

STATE OF MESSIAH'S MISSION 2015

Acts 2:42-47

Messiah's Annual Congregational Meeting Sunday

January 25, 2015

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On this Sunday when we discuss and focus on our mission as a church I am reminded of a December 10th football game back in 2006 when the San Diego Chargers were playing the Denver Broncos. In this game running back LaDainian Tomlinson received the ball, sprinted around two defenders and scored his NFL record-breaking 29th touchdown of the season.

As impressive as this accomplishment was it was Tomlinson's selfless behavior after this run that really stole the show. Instead of doing an end-zone dance or the Lambeau Leap, he beckoned for his whole offensive line—those faithful blockers who had cleared the way for his success to join him. With over 67,000 fans cheering wildly he wanted his entire team to bask in the glory.

Certainly I can't guarantee that this same humble, team/community centered and selfless behavior will be exemplified in the Super Bowl Game next Sunday; not every NFL player is willing to share the spotlight with their teammates.

Yet I can guarantee that we will have a super worship experience here at Messiah next Sunday; in fact every Sunday is a super Sunday as we celebrate the love and resurrection power of Jesus our Savior. We will also have a super time of community and love together—wear your favorite team jersey; buy a souper sub from the youth (fund raiser); in Christ we are always winners in that Jesus has won the victory over sin and death. Make sure you are part of our winning team.

Now on this day as we at Messiah conduct our Annual Congregational Meeting at 10:45, and as I attempt to lift up and highlight the state of our congregation's Christ-centered mission, I whole heartedly celebrate how important each one of you, our congregation and faith community, are in making Messiah the vibrant and faith-centered place it is today.

I want to lift up Charis and Becky; each of you leaders and volunteers; as well as each of you who are part of this generous and committed congregation for the incredible ways you have all helped Messiah become the healthy, Spirit-filled and strong church that it is.; have helped our church move ahead with a new mission focus; in many new and visionary ways.

God's Spirit is truly alive and doing amazing and miraculous things in this place. The Holy Spirit is leading us forth in many new and exciting ways. Our future possibilities and opportunities are great as we keep our focus firmly on Jesus Christ; on his Biblical Word of truth and guidance; on his call to a deeper faith and growing mission.

We need to always remember that Messiah is Christ's church and we are his people. As we keep our focus on Jesus; as we worship him with humbleness and joy we know that he will bless our love and outreach to others; in Jesus even greater things are yet to come.

As we remember the example of LaDainian Tomlinson along with the team and community-centered example he demonstrated that day, this morning I will spend a few minutes focusing on the importance of Messiah growing stronger as a community of care. I truly believe that an authentic, caring, and loving community of faith is one of the biggest needs in our area today.

In the book of Acts, Chapter 2, verses 42-47, the Bible lays out the true vision of what Christ's Church and our church at Messiah is to be. It says, *"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."*

"Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts."

"They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

Acts 2 lays out very clearly the mission and purpose of Christ's church. It is to be centered in having awe and respect for God's presence and divine power; it is to have harmony and solidarity in compassionate concern for each other.; it is to be filled with generosity, praise, joy.

Some years ago I heard a lecture by Dr. Gilbert Bilezekian about how the church in the years following the Acts 2 church, lost this essential focus on community. The more institutionalized the church became, with more levels of hierarchy, the more the energy went out of it.

As the church became mostly clergy centered; as people simply went to church, looked at the back of the person's head in front of them and watched a priest perform a rote liturgy, the more the concept of community was lost. In fact, some actually found it as a personal intrusion when they were asked to turn and shake a stranger's hand.

That is why today, according to Dr. Bilezekian, there is a rediscovery that is happening in many churches as they refocus on the real/true meaning and purpose of the church. In fact even our God who comes to us in plurality—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—shows that God is community.

Jesus himself gathered 12 men, a small group to travel, eat and work with him. At the transfiguration he had a mini-small group made up of James, John and Peter. He says, *"where two or three are gathered in my name I am with them."* The focus is on community, on small groups, on authentic care for one another.

Then what was the outcome? *"God added to their numbers daily those who were being saved."* The truth is that church growth is God's will and idea, and the way that growth happens is through authentic community. There is a magnetic force of attraction when we are the community God calls us to be.

It is definitely true that community is a major need in our world and society today, and this also needs to be a major focus of our mission and ministry at Messiah. This need for community is going to only continue to grow as our world spins out of control; as our lives are more and more under the pressure of the economy, of being successful, of being happy.

I read onetime that *"UNICEF surveyed 21 of the most developed nations and measured how kids relate to other kids, spent time with parents, used alcohol and/or drugs, and perceived their own happiness. Tight-knit nations—like Sweden, the Netherlands, Denmark and Finland—ranked the highest when it came to young people feeling secure and happy."*

"The U.S. came in next to last, with the United Kingdom at the bottom of the list." UNICEF'S operating theses was that "stable, supportive family and social relationships are far more important to kids' well being than how much expensive junk they have piled in their rooms."

William Falk of *"This Week"* magazine said, *"It would be comforting to shrug off (this) report as pure anti-American bunkum. But as a parent of a teen and a tween, I cannot. I've seen first hand the emptiness that haunts so many middle class kids. From an early age, they are taught that life is a pitiless pursuit of individual gratification and success, requiring above average brains and above average looks."*

He continues, *"There is no sense of context, or community, or higher purpose. Many (of them) hide their sadness in eating disorders, drugs and meaningless hookups. In our rush to give our children everything, I'm afraid, we have forgotten to help them answer the greater question that won't be ignored: What is it all for?"*

Pastor Dave Stone says that today's kids are saying, *"Will someone please love me? I'll give you my body if you'll love me. I'll take drugs if you'll let me into your group. I'll terminate my relationship with my family if you'll just make me part of your gang."* Please love me.

My friends, this past year at Messiah we experienced the tragic death of some vital people and leaders in our congregation. We experienced some painful feelings of loss in the closing and tear down of the nursing home, and in the loss of some community leaders through such freak things as a debilitating fall.

Charis, our Youth & Worship Pastor had discussions and ministry times with youth and young adults who have questions about life; about their meaning and purpose; about who is God and how can we know him? She has also seen many youth and parents who are struggling with depression; with low self esteem; without any God like values to live by and guide one's life.

What is the answer?...community. Community for children, for youth, for adults. Connecting and community that young adults and parents need to learn so they can provide this example to their friends and to their kids. Adults; kids are not going to learn true caring connecting and community if you don't show it, and model it, in your family.

Seniors need community and care as they face the challenges of growing older. People who have lost spouses need community to help them keep going in life. Singles need community to provide friendship and care. Married couples need community so they can find support and encouragement. All people, all ages, need community.

So the state of Messiah's mission today, I believe, is to continue to develop true and authentic connections and community in this place. This is an important part of Messiah's mission focus: *"Seek – Connect – Impact...A Spiritual Journey Through A Jesus Filled Life."* Many are feeling alone and left out in this day and age; Messiah's mission is to open ways for people to connect.

At Messiah we have a dynamic children's ministry and youth ministry where the focus isn't on fill in the blanks learning; rather our focus is on developing relationships in smaller groups, and on helping each one to firmly develop a relationship with Jesus Christ.

My friends, God has called Messiah to be a church where people, where community and a relationship with Jesus is the center. God is certainly doing amazing and miraculous things in this place. May we work together as God's community so his love will be a magnetic force in this place as well as throughout this whole area.