



Every Church's Mandate – Evangelism and Discipleship

“True North” Series #11

This has been our week of thanksgiving and I hope it was a good one for you. Before we move away from this special holiday and start the preparations for Christmas I have a story for you. It's a story of war and struggling economies, of sunken ships and treasure! And it holds a Thanksgiving lesson.

Florida went through the worst hurricane season it has had in decades and yet Joel Ruth, a resident of Florida, made the best of it. Ruth is a 52-year-old marine biologist who recently found 180 near-mint Spanish pieces of eight (silver coins) worth \$40,000. He found them on a stretch of beach that had been pummeled by Hurricanes Jeanne and Frances, on a slice of shoreline that had been raked back to where it had been in 1715.

Ruth has been watching this stretch of beach in Brevard County for 20 years! Why? In the summer of 1715 close to a dozen ships loaded with gold, silver, precious gems and porcelain from China were headed to Spain and its king, Philip V. Under pressure from the king to bring the treasure immediately to boost a war-ravaged economy, the fleet left the safety of the Floridian harbors even though hurricane season had already started. And history tells how only a few survivors lived to tell of the storm that snapped the ships like matchsticks and sent incredible treasure to the bottom of the sea.

Finding treasure like this takes more than walking the beaches with a metal detector however. What separates those who make the finds and the hundreds of beachcombers who don't is knowledge and patience. “Plus,” Joel Ruth says, “you have to be quick. If you're not out there right away the high tides that follow a storm often dump several feet of sand back on the beaches and the treasure is buried again far below the reach of most detectors.”

We go through storms in our lives. Sometimes it is only during the storms of life that we see things in a way we've never seen them before. And when that happens we have choices to make. We can complain or we can give thanks. We can despair or we can look for treasure. Determining to give thanks in all things – that's looking for treasure!

Today we continue our look at what the church is all about. When I say the church I'm not talking about a building or a denomination. I'm talking about the church as the Bible talks about it. The church is made up of all the people who have been born into the family of God through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for their sins. So this is about you and me! This is about our mandate!

The Mandate

SERVICE (We are here to serve. You may remember the song that was played out by our students a couple weeks ago...“If we are the body why aren't his hands reaching, why aren't his feet going...” It was a challenging reminder that the church is not about US; it's about OTHERS! And if we lose our perspective of service we have lost a grasp on a big part of our mandate.)

FELLOWSHIP (Last week we experienced fellowship as well as talked about it. We shared many things in common. That's what “fellowship” means – “to share in common”. As Christians we are so diverse. We are different ages, we have different levels of education, we are tall and short, we have diverse interests and passions and yet we share so many things in common because we are “in Christ.” We must maximize those things.

We were blessed in the office this week by a card that came. I'll only read a portion...*“Thank you for everything you do every week to keep us all together! ...and to keep us moving forward. I felt very blessed on Sunday to be a part of God's team at Immanuel.”* This person had experienced fellowship – and it's good!)

WORSHIP (Next Sunday we'll talk about our mandate to worship and today our emphasis is on that crucial mandate of...)

E & D -EVANGELISM AND DISCIPLESHIP

Historically these two mandates have had eras where they took on a status of being the Big Two! Sometimes it was to the exclusion of the other three; who can argue with, “What's more important than the saving of a soul?” But recently there has been a swing of

the pendulum back to where Worship, Fellowship and Service have been receiving the emphases they need to have. We just have to make sure the pendulum doesn't swing too far in the other direction because E & D are definitely crucial elements in God's mandate for us as a church! Let's look at some history...

The History

Acts 1:8 – “You will be my witnesses...”

Acts 2:37-47 – “E&D in action...”

Acts 8:5 – Persecution / Philip / Everyone talked...

Acts 10:1ff – Peter with Cornelius (non-Jew)

1 Timothy 2:3 – “God is not willing that any perish...”

The Options

So we see very clearly that God has a passion for E & D and that passion must be expressed by us as well. So what do we do?

BRAINSTORM (Doug Anderson, our consultant with Nehemiah Ministry, told us last week of a church that asked this same question, “What can we do to improve our outreach?” The pastor challenged every department in the church to come up with a strategy and bring it back to a special meeting. They did. He told how the nursery department in this church decided to make fleece baby blankets and deliver them to all the new Moms and Dads with a little card from the church. Is that evangelism? Yes it is. It's preparing hearts that to this point have not been interested in “church” so that they may someday be open to hear the good news.)

Understand Your STYLE (According to a book by Mark Mittleberg, Lee Strobel and Bill Hybels, *Becoming a Contagious Christian*, everybody has a unique style of evangelism. Nobody is exempt from the call to share the faith. But we must not think that the only style of evangelism is the style of Billy Graham. In fact, in the Scriptures we see six distinct styles and one of them is probably yours!)

CONFRONTATIONAL (Peter – Acts 2) Peter laid it on the line in his Pentecost message in Acts 2. He doesn't soften the message. He tells it like it is. And this approach is not

foreign to Peter's personality – that was the kind of guy he was! If this is your style you are probably confident, assertive and direct. But not all of us are made to be this kind of evangelist.

INTELLECTUAL (Paul – Acts 17)
You may approach evangelism from an intellectual angle. You prefer to build a logical case for the gospel like Paul did with the Athenian philosophers in Acts 17. If this is your style you tend to be analytical, you like to debate and you enjoy working with ideas. You have to be careful however to get to the gospel and not make it your goal to win the debate!

TESTIMONIAL (Blind Guy – John 9)
Other people keep it simple. They tell their story. Case in point, the blind man in John 9. Jesus healed him and when he was confronted by angry religious leaders he didn't confront back or give them a logical scenario of the situation he simply said, "Hey, all I know is that I used to be blind and now I can see." If your style is testimonial you know how to tell your story, you're a good communicator and you are able to relate your experiences to others.

INTERPERSONAL (Matthew – Luke 5:29) There's three more... The fourth is the interpersonal style, patterned after Matthew in Luke 5. Matthew just comes to faith in Jesus but realizes that almost all his friends don't have a clue about forgiveness! So he plans a party and invites everybody! He wants them to rub shoulders with the Messiah. If this is your style you are probably have a warm personality, you have a bunch of friends and you tend to focus on people more than you do on ideas. You just have to be careful that you don't value your relationships above sharing the gospel because you can lose friends by bringing up some things they may not want to hear. They still need to hear it!

INVITATIONAL (Woman – John 4)
You may like people but planning parties is not your thing. Instead you love to invite people to stuff that's already planned. (Concerts – Conferences – Church – Whatever!) Our example here is the woman at the well who talked to Jesus. She went back into town and told everybody, "Come and meet this man who has told me everything I have ever done!" You seem to have a knack for getting other people interested in what you like to do. You are hospitable, relational and persuasive! Those are good qualities for evangelism.

SERVING (Dorcas – Acts 9) There's a lady in Acts 9 who, served others by "doing good and helping the poor." People with this style are not serving instead of evangelizing, they are evangelizing through serving. What they do opens the door for the opportunity to share the gospel. The story of a man who ministered to college students by serving Sunday dinner to 20-30 international students per week. How do you do it? I just love them until they ask, "Why do you do this?"

Know your style and then make the most of it! Don't worry that you don't have another kind of style. Leave that to the people who have that one. You make the best of what you've got!

The Stories

The Exciting Stories - YOURS! (My favorite part about preaching on E & D is the story! It is incredible to hear how God has worked in a person's life and brought them to himself.

You may think you don't have a story. You may think your story is boring. No, there is no such thing as a boring story of salvation. Anytime God is able to find a lost soul and draw them to Himself through the example of a far-from-perfect friend or the foolishness of a preached sermon or a book or the words of a parent or a SS teacher or whatever means He uses it's a miracle. Miracles are never boring!

The CHALLENGES (Acts 14)
Evangelism and Discipleship are not easy. As a church these are two of the most difficult challenges we face but we can't just do the things that come more natural.

At Iconium Paul and Barnabus went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed. But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. (14:1,2)

The challenges are going to be 1) to be effective and 2) to realize that no matter how effective you are there will always be those who refuse to believe!

The PATTERN - Keep IT MOVING (E → D, etc.)

The first church had this as a pattern. They had heard their mandate directly from the Lord Himself. They carried it out and so must we! Let's work to do

what we can as a church – and – do what we can as individuals. And who knows...we may have some great stories to listen to because of the commitments we make this morning!

This message was presented at Immanuel Church of Forest Lake by Pastor Mark Coughlin on November 28, 2004

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