

**Date: Sunday October 4, 2009**

**Scripture: Psalm 8**

**Title: “Being Church in the World”**

**The Message of Scripture (Sermon Thesis): As church, we are called to show forth the nature of Christ all around the world.**

**The Sharing of the Good News (The Sermon Purpose): The name of the Lord is majestic through all the earth!**

**(Remember, it’s all about God!)**

There is a restaurant here in Sedalia that mentions on their menu that fire was discovered about twenty thousand years ago. Then it says, BBQ was discovered the next day. Well, about that same time, the first meeting ever was held. In those days, the main job was to slay prey and bring it home for food to eat. We know now that food was BBQ. The problem was, as humans we were slow and almost naked, whereas the prey had warm fur and could run like an antelope. In reality it was an antelope, only nobody knew that at that time.

At last someone said, “Maybe if we just sat down and did some brainstorming, we could come up with a better way to hunt our prey!” So they did. It went extremely well, plus it was much warmer sitting in a circle, so they agreed to meet again the next day, and the next. Thus, the meeting was born.

But some other people pointed out that with all this meeting, prey-wise, there hadn’t been anything produced, and the human race was pretty much starving. Almost everyone agreed this was a very serious issue and they agreed capturing

more prey should be right near the top of their meeting “agenda”. At this point, some of the other people were tired of waiting and were hungry, and they started eating plants, and thus modern agriculture was born. We can say that something very important came out of that first meeting. Now I’m not claiming accuracy on the timing of all this, especially in light of the skeleton introduced this week with human connection that goes back four million years. Let’s just be optimistic and hope that something productive did come out of that very first meeting whenever it occurred (Let’s Joke).

I share all this today because I went to a church meeting last week. Actually, it is called a retreat and I look forward to attending it every year, but it really isn’t a retreat, it’s a gathering with several meetings. Anyway, like agriculture coming out of the first meeting, I found something quite worthwhile at one of our meetings. The statement was made that if as a local congregation we are not working with the wider church to make a difference in the world than we are really not being church. I have heard statements like this before, but this time it got my attention. To be church, we have to do more than just meet on Sunday mornings. We are called to reach out and serve God’s community which stretches all around the world. That got me thinking more about what it means to be church in the world. On this World Communion Sunday I found this to be a timely topic. I did some research this week and here are a few examples I found of being church in the world. Here’s the first example.

So this is the most important thing—that young people have someone to look

to as an example of good life, an example of peace, who can speak with them in their own language, who understand them, answer their questions, and simply spend time with them. This is very important, because by working with the young people, by socializing with them, we give them the seeds which can later bear good fruit. Social contact is . . . most important. We must not fear young people, and they should not fear us. We have more joy than trouble when we work with them. Let us give them all the time and effort we can.

Of course, many different influences affect young souls, and the Church must overcome them, but the phrases: “they don’t come to us,” “they are not interested,” “we don’t need them” are absolutely unacceptable. Dear fellow pastors, [and people], everyone who works in the Harvest-fields of Christ, all social workers! Let us persistently and purposefully, lovingly and patiently serve the youth, fostering within them love . . . ensuring for them not only a bright future, but preserving and developing our present.

I give my heartfelt thanks for the opportunity to participate in the sessions of this Council. I wish everyone that the Lord grant good health, well being and success. May God’s mercy and His heavenly help accompany you all as you gather in this forum and in your work going forward. May the Grace of the Lord our Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father and the communing of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen. This emphasis on caring for young people that connects with this morning’s gospel reading comes from the Russian Orthodox Church.

Maria lived in isolation, spending most of her time indoors cleaning houses just to make ends meet in the shantytown near Santiago, [Chile](#), where she lived.

But after encountering the [Popular Education in Health Foundation](#), Maria found freedom and a deeper meaning in life. Today, with a degree in social work, Maria helps those in her *población* (community): women in abusive relationships and families in need of affordable daycare. She has also become a leader in her church.

“Maria is a powerful witness to what the program can do,” says Raquel Rodriguez, program director for Latin America and the Caribbean. The foundation works in poor, marginalized communities in Santiago and Concepción, Chile. Volunteer health promoters conduct educational workshops on a wide range of topics, including self esteem, reproductive health, mental health and gender issues. The majority of program newcomers eventually become health promoters, themselves, after undergoing the training program. By doing so, they too become qualified to lead workshops and go on healthcare visits to homes, taking blood pressure, identifying signs of illnesses and teaching how nutrition plays an important role in preventive care.

The Popular Education in Health Foundation carries out its mission in a variety of other ways, too: organizing around environmental issues, distributing educational materials and using wall murals, marketplace displays and street theater to raise awareness of [HIV prevention](#), [domestic violence](#), breast cancer and other issues. The program has grown since its founding in 1982. “Like a flower, the foundation blossoms and spreads,” Raquel says (Faith in Action). This is a meaningful church program in South America.

The Church of Epiphany, an Episcopal congregation in Washington D.C., hosts “The Welcome Table.” It is a 8:00 a.m. worship service, breakfast, and small group Bible study for about 200 homeless people every Sunday morning. Guests are called by name instead of by number as at most social service agencies in the city. They dine on real china with real silverware while waiters, who are other members of the church, pour coffee in glass cups. After the meal, when the guests leave, there are always church members available to thank them. A long time church member offers this explanation of the program as showing forth the nature of Christ.

At first, those who attended our traditional 11:00 a.m. service simply referred to the 8:00 a.m. people as “the homeless.” Gradually, “the homeless” have become the “guests” and now in most cases are known as our “homeless members.” We are even starting to see people simply call them by name

rather than use a label. When this program started the liturgy didn't include a time for offering because the regular church goers thought it inappropriate to ask the homeless guests to contribute. However, the homeless members began to insist after awhile that they wanted the opportunity to give back to the church. One traditional member described the first time he ushered for the 8:00 a.m. service by saying that it was so moving to watch as the plate was passed down the pew and the homeless members would turn their pockets inside out and throw all they had - loose change or crumpled up dollar bills - in the plate. The usher went on to say he learned more about giving that morning than any other time.

Offering hospitality to strangers has become Epiphany's identity. They now donate office space to a newspaper that is written, published, and sold by the members of D.C.'s homeless community. Now Epiphany takes hospitality to the streets. I'll say that again, the church takes hospitality to the streets by offering noontime worship in a local park and serving bag lunches to all who attend, and to anybody else who wants one (Willimon). Again, that is being church in the world.

Oh yeah, here's one more example. Over five thousand meals served during a summer feeding program. Ninety-one school kits collected for students in Missouri. Money sent to support disaster relief and offer assistance across this country. Prayers of concern and compassion offered for disaster victims throughout the world. That, too, is being church in the world.

There is so much in all these stories and examples that we could lift up,

connect with, and celebrate this morning. But there is one phrase in particular that stood out to me as I worked with this material and that phrase is, showing forth the nature of Christ. It really seems to me that showing forth the nature of Christ is at the heart of who we are and what we are to do as the church. And not just as a church here in Sedalia, MO but as church all around the world. How appropriate on this World Communion Sunday that we think about showing forth the nature of Christ worldwide. Now of course that does mean we must do the same right here in this place; for we are part of the world, we are part of God's church, and we most certainly are part of the Body of Christ. As such, let us always show forth our nature. When we do we are carrying forth the name of the Lord through all the earth and yes, the name of the Lord is majestic in all the earth! That is very good news. Let us pray.

Dear God,

As you reach out and embrace this world and all worlds, we thank you for calling us to be part of your glorious creation. Call us again and again to serve you in the world and remind us again and again that we serve as the Body of Christ upon this earth. Lifting up our willingness to always show forth the nature as Christ, we pray to you. Amen

Offering: We often ask God for a sign of God's presence in the world. Today let us offer God a sign acknowledging God's presence in the world through our offering and faith promises. The ushers will please . . . .

Dedication: Let us join together in the prayer of dedication as printed in the bulletin.

Benediction: We go forth from meeting here blessed by God, empowered by the Holy Spirit and readied to show forth the nature of Christ in the world. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit go forth. Amen and Amen.

Sources:

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“Let’s Joke”; Website; [www.letsjoke.com](http://www.letsjoke.com); 2009.

The Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia; [www.russianorthodoxchurch.ws/synod](http://www.russianorthodoxchurch.ws/synod) ; 2008.

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