

Fall/Winter 2007 Sermon Series: The Power of Simple

Note:

Much of the inspiration for this series came from the Missional Church Planting Class I am taking and the readings associated with it.

Purpose:

This sermon series will seek to answer the question - "How we move people toward transformed lives?" Since it doesn't happen haphazardly or by accident, there needs to be a process. Using the ministry of Christ as the model, this series will aid in crystallizing that process for this congregation. After the conclusion of the series, Life Group Leaders will be ready to share insights and feedback from their life group at the next Life Group Leader Meeting.

Summary and Rationale:

A healthy, vibrant, missional church is also a simple church. This means a church with all of its ministries is designed around a clearly understood and strategic process that moves people logically through a process of spiritual growth, aligning all programs into the process and abandoning what does not clearly fit into the process.

In order for us to become vibrant missional church, we need to do a church makeover and remodel according to a simple purpose and process. We have already begun this process:

1) We began in the earlier part of the year with a congregational self-reflection through our Life Groups on who we are. It was summarized in this statement: "The Leavenworth Church of Christ is a Christ-Centered family, learning, caring, and sharing."

2) Over the course of the year we look intensely at the "what" of ministry: We looked at the biblical and theological basis for what the church is to be and what it is to accomplish in God's mission.

3) Over the summer, we brainstormed on how this can take shape here in Leavenworth. We looked specifically at the topics such as facilities, fellowship, worship, education, outreach, benevolence, and participation. We summarized all of our ministries under four headings: 1) Worship 2) Education 3) Outreach 4) Facilities

In reflecting on what is still undone, it occurs to me that we began to move toward complexity rather than simplicity. Simplicity concentrates and therefore maximizes our resources (people, money, etc.) while complexity tends to dilute them. I spent a lot of time with the biblical and theological basis for the church and God's mission. What we (I) did not do was return to where we began - with the summary statement of who we are, and determine not only how each of our ministries fit in to the big picture, but how the big picture is to shape our ministry process.

The big picture thus far was "We are a Christ Centered family, learning, caring, and sharing." My perception is that this has not been much more than a statement on the wall.

I suggest tweaking it. Scripture not only gives us the what, but also the how of mission. The Greatest Commandment is to love God, and the second is to love our neighbor. The Great Commission says to make disciples. Both the Greatest Commandments and the Great Commissions ("G³" if you like catchy logos and such) provide a simple statement, rooted in scripture, that is not unlike the statement we already have come up with.

<u>What we came up with:</u>	<u>Scriptural Statements:</u>	<u>Ministries:</u>
Christ Centered Family	is Love God (Mt 22:37)	(Expressed particularly in Worship)
Caring & Sharing	is Love Neighbor (Mt 22:39)	(Life Groups & Outreach)
Learning	is Making Disciples (Mt 28:20)	(Education - Bible School/ LTC)

This should be both the program and the process. We have programs, but not an integrated process. For instance, one way of designing the process is beginning with (1) Loving God. A visitor witnesses or experiences loving God in worship. From there, we transition them to (2) small groups, from there to (3) Bible Class, from there to (4) ministry, etc. There needs to be a clear pathway or process for spiritual growth, and each ministry should be a part in that journey. Each ministry that is part of the process will contribute toward the process of life transformation. Anything that does not should be phased out gently. For the lost, obeying the Gospel needs to be a clearly identified part of the process at the beginning.

Whatever process is in place, it needs to be clear, simple, and easily communicable. This is something we can discuss in Life Groups and among Life Group Leaders as we tweak or remodel the big picture design.

Theological Reflection:

God has not made it difficult for us to know how to please him. God is God of all, and is especially interested in the poor, the widow, the helpless, the disenfranchised, etc.. His Gospel was one that was simple and therefore resonated with the simple. Even though the religious establishment made it complicated and difficult, Jesus spoke with authority and power. Part of the power in his teaching was its simplicity.

If there is power in simplicity, and if God demonstrated simplicity, then it stands to reason that there needs to be an overarching process of transforming lives in a congregation that is also simple.

On a practical level, simplicity is efficient and maximizes resources. It's strength lies in the fact that the greater the simplicity, the greater the understanding by everyone. With a greater understanding by everyone, there would also be a greater focus of resources. With a greater focus of resources, there is less wasted energy and resources and greater impact.

So, simplicity and stewardship would seem to go hand in hand. God wants the best which may mean simplifying not only our lives so we can give more undivided attention to God and his mission, but also simplifying the church for the same purposes.

Caveat:

This is not to denigrate scholarship and theology. We would not even have good English Bibles to read were it not for good scholarship. However, scholarship stands in service to God's mission and not the other way around.

Series Flow:

1. Sermon One: Introduction to Simplicity

Summary: Our world and lives has become increasingly complex. Complexity often looks good and impressive, especially in mega-churches with a full variety menu of options. However, complexity leads to ministry clutter, which often does not contribute directly to the mission of God. In contrast, God's message of the Gospel remains a simple message with a simple process. God likes simplicity, which is why Jesus preached a simple message with power and had a simple process that had power. We

need a simple and fully integrated process of discipleship that is clear and moves people toward spiritual maturity. It is not complicated.

Know: God has not made discipleship and spiritual growth so complicated that we can only figure it out with a graduate theology degree, but has made it simple as demonstrated in the ministry of Christ.

Feel: The desire to keep the discipleship process uncluttered and simple

Do: Reflect on the current process of discipleship and identify areas of strength, weakness, and how simplicity can make the process better.

Text: Mt 22:34-40

Scripture Reading: Mt 11:28-30

2. Sermon Two: Beginning with Clarity

Summary: The process of moving people from salvation, to spiritual maturity to meaningful ministry needs to have clarity, which is the ability of the process to be communicated and understood by the people. Clarity involves defining not only the purpose, but also the process and how each weekly program is a part of the process.

Know: As expressed by metaphors of growth in scripture, spiritual growth in the church is a process. The implication is that we need to identify, communicate, and utilize a commonly understood process of being spiritual formed.

Feel: The excitement of the process being so simple that anyone can do it

Do: Discuss the elements of a simple process of discipleship as demonstrated in scripture.

Text: 1 Cor 3:6-13

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet 2:1-5

3. Sermon Three: Growing with Movement

Summary: The process of moving people from salvation, to spiritual maturity, to meaningful ministry needs to have sequential steps that cause people to move to greater areas of commitment. Like Jesus who had three distinct phases of calling, building, and sending in Lk 5-9, so the church should also have distinct phases. Beginning with the process, each ministry should fit and be placed sequentially in the process with a clear beginning point and clear transition points to the "next step" with "leaders" (not travel agents) who lead the way.

Know: Just as Jesus had specific, identifiable steps in his discipleship process that involved modeling the steps, so we also need to have the same.

Feel: Perhaps an Aha moment in seeing how this is not only practical, but modeled in scripture and therefore biblical

Do: Discuss and identify steps of discipleship in the ministry of Christ and the possibilities of applying the model in our situation.

Text: 2 Cor 3:12-18; Lk 5-9

Scripture Reading: Lk 9:1-6

4. Sermon Four: Maximizing with Alignment

Summary: In order to move people more effectively from salvation, to spiritual maturity, to meaningful ministry, all ministries and ministry leaders need to be aligned with and committed to the same simple process. This means that not only to leaders need to have theological agreement on core beliefs, they also need to have agreement on ministry philosophy (which is usually where disagreements in congregational settings

stem from). For this to happen, there needs to be accountability to the process (goal setting, feedback, etc.), and implementing the same process in ALL ministries. This will aid in "functional" unity as well as theological unity.

Know: In order for a congregation to have an effective discipleship process, the leaders need to be on the same page concerning the process so that all ministries are working in the same direction. Leaders who "do their own thing" dilute rather than maximize effectiveness in discipleship

Feel: A desire not only for theological unity, but also functional unity

Do: Starting with the process (not with the current ministries), reflect on how current ministries can be tweaked, shaped, or overhauled in order to fit into the overall discipleship process, and what type of ministries may be lacking in the process.

Text: Jn 17:20-23; Eph 4:1-16; Num 13-14

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor 12:4-7

5. Sermon Five: Clear out the Clutter with Focus.

Summary: In order to move people more effectively from salvation, to spiritual maturity, to meaningful ministry, there must be a commitment to consistent focus, which involves abandoning everything that falls outside of the process. This means both eliminating and not adding programs that do not fit into the process, but instead, adding "options" to the already existing ministries and process when new needs arise.

Know: In order to keep the process simple, understandable, focused, and effective, there must be a commitment to abandon what does not fit into the process and reject anything new that does not fit into the process. To do otherwise would dilute rather than concentrate our resources.

Feel: Hopefulness through the pain of the prospect of the possibility of abandoning or overhauling certain ministries

Do: Reflect on the wisdom and rationale for abandoning what does not fit into the process. Discuss the practical and emotional difficulties involved with this step, and how it might be done over time without excessive emotional pain.

Text: Phil 3:13-14; Eph 5:15-16

Scripture Reading: 1 Jn 3:1-3

6. Sermon Six: Conclusion and Beginning

Summary: Becoming simple in order to maximize focus and resources is really a matter of stewardship. God is not only interested in what we give, but even more importantly how we give. Becoming simple is an attempt to focus in such a way that we give God our very best because he is worthy of our best. Taking the steps to become simple is much easier for a new church plant than an established church, but it can be done over time. We need to spend considerable time in prayer as we move forward

Know: God expects us to use his resources wisely and he expects results

Feel: The desire to incorporate biblical principles of stewardship by becoming simple so that there can be greater results to the glory of God

Do: Review the sermon series, taking time to discuss, understand, and communicate the clear discipleship process, how one step leads to the next, how each ministry needs to be aligned to the process, and what needs to be overhauled or eventually abandoned. Life Group Leaders will be ready to discuss the group insights at the next Life Group Leader Meeting

Text: Mt 25:14-30; Mal. 1

Scripture Reading: Mt 25:25-30