

Living the Commission

August 27th 2006

Introduction:

*What is the most exciting news you have received in the last month?
What is the most exciting news you have ever received?*

- The Gospel – death, burial and resurrection of Jesus and how he now extends that to us.

Tonight we are going to talk about some good news. Jesus died for you and if you are a Christian, he expects that the news about his resurrection will not stay in our hearts but will be told by us to others. God's commission to reach the lost was not to a few men 2000 years ago but is also for us today. Let's look at Matthew 28:18-20 and discuss how this passage impacts our view of evangelism.

Text:

Read Matthew 28:18-20

The Commission:

Jesus gave them and us a command, to "make disciples."

What things does Jesus say need to happen for us to make disciples?

- To go to them, to baptize them, and to teach them.

What promise does Jesus make to his disciples in verse 20?

- To always be with them even to the very end.

In what way is his promise in verse 20 tied to his commission in verse 19?

- It empowers and encourages us to do what he says to do because we won't be doing it alone – he will be with us. God made a similar commission and promise of his presence in his call of Jeremiah (Jer 1:6-9).

What does Jeremiah have to say about God's providing all we need to do what he says?

In what way does Jesus' promise bring us comfort in our commission?

- In his presence and by his power we can do anything (Romans 8:28).
- His promise to be with us brings us a renewed comfort that when we talk to others about him, we are about his

business here on earth. There is no more comfortable place to be than with him.

What added significance is given to Jesus' words in Matthew 28 due to the fact that they were some of Jesus last words?

- You don't normally have much small talk for your last words.
- Parting words are normally the things you wish for someone to hear the most. Therefore they carry a great amount of weight.

How has Satan used our comfort as a barrier to evangelism?

- Often we do not want to compromise our comfort. Evangelism is often viewed as an uncomfortable situation because you are dealing on the deepest level of someone's life.

Jesus' Mission:

There is no doubt that God has a great amount of love for us. It is evident in who he made us to be and how far he has been willing to go to redeem us from our sin. Jesus' mission on earth was to make our relationship with God right through the shedding of his perfect blood (Hebrews 9:15). His resurrection from death was an invitation for us to share in this new life (Romans 6:1-6).

Jesus' Model of Evangelism:

We want to look at **three areas** of Jesus model of evangelism and talk about how we can implement them in our own lives so we can fulfill his commission for us in Matthew 28.

Jesus' Model of Evangelism:

- It was Sufficient
- It was Relational.
- It was about Service

It Was Sufficient:

Before anything else we must realize that what Jesus did on earth was sufficient to save people from sin. If we do not realize that, nothing else will matter.

Read Hebrews 10:11-15 [Note: In verse 12, "this priest" refers to Christ.]

This passages talks about how the Old Testament was insufficient because sacrifices had to be made day after day.

How was Christ's sacrifice different than the priests of the Old Testament?



It Was Relational:

- Christ's was a one-time sacrifice that never needed to be repeated because it was **sufficient** to take away our sins and make us holy (10:12, 16).
- The Old Testament sacrifices were **temporary**, Christ's was **forever** (10:16)

Christ's ministry was relational. He did not stay in isolation to others but he went to them and gave them a chance. He didn't always go to all the nice people either, but even to people who society wouldn't give a chance.

Who are some people in scripture Jesus took time to relate to?

What does that teach us about who we reach out to?

How are relationships with others essential to effective evangelism?

It Was About Service:

Jesus' mission was characterized by service. Service is always characterized by humility as it involves a lowering of self and an extension of grace toward others who may or may not deserve our service.

Jesus had a lot to say about service— Read Matthew 23:11-12

How does this passage flip our upside down view of value right-side up?

- It gets us looking at life the way God looks at life. The people we place on top of the pile are not always the ones God chooses to place on top.

Application:

He not only spoke about it, he also lived it— Read Philippians 2:5-11


How does serving others help us to have an attitude like Jesus?

How does his example and lowering from heaven to earth, spirit to flesh, help us humble ourselves and serve others?

How would our lives look different if as we interacted with others we remembered our calling to "make disciples"?

Which part of the commission (going, baptizing, or teaching) is the most challenging part of making disciples for you in your walk?

- Remember, going does not mean you have to go to an



other country but could mean going to a friend, family member or neighbor.

Which relationships do you already have that could be used to draw others to God?

What acts of service could you do for others that might open them up to seeing Jesus modeled in your life?

Exercise:

This week, take out an index card or blank piece of paper and write down the names of 3 people who are not Christians. Begin to pray for them daily. Pray for the following:

- 1) That their hearts will be softened to the good news about Jesus.
- 2) That you will find an open door to invite them to church or LIFE group.
- 3) That when God opens the door that you will step through it and invite them.

Impacting Through Compassion

September 3rd 2006

Introduction:

When was a time in your life someone showed you compassion?

How would you define the word "compassion"?

Jesus' ministry was one of compassion. One reason he touched people's lives the way he did was because of his willingness to be on their level and to experience their life with them. He was willing to touch the untouchable, eat with tax-collectors and "sinners" and even raise the dead.

Through the story of raising Lazarus, we will explore what kind of compassion Jesus had for others and how we can reflect that same compassion to people in our lives.

John 11:1-6

Text:

What tension was there between Jesus love for them and his decision to stay where he was for two days?

The Situation:

- If he loved them, he would come and heal Lazarus as he had healed all these other people.
- We tend to think God should immediately answer our requests but sometimes he has better things in mind and like Mary and Martha all we can do is wait for his response and trust he will come through.


When have you had to wait for God's answer only to find out what he had in mind was so much better than what you had asked?

John 11:11-13

They understood Jesus literally. John records other times in his gospel people misunderstood Jesus.

- Nicodemus—"born again" (John 3:3-5)
- Woman at the well—"living water" (John 4:10-14)
- Jews in the temple—"you cannot come" (John 8:21-24)

In each example the people understand him literally but Jesus is talking in symbolic and spiritual terms.



Usually Jesus takes time to clarify what he means. With Nicodemus he tells him that the new birth is of water and the Spirit, not physical. With the woman at the well, Jesus clarifies who he is by telling her details of her life he could only know from God. To the Jews in the temple (John 8) he clarifies by saying where he is going is not of this world. In John 11 he also takes time to explain what he means:

John 11:14-16

Even from a distance Jesus knew Lazarus' condition. Only after Lazarus was dead does Jesus go to Bethany so that "God's Son may be glorified" (verse 4).

Thomas often gets a "bad rap" because of his doubt of the resurrection. Here he goes expecting to die.

What is ironic about Thomas' thinking he will find death in Bethany?

- He will find the dead brought back to life when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.

John 11:17-22

How would you welcome Jesus if you knew he had let your brother die?

- You probably wouldn't welcome him with much compassion.
- You would probably be upset, maybe even angry. Four days in the tomb would seem impossible to reverse.

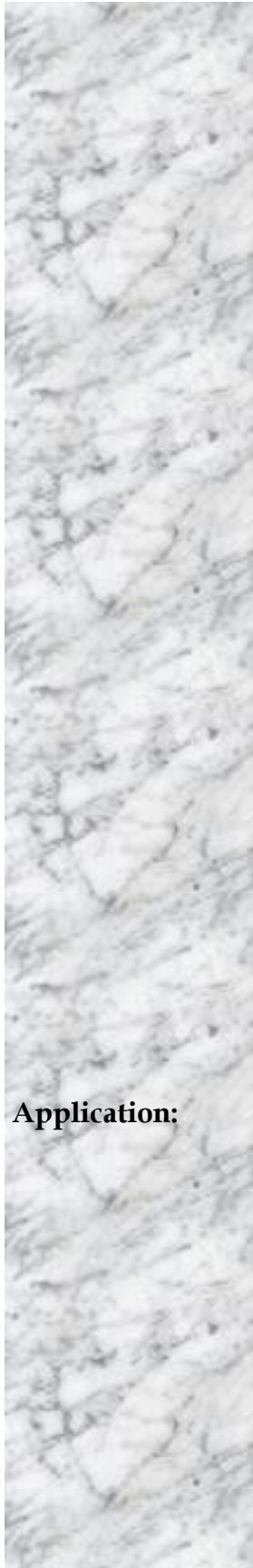
There was an ancient tradition that the soul of a dead person stayed near the body for three days hoping to reenter it. Waiting for four days showed the people Lazarus really was dead with no hope.

Martha was right in saying if he had been there Lazarus wouldn't have died (11:21).

But what limitations to did Martha assume about Jesus' power?

- She assumed he did not have the power to raise Lazarus from the dead.

When in your life have you assumed God couldn't fix your problem only later to find out he answered your prayer?



Under what circumstances have you doubted the power of God?

When are times you had faith in God's ability to work out an impossible situation?

John 11:33-35

How does Jesus' emotional reaction emphasize his compassion for his loved ones?

- Even though he knew he would fix the problem, he still had compassion on them.
- Jesus' weeping shows the full extent of his humanity and his connection with his people.
- This gives us comfort to know he is willing to stand by us and comfort us in our difficult moments.
- He doesn't stand at a distance, stone cold and compassionless.
- He stands at our side, with his arms around us, and has compassion for us.

John 11:38-44

What did the people expect to find in the tomb?

- Exactly what they put in it, a corpse.

How did Jesus' power expand their view of his compassion for them?

- He was willing to do more than comfort them with kind words. His compassion was so strong he would even raise the dead.
- Jesus' compassion for us can help us in our the most difficult situations.

Application:

When in your life has God done something far greater than your expectations of what he could do?

It is clear from this story that Jesus has compassion on us. He is willing to stand next to us in our deepest sorrow and comfort us. We need to have a deeper understanding of the extent of his love for us:

Eph 3:17b-19

The depth of his love is more than tears. It is wider and longer and higher and deeper than anything we can imagine. His compassion is even greater than raising Lazarus from the dead. Everyone Jesus

healed eventually died. He has something better in store for us. Resurrection to eternal life. Because Jesus has compassion on us, he died for us. And through the compassion he had in his willingness to endure a cross, we too will be raised. But unlike Lazarus when we are raised we will never die again.

How does our future resurrection give us hope in our daily living?

- It should help us live more holy lives.
- It helps us live in the expectation that there are better things in store for us than suffering.

We also need to understand our obligation to have the same compassion Christ had for us for other people in our world.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

What are some practical ways we can pass on the compassion of Christ to people in our everyday lives?

How would your life be different if you started showing others the compassion of Jesus?

What specific situation do you need to trust God to work out in your life?

Put it into Practice:

Think of a hurting person you know (loss of a loved one, physical pain, emotional struggles) and find a way to treat them as Jesus would. Let them see the compassion of Christ through your life this week.

Note to Leaders:

[Note to leaders: Please encourage your members to be inviting people to the group. Encourage them to look for visitors on Sunday morning and invite them. We need to get our members in the habit of welcoming and inviting others. As leaders, we are the model for them. If they see us doing it, they will follow. Thank you for all you do!]

Finding Community

September 10th 2006

Introduction:

One of the main purposes of our L.I.F.E. groups is to help people have a sense of belonging and community at Northwest. Being the body of Christ requires connection. Connection requires time of sharing and encouraging as we try to grow closer to God as his community.

Our culture has not fostered community very well. We have learned to disengage from others, to be independent, and to play by our own rules. The result has been community breakdown. Most people don't even realize they lack one of the most fundamental aspects of our identity, who we are in community. This is reflected in a 2005 Newsweek Poll that asked, "Why do you practice religion?" Here is the breakdown:

To forge a personal relationship with God – 39%
To help you be a better person and live a moral life – 30%
To find peace and happiness – 17%
To connect with something larger than yourself – 10%
To give your life meaning and structure – 8%
To be part of a community – 3%
Other – 13 percent

What are some groups where you have a real sense of belonging?
- Church, Family, Social groups, etc.

What is it about those groups that helps you feel connected?

- There is probably some level of investment.
- There is probably some level of sharing or interaction with others

Church as Community:

The church is the most important community we can be connected to. It helps us form relationships that will last forever. Scripture offers us insights into forming deep communities of faith. In fact, the first century church was able to reach nearly the entire world at the time without the aid of all the technological advances we have today. One of the reasons they were able to do this was through connecting people to meaningful communities of faith.

Text:

Just after Peter's sermon at Pentecost, 3000 people were baptized into the first Christian community (Acts 2:38-41). In the very next verse there is a word that is the key to community:

Acts 2:42-47

They **devoted** themselves.

How important is devotion when it comes to the most important things in life?

- It is essential.

What happens to the things we are not very devoted to?

- We tend to drop them as the time requirements of our lives put other things we are devoted to in their place.

Devotion to the right things:

How long would you last if you devoted every waking moment to cheesecake and hotdogs?

- Probably not long!

It is important to look at *what* they devoted themselves to:

- Apostle's teaching (Bible study)
- Breaking of bread (Fellowship)
- Prayer
- Sharing things in common (Giving)
- Time together
- Praising God (Singing)

When these are shared we develop deeper relationships with each other and with God. We form communities of faith people can identify with and feel welcomed into.

Text:

John 15:1, 4-5

How do the vine and branches symbolize a Christ-centered community?

- Christ is the vine and Christians are united in their identity because we are all connected to the same vine.

What is produced by our being in community with each other and with him? Can we do this alone?

- We produce fruit.
- No. We cannot do this alone but only produce fruit when we are attached to the vine.

John 15:6-8

What happens to unfaithful branches that rebel and do not remain in the vine?

- They are thrown away and wither and die.

What does Jesus say shows we are his disciples?

- When we bear fruit

What does it mean to bear fruit as a Christian?

- To serve as Jesus served.
- To grow spiritually
- To help others become part of the vine

John 15:9-17

What did Jesus urge his disciples (and us) to do?

- Remain in his love.

How does loving each other model what Christ has done for us?

- Christ loved us so much he laid down his life for us and he asks us to do the same for each other (vs. 13)

What does Jesus mean in verse 16 when he says we will bear fruit that will last when we remain in him?

- Being a part of his community has eternal rewards.
- We do things that have eternal significance.
- When you serve others, reach the lost, or love your brother you are doing something that has effects that will last throughout eternity.


Application:

What steps can you take to develop and maintain a personal relationship with Jesus?

What steps can you take to develop and maintain a personal relationship with other Christians?

Put it into Practice:

Find a visitor at church this week and invite them to be a part of your L.I.F.E. group for next week. When we see the need for Christian community, we will want other Christians to be a part of it as well!



Note to leaders:

If you have not discussed the Group Covenant idea that is something that should be in place soon. If you need help with it just let me know and we can work it out. If you want to encourage people to invite others, try to always have an extra chair in the room. You can use that as a reminder on a weekly basis that there is always room for more people and to try to fill each chair next week. Thank you for your dedication. It cannot happen without you. God bless.

Encountering the Christ

September 17th 2006

Introduction:

If you could spend a day with anyone from history who would it be?

- Normally someone important historically or someone we were close to. Jesus fits both of those categories.

Ultimately we want to be with Jesus. On several occasions he promises his presence to us. Even in his last words to his disciples in Matthew 28:20 he promises that even after his departure he will be with us. We will be talking about what some of those we find in scripture found when they encountered Christ and how that can be reflected in our L.I.F.E. groups

Text:

Luke 19:1-4

Tax collectors were normally not well-liked individuals. They paid a price to the government and then recouped it through the people in an area, often overcharging for a profit. The people of Jericho had probably been cheated by Zacchaeus in the past and did not have much respect for him.

What lengths was Zacchaeus willing to go through to get a look at Jesus?

- He was willing to look a little silly by running through the streets and climbing a tree to see Jesus.

Luke 19:5-7

If Jesus came to Saint Petersburg, who would he probably spend time with? Why?

- The down and out, the spiritual sick, even people we find objectionable.

How would people today react to that?

Luke 5:27-32

What request did Jesus make of Zacchaeus?

What seemed so objectionable about Jesus' request to Zacchaeus by the people of Jericho?

- They were shocked Jesus would want to eat with such a "sinner"



Responding to the Grumblers:

- There were much more righteous people in town they probably thought Jesus would want to spend time with.

In the story of the calling of Levi, a tax-collector, Levi had a banquet Jesus attended. Again the people grumbled that Jesus would be in such company.

Luke 19:8-9

What was Zacchaeus' response to those who grumbled?

- Genuine repentance and reconciling any wrong he had done.

This response of repentance was what Jesus was after. He was willing to put up with grumbling and people complaining if it meant one of God's children would come home.

When have we found ourselves grumbling about what was God was doing in the lives of others?

How did encountering Jesus turn Zacchaeus' life around?

Instead of grumbling, what can we do to support people who are turning their lives over to Jesus?

Affects of his presence:

What affect did the presence of Christ have on Zacchaeus' heart? How does that apply to us today?

- Being in the presence of the holy makes us all the more aware of our own sinfulness.
- It inspires us to repent and make right the wrongs we have done.

There is a similar instance in the book of Isaiah.

Isaiah 6:1-4

Isaiah is confronted by an encounter with God in the temple. Just the hem of God's garment fills the temple. There is violent earth-shaking and worshipful angels praising God.

If you were confronted with this sight what would your reaction be?

- Terror, fear, reverence

Isaiah 6:5-7

What was Isaiah's reaction to the holy presence of God?

- He was made entirely aware of his own sinfulness and unwor-

thiness to be in the presence of God.

What was God willing to do with Isaiah's "unclean lips"?

- God was willing to provide the cleansing. Isaiah's guilt was removed.

Isaiah 6:8

The presence of God in our lives comes with an obligation. For Isaiah it was a commission to go and be a spokesperson for God. Zacchaeus realized the obligation was to make restitution for the wrongs he had done.

As Christians, we have the presence of God in our lives.

How can a person's reputation keep us from telling them about God or inviting them to church/L.I.F.E. group?

- We often assume people with bad reputations or bad attitudes would have nothing to do with church.
- They are the ones who need it most and are often even the one who receive it the most because they realize their need for something better.
- They are also more receptive because not many people take the time to show them they care.

Application:

What can you do in response to God's presence to serve him more fully?

How can others experience Christ through our lives in our L.I.F.E. groups?

- By loving them, serving them, and being genuinely interested in their wellbeing.

Put it into Practice:

Spend a few minutes each day in God's Word. Remember as you read that he wants you to be in his presence.

Note to Leaders:

You may want to take a moment and review and see what people have learned/how they have applied these to our groups:

L – Living the Commission

I – Impacting through Compassion

F – Finding Community

E – Encountering the Christ