church is that increasing numbers of people see no purpose in it whatsoever. They have been to church and it hasn't done anything for them. Their lives are very busy and they don't believe going to church is worth the time and effort it takes.

The whole process of sitting, standing, sitting, standing; singing hymns they don't know or relate to; singing liturgical responses which they don't understand so they sit in silence; seeing a pastor in a funny robe and funny collar; hearing a sermon where the pastor uses all kinds of theological words they don't understand; reading confessions and prayers together in a monotone way like certain cults do—it just doesn't speak or make sense to them; it is not relevant to their needs.

This is why the vision word "impact" is so important. The church today needs to offer an environment where one's faith in Jesus is growing stronger, and where one's faith empowers them to make a positive impact in their relationships with friends; in their marriages and families; in their work; in the community.

Too often people don't see any relationship between worship on weekends and their daily lives the rest of the week. Too often people see no correlation between the ancient liturgies and philosophical sermons, and their Monday through Saturday lives filled with questions, relationship challenges, financial struggles, health concerns.

This is why I believe some of the fastest growing churches in America today focus on relevant Bible teaching messages in regular message series (like Messiah). You may be interested that where many mainline churches have now gone to having what they term 10-12 minute homilies (short sermons), most fast growing churches today have 30 minute teaching time messages.

When I was in seminary one of my preaching classes talked about how, with the advent of TV, people can't listen or concentrate more than 8-minutes before a commercial. Therefore some thought 10 minute sermons (McChurch—give them a small nugget) is enough and would bring in droves of people—it hasn't. I grew up with sermons always being 20-25 minutes, and that is how I have always preached throughout my ministry.

A neighboring church to my previous congregation in Shoreview is called Eagle Brook Church. In just a few years this church now has four campuses with more than 15,000-20,000 people worshipping each week—many of them young families with kids.

Why do you think a church like Eagle Brook, and many others like it, are growing in amazing numbers when most mainline churches are barely holding their own; while many are shrinking or closing their doors? Why are many people of all ages leaving their traditional churches; why are many who have not grown up worshipping regularly attending these churches?

One reason I have heard many times from those I have visited with who are now attending this church (churches like it) is the relevant teaching messages they hear each week; messages which apply the Bible to real daily needs and concerns; messages which help people learn how they can better know and live their faith in Jesus during the week; messages which help people to actually make an impact at work, at home, in the community.

The pattern at these churches is pretty uniform—30 minutes of worship (often a band leading) and a 30 minute Biblical teaching message on the theme for that day. People often bring their Bibles and many of them tell their friends.

Needless to say it is a powerful invitation when someone shares with another how their life has been impacted at their church, and how it is now impacting and blessing their marriage; their parenting; their financial decisions and plans; their moral behaviors and choices; their joy, happiness and purpose in living. Wouldn't each one of us like our church involvement and faith to impact these same areas in us?

Recently I received a Facebook post from a young family who used to go to my previous church about a new series of messages coming to Eagle Brook this fall. This family is very excited about what they will learn; they are excited to want to go to church; they are telling others.

The interesting part of this story is that I conducted their wedding about 10 years ago. From the outset the husband refused to go to church except for the baptisms of their children, and for a holiday like Christmas. He didn't grow up with it; he thought it makes no sense whatsoever.

A few years ago, however, this wife (grew up very strongly Lutheran) began going to Eagle Brook. She kept encouraging her husband to go and finally he relented and did. This church's music band (present day music he could relate to) and relevant teaching messages spoke to him—it wasn't like his other church experiences. God impacted his life and he is now impacting many areas in his own life as he faithfully worships each week. (My Dentist Story)

Now it is important to note that this is also happening in some Lutheran churches and those with Lutheran backgrounds: Hosanna in Lakeville; Lutheran Church of Hope in West Des Moines, IW; Rejoice (my oldest son Zachary's church) in Northfield; Alleluia in Naperville, Ill; Hope Lutheran in Fargo with two campuses; Messiah in Hoffman; and many others.

Now one of the problems with this is that lots of pastors and mainline church people like to rail against these kinds of churches. Some want to stand firm in how we have the right liturgy; the right hymns and music; the right textual preaching; the right theology. They claim these churches are "church light." Yet people keep leaving and these other churches keep growing.

One of my firm beliefs through the years is rather than rail against these other churches we should be learning from them. And rather than digging in our heels to preserve past traditions and ways of doing things, we need to be open to new ways of doing worship; of preaching messages; of equipping and empowering people.

Messiah's mission is to be a church where people know it is okay to seek and not simply like the ways it has always been done (where concerns are listened to and change actually happens); where people want to be here because the relationships and connections are real and helpful; where people feel that being part of Messiah helps teach them to better make an impact each day.

One other thing people often list as to why they don't go to church is because they say church people mostly talk a good game—yet where is the impact, the action? We say we love others—yet in practice church people often condemn and judge others; churches are often filled with fights, complaining and divisions; churches often keep people out unless they agree with them.

Church people often talk about caring for the poor, the needy, people of other races—yet where is the impact, the action? How much do we really sacrifice and give to help others? How often do we use political rhetoric to put the blame on others for their own plight, and then conveniently let us off the hook in caring for and loving others?

My friends, our vision and mission at Messiah is to be a church that doesn't just talk a good game; rather our vision is to be a church filled with grace, understanding and care; a church that loves God above all things and loves our neighbors (and others who aren't like us) as we love ourselves.

Our vision is to be a church that provides relevant worship which respects and uses helpful traditions, yet is learning new music and ways to praise God. Our vision is to be a church with Biblical teaching messages which help people with their questions; their life challenges; in being able to use their faith to make an impact each day.

"Seek – Connect – Impact...A Spiritual Journey Through a Jesus Filled Life." Wow, what an amazing vision our God, through his Holy Spirit, has called Messiah to. Next Sunday we will have a celebration of this vision as we pray for God's powerful leading. Don't miss it.