



FIRST PRESS

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FRIDAY, FEB. 20, 2015

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Feb. 22, 9 a.m.

Sunday School:
Num. 21, "Snakes!"

Feb. 22, 10 a.m.

Morning Worship:
Mark 2.1-12, "The
King's Question"

Feb. 22, 4:00 p.m.

Sunday Night Study,
Psalm 15, "A Cure
for Flippant Worship"

Feb. 25, 5:15 p.m.

Wednesday Night
Bible Study, "The
Church"

From the Pastor's Pen...

As we have been thinking more seriously and intently about revitalization, we must not think about revitalization as simply "getting more people." If we approach it simply from the perspective of numbers the underlying problems that led up to our current situation will continue to cause problems in the future. Instead, we must look at things biblically and consider matters of congregational spiritual health.

The Lord is patient and merciful, so this is an opportunity for each of us to take stock of our own spiritual condition and health.

Are you spending time with God in prayer? Not just before meals or when the blue lights appear in the rearview mirror, but daily communion with God: worshiping and adoring, confessing sins, seeking His merciful care, and giving thanks for His goodness.

Does God's Word play a prominent role in your life? This region is often called the

"Bible Belt," but is that true of you? Are you carving out time in your day to meditate on the truths of God's word, to feed your soul daily? We can always find time for hobbies and chores, but whether we find time for God's word reveals volumes about our spiritual state.

Are you growing as a Christian? Do you know more about God now than you did as child? Do you desire to grow as a Christian?

Are you faithfully giving to the Church? God doesn't call His people to give out of their excess, but rather to give a worthy portion simply out of what they have; God commands us to give sacrificially in response to the gospel. A person who gives nothing or a very small *proportion* to the church reveals that he or she knows very little of what Christ has done.

These are just a few questions to help you examine your own heart to see and gauge your own spiritual health.

Westminster Shorter Catechism Meditation

We've been considering the 3rd Commandment for some weeks now, which teaches us to respect and honor God's name and the ways in which God makes Himself known to the Creation. This week we take up an additional *reason* to obey this command and revere God's Name.

Q56. What is the reason annexed to the third commandment?

A56. The reason annexed to the third commandment is, that however the breakers of this commandment may escape punishment from men, yet the Lord our God will not suffer them to escape his righteous judgment.

Does it ever seem like the wicked, evil-doers, and criminals get away scot-free more often than not? We turn on the TV and we are overwhelmed by the success of the ungodly; for example, the compulsive liar Brian Williams had a salary of \$13 million a year before he was finally exposed and "suspended" for six months.

The wicked prosper in their schemes in spite of their flagrant rebellion against God.

That very problem has troubled the godly for thousands of years. In Psalm 73, Asaph confesses "I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." It's a hard thing not to do, to look around at how well cheaters and swindlers make it in life and desire for some of that! The 3rd Commandment reminds us that God will punish and deal out justice.

This command reveals a harrowing truth. Even if the governments of the earth refuse to punish certain classes of evildoers, God will not. Little different from school children on the playground, grown men often think that as long as no one catches or stops them, they're free. Here we are reminded that God sees all and will judge all, even the things that we do in secret.

Because God knows all and sees all, none will escape His justice. This again reminds us of the necessity of us to seek His mercy and grace. You may put on a good public face, but God knows how you really are. **God knows how you really are and He still offers you mercy in Christ.**

“Just invite them to church!”

On the previous page, we had a few questions for self-examination to consider the health of our congregation. A church can be no more healthy than her members are spiritual. And while it's true each of us needs to take stock of our own lives and the part we play in this community of faith, it's also true that we need to reach our town with the gospel and salvation of Jesus Christ.

Decades ago, it was probably enough to simply invite a person to come to church several times and eventually, that person would almost certainly show up. Decades ago, even if people weren't Christians (in the sense that they actually had *saving faith* and *repentance* in Christ), they still knew they ought to be in church because it was a “moral good.” Today, that's simply not the case.

Many people today think that they are Christian and godly by virtue of the simple fact that they had the blessed providence to have been born south of the Mason-Dixon Line. Many people in this society, particularly young people, see no need for church, and so they are unchurched.

The “unchurched” often see church as either for “good people” (and thus they feel not good enough) or for “bad people” (and thus they feel no need for it) or for “hypocrites” (and thus they wouldn't want to be around such people). **As a congregation, we must equip ourselves to understand the changing perceptions of society about the church and also equip ourselves to meet those perceptions with compassion and truths from the Bible.** To that end, let's consider a few things that will hopefully aid our mission work here at the Crossroads.

At a recent meeting, one of our officers rightly said that the job of outreach isn't just the job of one committee or a select group, it's the calling of every single member. That's precisely the point Jesus made when He inspired the Apostle Paul to write Eph. 4.9-16 (“equip the saints for ministry).

But we should all pause and ask ourselves: “**how well equipped am I for ministry in Winona?**” Let's put it another way: if you invite someone to church, how would you answer if that person responds along these lines:

Why should I come to church with you? *I'm a good person, I think I can worship Jesus on my own. The Bible doesn't say we have to go to church, does it?*

I'm too busy right now; *it's just not a good time. We have a lot going on with sports and with the house.*

What is Presbyterianism? *You all do things differently than I've ever experienced. Why do you do that?*

What do you believe? *Are you different from Baptists or Methodists? Aren't you pretty much Catholic?*

Don't you believe in that Predestinarianism stuff? *You believe God just made us all robots, don't you?*

It is a good exercise to think about those *kinds* of questions and how you would answer them. These are the kinds of questions people have, and it's necessary for you to know and have good, **biblical** answers at the ready to engage your neighbors with them. It's another way to love your neighbor. There are many people perishing in our town; let it never be said in truth that they perished because the Presbyterians didn't know how to present them with biblical answers from Christ in His word.

Sermon Snapshot: “Hindering the Mission of Jesus”

Last Lord's Day we closed out the first chapter of Mark's Gospel. In that first chapter, we have the opening phase of Jesus' earthly ministry. In it Jesus goes around preaching: calling people to repentance and faith in the good news of God because, in Him, the Kingdom of God has drawn near. As He goes preaching, He performs signs that testify to the truthfulness of His message: healing and casting out demons.

Along the way, Jesus explains to Peter, Andrew, James, and John what exactly the mission of his ministry is; He has come to *preach*. The chapter is the record of that preaching tour and ends with His tour being cut short because people are coming to Him in hopes that He will improve their lives.

The leper, whom we encounter in Mark 1.40-45, seems quite sincere and earnest in his desire that Jesus heal and cleanse him of the wretched skin disease devouring his body. Jesus shows great compassion on him and heals him immediately. Jesus also gives him some commands: tell no one about what happened, go to the priest to be declared clean, and make the requisite temple offering.

The Bible doesn't tell us whether he did the latter items, but it does tell us that the healed and restored man disregarded the first command. He not only told people Who healed him, but he “spread the news,” blabbing to anyone who would listen about Jesus' miraculous powers.

As a result, Jesus is forced into the desolate places. His preaching tour is curtailed because He is now overwhelmed by people wanting His healing power.

In His preaching, Jesus proclaimed God's power to save eternally, to bring sinners back into fellowship with and to know the joy of God. Sadly, the crowds that sought Him out were only interested in what He could do to make their lives better *now*, to have their Best Life Now and couldn't care less about His preaching.

Because of this man's disobedience, Jesus' mission was hindered. This forces us to reckon with the truth that our own disobedience hampers the mission of Christ and His church in our own community. As we think about the future, we must all consider our own personal reputation in town and how that reflects upon Christ and His church.

