

Sharing and Sowing in 2015/16

Pastor Michael

I love coming together and worshipping like this. I never tire of it. There's a verse about worship that's always intrigued me. David exclaims to God in Psalm 22:3 KJV "But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel." This observation that God inhabits the praises of his people has always gotten my attention.

Jesus teaches us something similar when he's talking about us coming together to pray. He says in Matthew 18:21¹, "For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them." Jesus is promising to inhabit the prayers—the praises—of his people. So coming together to worship our Lord is sweet, and it has merit just in its own right. But something also happens to us when we encounter God this way: he changes us. He makes us more and more the exquisite persons he created us to be! He makes us reflections of his glory and partners in his good purposes.

Bringing in and Sending out

You can think of how God brings us into worship and then sends us out into the world as a circulatory system. Let's say we're the life-giving blood in that system. As we go about doing our work of providing oxygen and nutrients to the larger body and also helping purify it from impurities, we naturally get depleted and exhausted. So the heart brings us back in through the lungs, where new breath, new *Spirit* (which is the same word) renews and re-energizes us to go back out and continue our purpose of keeping the body healthy and fully functional.

God brings us into worship—into his concentrated presence—to give us new breath, new Spirit, so he can then send us right back out to partner once again in renewing a lost and broken world.

Our Purpose as God's People

During our summer series on the life of Joseph, we talked about the purpose God had given his family through his great-grandfather Abraham back in Genesis 12. God covenanted to bless Abraham's family so that in turn all the families on earth could be blessed through them. That promise is ultimately fulfilled through Jesus.

Jesus gathers in all of us who will follow him to bless us as our Lord and Savior. And then right in line with the promise made to Abraham, he sends us right back out to be a blessing to others by sharing his love with them.

This fall we'll be discussing Acts, so let's take a quick peek now to see how Jesus has sent us out right from the start of the church in Acts 1. At this point he's been resurrected from the dead, and he's been appearing to people in Jerusalem

and Galilee for the last 40 days. His apostles are naturally curious what he's going to do next! So they ask him:

⁶ Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

⁷ He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:6-8)

And then he leaves them ... and us! (At least physically.) But notice what he's done: He's promised to fill us—then and now—with his Spirit, and then send us out to partner with him in his purpose of sharing the gospel. He wants us to tell others about the work he's done for us. He's set us free from sin and death so we can truly live in a love relationship with God and with each other!

Jesus calls this partnership in the gospel *discipleship*, and he sums up what it looks like pretty succinctly in Matthew 28:18-20:

... "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Jesus didn't make this call to a specialized priesthood or early clergy in the church. It's his universal call on everyone who will follow him. It's a call to us as individuals, and as a church, and as the universal church across the world and time.

This is why our mission that's stated in the bulletin is simply a memorable summary of the Great Commission. "Timberview's mission is to help people find and follow Jesus."

We pursue this mission to a great extent individually in our own spheres of influence. Remember we saw that Joseph, even with all the weight and responsibility of being the prime minister of a foreign land on his shoulders, just naturally talked with those he encountered daily about his relationship with God. Think about that time when his brothers only knew him as the prime minister, and they were worried he was framing them because he had secretly returned their money for the grain. It's telling how his *Egyptian* servant reassured them then:

"It's all right," he said. "Don't be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, has given you treasure in your sacks; I received your silver." (Genesis 43:23)

Guess who had apparently been talking to his servant about *Yahweh*, the God of Jacob? It's evident Joseph's relationship with God was just part and parcel to his whole life, and he couldn't help but talk about him with others. So whether then or now, we're each ambassadors for God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—in all our relationships.

But this mission isn't just for individuals. It's also taken up by whole churches as well. Again, just to give you a little teaser as to what we'll be discussing in Acts, let's look at what's probably the first megachurch in Christian history in Acts 11:19-26:

¹⁹ Now those who had been scattered [from Jerusalem] by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. ²⁰ Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. ²¹ The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

²² News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³ When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. ²⁴ He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

²⁵ Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶ and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

It looks like Barnabas and Paul (also called Saul) were teaching and pastoring “a *great number of people!*” So this brand-new church at Antioch starts taking root. And Barnabas and Paul become its key pastors and teachers as it grows. The intuitive thing would be to let them keep on growing that church. But what this young church does is totally counter-intuitive:

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” ³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13:1-3)

This new church at Antioch has really grown, and Barnabas and Paul have been her star leaders. If the Holy Spirit hadn't driven this action of sending them out, it's not very likely it would've been considered the smart thing to do!

Barnabas and Paul weren't part of Jesus' first 12 Apostles. But they were still gifted and recognized *apostles*, which is to say they were “sent ones.” That's what *apostle* means: “sent one.” Paul later tells us in Ephesians 4:11-13 (NIV84) that Jesus gives the church apostles to accomplish specific purposes:

¹¹ It was [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

So of all the different types of leaders named here, apostles in particular are people who are sent out to share the gospel and help start new churches with new bodies of believers. They help the unchurched find Jesus in newly forming churches. That was true in Paul's time, and it's still true today.

Research indicates new churches are three-to-four times more effective in reaching and incorporating the unchurched into their fellowship than established churches are. That means if an established church of 250 like ours helps 10 people start following Christ in a year, a new church of 250 people would reach 30-40 people. Now it may take a while to reach 250, but new churches grow 23 times faster than churches over 10 years old.² So this is why established churches need to use their blessings and human and material resources to sow new ones—whether in the early church or today!

From one perspective, apostles are like midwives—they help mature churches have babies, they help the church reproduce. In today's terms, apostles are often church planters. And when you have a willing apostle in your midst, you don't want to ignore God's gift. And when God's not only provided a church with a willing apostle, but also provision in terms of human and material resources for a new plant, you *really* don't want to ignore God's gift!

What This All Leads to

So what this overview is all leading to is an important realization Timberview's leadership has made this year: we're pregnant! We believe God is leading us to plant another church—maybe near Audubon or the lower South Hill—because he's given us a person with both the gifting and passionate calling to plant. And through your faithful partnership in this church this year, he's also given us resources in terms of both leaders from our church and the start of financial provision to assist in leading and supporting this plant.

Now before you panic and think we're losing people who are precious to us starting next week, that's not the case! Plants, like pregnancies, take time to gestate. As you've likely already put together, the apostolic church planter I'm talking about is our own Pastor Pete. Through much discussion and prayer and consultation with our staff and board here at Timberview, as well as with our Conference Superintendent, Dennis Jeffery, and our Bishop, Matt Thomas, we believe the optimal goal for birthing a new church is next school year.

Like the birth of any child and its initial growth and development as a newborn, plants are tough and take hard work and come with inherent risks. Pete has been approved by the Timberview Board and The River Conference through a series of discussions and professional assessments to ensure he'll be an effective planter. And now through the next year he's going to receive systematic mentoring from the Free Methodist Church's church plant director, as well as specialized church planter training, which he'll take part of his core leadership team to as well. Together they'll be developing a larger plant team, which will include some new life groups that are interested in exploring the possibility of joining this plant.

And, of course, we'll also need the next year to grow here at Timberview and develop new replacement leaders, especially in regard to finding a new worship director to lead our worship team when we send Pete and the plant team out.

I realize all of this is a lot to take in! But Pete's going to come up now and briefly sketch his story, calling and vision. I think you'll begin to get excited about where the Lord is taking us, just as I am! And then we'll continue this discussion in the Acts series that will take us through the fall, winter and spring. And we'll also have informational Q&A meetings so you'll be able to talk with us.

So with that introduction to where we see the church heading this year in helping others find and follow Jesus, let me invite Pete up here to share his heart.

Pastor Pete

This is all a little bit overwhelming for me because—and I know Michael mentioned—this should be a brand new idea to a lot of you. But this is a vision that I have had for about 4-5 years now, and one that we have been talking about as a staff and with conference and denominational leadership formally for over a year.

There's no way that in this short amount of time I have remaining this morning I can answer all the questions that you may have formed in the last half hour about the methods we are using or the formula we will be following, not to mention the assessments I have taken or the conversations I have had or the obstacles that have had to be overcome already. But I realize that it's important that I lay out a roadmap as to how I got here and share with you some of the calling and passion behind the vision that I am following that will take me away from what has been my home church for nearly 20 years.

So first things first: My name is Pete. I am an associate pastor here at Timberview. I began attending Timberview in 1995 when it was a fledgling, young church plant of around 80 people that met on the campus of Whitworth College. I was a junior in high school and was finding Jesus for the first time on my own, after a number of years battling alcohol addiction and a general rejection of the things I had learned through the faith of my parents growing up.

In 1997 I met my wife through some mutual friends here at Timberview. We had similar stories of wrestling with God and following our own paths, but we were each working back into a right relationship with Christ when we met. We decided to get married, and my wife—who was the child of a pastor—made me promise two things: first, I would never work with high schoolers because high schoolers are the devil; and, two, I would never, ever, ever—under any circumstances—never, ever become a pastor.

About 6 months later I began my first high school coaching job. Right around that same time I began helping Sloan, our former youth pastor, with high school youth ministry. And about 12-18 months later I began formal entrance into the ordination process in the Free Methodist church, which finally culminated last summer when I became an ordained elder, which is the Free Methodist title for the office of pastor.

I apologize to my wife often for me being so obstinate and stubborn. Probably not often enough.

It was shortly after my ordination last year that God began stirring a vision in me to be a church planter. And it's funny how he chooses to work. I had no problem committing to my wife that I wasn't going to be in ministry because I

never planned to be a pastor. But somewhere along the way, God changed my heart. And even after I started serving in ministry, I didn't want to be a pastor. We joke about pastors only working on Sundays, but Becky served as the church secretary and I spent a lot of time here, and I saw how hard the pastors worked. But somewhere along the way I decided that worship pastor was a fine compromise. I mean, where else do you get paid to sing and play your guitar and you don't have to worry about someone throwing a bottle at you or spilling beer on your shoes? Bouncers are probably never going to kick me off the stage so that's a bonus. But even though I thought I had the journey figured out, Matt Thomas kept urging me to pursue more lead pastor-oriented ministry, and I decide to give it a shot.

Here's the deal though: I am probably as much or more overwhelmed as you are, and I have known this day was coming for a long time. And sure, in a sense I am saying *this actual day* when I knew Michael and I would share with you this strategic plan to plant a church. But I have also known that God was calling me to do something for him that would stretch me and grow me, and take me out of my comfort zones and likely away from Timberview. And that is the part I want to focus on for the rest of this talk.

I went back to school in 2009, kind of in the heart of the economic downturn. And I met a lot of people who were in really bad places financially and, like me, were going back to school as a result of a layoff. But I was stunned at how many of these people were just absolutely spiritually illiterate. I was raised in the church, so it was hard for me to fathom an 18-to-35-year-old man or woman never having set foot in a church other than to take part in a wedding or a funeral. It floored me. And through it all I started realizing the deep obligation that we have as Christ followers—and even more so for those called to be pastors and preachers—to live out our faith in the communities in which we live and work, because if we aren't, no one else is going to demonstrate Jesus to someone who may never have the opportunity to meet him.

And through all this I became kind of disenfranchised. Churches, to me, seemed to be places in which people fought over paint color and carpet texture, and whether or not you needed to have an organ on stage to lead the music. They definitely, it seemed to me, were missing the mark with this great group of people—non-believers—with whom I was doing life together and learning to love and enjoy. And then I'd get so sad at the thought that many of these people had no idea what the words *Savior* or *Redeemer* even really meant.

So I thought, maybe God is calling me to do something apart from Timberview. I had conversations with Sloan, and with Dan Bonney, my old pastor and boss in the Valley, and with Jake Balyeat who was the old worship pastor here. And no

matter the conversations, none of these dreams seemed to ever come close to becoming a reality. Until one day about a year ago I got struck with the 2x4 of the Lord, and God said, “No, dummy... this isn’t *their* vision you’re supposed to help see come to pass. This vision is for you.”

When I realized that this was my vision, I got scared because I thought, “This is going to change everything. You want to take me away from this place I have been for 2 decades, this place that raised me, this comfort zone.” Now don’t get me wrong, this place hasn’t always been perfect. In fact, if you have been here over the last 5-7 years, you know we have had some tremendous ups and downs. But I want to encourage you that so has everyone else. The problems we have had aren’t unique to this place. But when you are working with a place through the thick of the tough stuff, and you see how green the grass is on the other side, it’s easy to stop watering your own grass to go check out the more fertile fields, isn’t it?

It was easy to question the timing of that vision. But thankfully someone taught me early on that when you are struggling through a holy vision, you need to weigh that vision against three things: prayer, Scripture, and the edification of the body.

I have prayed... Oh man, have I prayed. And people around me with knowledge about this initial call have prayed. Heck, people without knowledge of it have prayed. I had someone approach me last year who said, “I have been praying for you lately, and God has been laying it on my heart that you need to plant a church.” I kid you not, while that conversation was happening, right here in the front row, I had a friend text me saying, “Hey man, I think we need to start a church.” And all the while I had been talking with Pastor Michael about how I was feeling led to explore planting a church. He and I were praying about it, and the power of prayer was evident.

And I have sought the affirmation of this calling through Scripture and through studying God’s word. Michael did a great job summarizing some of the scriptural bases for why we plant churches, so I am not going to rehash that now. But hopefully you took away from his message the idea that we are called to spread the gospel through our understanding and following of Scripture, and that one of the ways we do so is to send people out to spread God’s word into new communities.

So after praying and consulting Scripture, I didn’t have any doubt then that this is what God was calling me to. But once I started seeking affirmation from the body—from leaders I trust and from personal mentors, and from friends both Christian and non-Christian alike—I came to the undeniable conclusion that God is calling me to serve him by going into a community to live there, and be there, and to establish another community of believers where people can be presented with the opportunity to find and follow Jesus.

At this stage there are probably more questions than answers. I know that God has called me to serve, but I don't know exactly where. I do know that he isn't calling us away from this city. Actually I believe and I hope that the time I have spent here in Spokane is going to be a huge asset to wherever the church plant lands. I know that I feel like the village model of living—where people can live within walking distance of their jobs and their schools and their marketplaces—is a model that is becoming increasingly more popular and sustainable, and I feel called to that kind of a place. I also feel called to serve young families and to help teach people Biblical models of how to parent and how to safeguard their marriages. I know there are some people here at Timberview, as well as in my circles outside of Timberview, that God has told me to approach specifically about them also becoming a part of this church plant team. But I also know that doesn't necessarily mean that's where God wants them. Maybe he just wants a seed to be planted.

I know that we are living in a time when the church is underappreciated, underrepresented and underutilized as a tool to help people live better lives. But I also believe that the church is a group of people that can become a great power for good in any community to which they commit themselves. God is calling me to go and gather others to be the church and help expand his Kingdom here on earth.

John Wesley said, "Give me ten men who hate nothing but sin and love nothing but God and we will change the world." I believe that is the mission that God is calling me to and the vision he has given me to see come to fruition. He's calling me to empower leaders to lead boldly, develop and protect families, and live lives that demonstrate our faith in the redeeming salvation of Christ to everyone we meet.

So what should you take away from this message? My hope is that you will take away the understanding that we are all called and gifted to spread the name of Christ in some way or another.

If you note the action steps in your bulletin, maybe your calling is to serve Christ by serving the children of Meadow Ridge by providing food for them over the weekend through Bite2Go through a child sponsorship. Or maybe you feel called to jump into world missions. We are going to hear from Eric Spangler, our Asia Missions Director, next week and he can give you more details on how to serve here. And, finally, maybe you feel called to serve in this church plant, or to step up and become more active at Timberview after the launch. If so, Michael and I would love to hear from you and to talk to you about ways you could get involved!

References

¹ All Scriptures are from the current NIV unless indicated otherwise.

² Ferguson, Dave and Jon. *Exponential: How You and Your Friends Can Start a Missional Church Movement*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010. Pp 166-67.