

Sermon Easter 6 C 2016

I'd like us to do something unusual this morning. In fact, we are already doing something unusual by just being here together in this space. We've taken time in the midst of our busy week to make time for God. As time goes on, fewer and fewer people do that here in the Northern Hemisphere. Therefore, being Christian and making room for God in our daily lives makes us more and more unique. So, I want us to just look around and see the other unique people around us—everyone here right now and those with whom we are connected who can't be here this morning, and give thanks for this miraculous congregation that God has called together and formed into a loving group of disciples called St. Matthew's Church.

And that is who we are: Disciples. If we are here this morning and if we continue to want to belong to a people where meaning is made through caring relationships instead of by productivity and competition, it is because God has called us here and we have heard God's invitation to come and feed our lives with the stuff of meaning: namely, that God has a purpose for us and that purpose is for us to share in the same love that Jesus and his Father share.

But, as a church, we have only done half of being a disciple well: the part where we come. The other part is about being sent into the world to BE the message of God's love, to BE the sign of meaning and caring and peace like the world cannot give. We understood mission as being reserved for special people and special times and places, and we didn't see that the church itself came into being not because a group of disciples did a great social campaign and then sat down and waited for people to come. They did an amazing social media campaign and went out into all the world to meet as many people as they could and engage them in meaningful conversations about God's transforming love in Jesus Christ. They invited people to meet Jesus. They showed up and began telling their version of the good news: how knowing Jesus had changed their lives and how God's love in Jesus Christ was offered to everyone without exception. They did that for the people around them. Some travelled great distances, like Paul, but some stayed right at home and kept telling the story about love, like Lydia. Mission, for the early church, was a way of being, not a project for a select few. Everything they did was missional—the disciples made other disciples by going out to meet them where they lived.

Today we are being challenged by a context that is a bit like the early church in that more and more people don't know Jesus and are hungry love and it is our job to make sure that they hear the story by whatever means possible.

Up until now, we have been working on a model of church that says, "if you build it, they will come," but all mainline denominations have been experiencing a steady decline for the past 15 years. This is a program model of church, and attractional model that says, if we do it well enough and better, people will come. The past 15 years of data are leading us to believe that this approach may not, in fact, be working.

There is another model for being the body of Christ that isn't about waiting patiently in our buildings for more people to show up, and that is called missional church. Missional church is a way of being where through prayer and discernment, the question, "What is God up to in my neighborhood and how can I join God in God's mission?" is the driving focus. It is about honing our vision for expecting to find God alive and well right here, helping us to see with new eyes and encouraging us to not be afraid, but to tell the story that matters—even to our friends and neighbors and colleagues.

[example of missional church]

God led Paul to Lydia so they could have a transformational conversation.
Where is God leading you?