



New Day Church

Need a fresh start?

SENDING SPREE

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Newsweek magazine featured a story this past week on a trend in job hunting that's springing up across the country. If you're searching for one right now, you can forget the cover letters. Don't bother typing up a resume on that nice parchment paper or hound an employer with phone calls. The latest method to land the job of your dreams is to produce an online video. In today's image oriented culture, making your appeal for a job in front of a camera is becoming the popular route to employment.

The article gave some advice and said you should keep it short, stick to why you're interested and why you should be hired. But they warn that it can be a bit of a risk, because when you make a video of yourself, you're making a video of yourself. You're putting it all out there on the line. If you don't come across well on camera, you might be shooting yourself in the foot. One guy trying to get a job this way was so bad that his video wound up on YouTube as a joke.

But one thing's for sure: A video shows who you are in a way no paper resume can. Your passions, your skills, your personality, your bad haircut – nothing hides from the camera.

We've been turning the camera on New Day over the past few weeks, putting it all out there on the line. We're trying to get across who we are, what we're passionate about and where we're going.

A couple weeks ago, we said that New Day had identified seven core values that shape our priorities. We're walking through those one by one to help clarify what they mean and why we've said they're important to us. Next Sunday, Meghan Henderson will be our guest speaker for Mother's Day. It's fitting to hear from a mom on Mother's Day. But not only is Meghan a mom, she's also a member of the New Day board, and she's going to share with you about value #4, every Christian is a minister. You won't want to miss it.

But this morning, we're looking at value #3:

The church is a mission outpost.

We've gone from the very straightforward value of "Worship is central," to the slightly less predictable, "Truth must be well-told," to the what-does-THAT-mean category of "The church is a mission outpost." As Alice once said, "Things are getting curiuser and curiuser."

Actually, the values all *do* hang together. Last week we talked about how much culture has changed over the past century, and this value ties into that specifically. Author Kennon Callahan was the inspiration for the wording. He wrote in one of his books, "The day of the local church is over. The day of the mission outpost has come."

That's a shocking statement when you stop to think about it. The day of the local church is over? He goes on to explain that he doesn't mean local churches are going to go away. They're just going to function differently than they used to.

I believe he's right, and I believe it's crucial to recognize just how differently churches need to operate in today's world than they did a century ago. This will be an easier jump for those of you who are coming to New Day with little or no church background. You don't have as many preconceived ideas or expectations. But those of us who grew up in church 20, 30 or 40 years ago are going to have to let go of some of the memories we have in our heads that tell us what church is supposed to be like.

The way New Day spends money, the way we structure our priorities, the way we will measure success all changes if we take seriously this value of church being a mission outpost.

Still – it's an unusual choice of words. Just what is a mission outpost?

It might help if we separate out those two words and look at each individually.

Let's talk about the word mission first. What comes to mind when you think of that word? Mission impossible? Mission macaroni? Missionaries? Mission is outward movement. Mission is goal oriented. Mission is strategic. Mission is an action word.

When somebody is on a mission, usually it's because they've been sent on one by somebody else. A commanding officer sends a soldier on a mission. I send Annika on a mission to find my keys. Within the word is the implied idea that someone stands behind it.

Jesus himself was on a mission. Over and over again through the gospels, Jesus refers the fact that he was sent by his Father. He had been given a single objective – to save the world. The gospel has been on the go ever since Jesus left heaven for earth.

We say that the Church is the body of Christ. If we're that connected to his person, that means we must have the same mission. We're here to carry his message to the world. Just before he was crucified, Jesus prayed to his Father and said,

John 17:18-19

As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.

He passed along his own mission to the rest of us. He put it in clear terms just before he went back to heaven. He told his disciples:

Matt 28:18-20

God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I'll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age.

Jesus sent and still sends his followers on a mission to tell people about him. The church has been on a sending spree from the beginning. It's in the DNA. But the American church ended up in a unique situation. From the first pilgrims on, the church was influential in all aspects of society. People could be exposed to the gospel at almost every turn. Public life had all the trappings of Christianity in America. From stores closing on Sundays to Christmas songs being sung in school, the average person had some familiarity with Jesus even if they didn't believe in him.

So the idea of mission --of being sent out -- became separated from the idea of church. . Mission was something other people went somewhere else to do, because it wasn't seen as necessary in America. Where was there to go? A missionary was someone who took the gospel to far away places in foreign lands, and local churches became supporting congregations. They weren't so much involved in mission work themselves. The average Christian didn't view himself or herself as a missionary. They were churchgoers. A missionary is kind of a fish out of water, and Christianity blended in so well with American life that you didn't have to think of yourself in those terms.

But the world has changed and so has the U.S. Did you know that there are now more Christians in Nigeria than in America and Europe combined? Did you know that if you took all the people who have no church connection in America and collected them in one place, they would equal the population of the eleventh largest country in the world? As more and more religious and non-religious backgrounds have become prevalent in the U.S., there has been more and more of an effort to take any references to Christianity out of public life to make things more neutral.

So the average person on the street no longer knows the Jesus story. They won't pick up on it in our culture anymore unless they're specifically taught it. And most people looking for answers don't run to church to find them. So the local church is in a much different spot than it was 50 years ago.

That's why Kennon Callahan made the statement he did. Church is no longer in step with culture. If we operate like nothing has changed, then church becomes just a quaint, irrelevant experience. But if we engage culture with a missionary mentality, we'll get more creative. What does a missionary have to do? Learn a new language. Understand

new customs. Look for what the felt needs are in a community. Figure out how to translate foreign spiritual concepts in a way somebody can understand.

Those are all traits New Day needs. We've got to learn the language people speak today. We've got to meet where people where they are feeling the need for God. And we have to work to make the gospel understandable, to translate it again and again. That makes church dynamic and forward thinking instead of a relic from a different era.

The idea of mission is brought into focus by a scene from Jesus' own life. After he had been teaching the crowds for a while, Jesus said this:

Luke 13:20-22

Again he asked, "What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough."

We've had a little packet of Fleischmann's yeast sitting on a shelf in our kitchen forever. We don't bake a ton of bread, so it lasts a long time. The package says it's "active" yeast, but when it's just sitting in the cupboard, it doesn't do anything. You've got to take it out of the packet and work it through some dough. Once it comes into contact with the other ingredients, it starts to make things happen, making the dough expand.

We become "active" when we're engaged with people outside the church. The strategy Jesus had in mind for his followers was for them to work their way throughout the world. Our primary business is not here when we're together in our little packet on Sunday mornings. Christians tend to think of going to church as their main job, but that's not where the bulk of our spiritual life happens. It's when we're out mixing with everyone else in our lives. As it says on the bookmarks we handed out, we come in to get what we need to go back out and serve. We take Christ with us, and as a result, his kingdom spreads.

I've read this little parable Jesus told about the yeast many times, but I never paid any attention to what verse comes immediately after it:

Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem.

What struck me was how Jesus was living out how he described the kingdom. He didn't just set up shop in one spot and wait for people to come to him to hear him teach. He took his show on the road, going from town to town. He acted like that yeast, spreading the news of the kingdom wherever he went.

Do you remember learning about centripetal vs. centrifugal force in school? Centripetal force is when something rotates and the spinning pulls everything inward toward the center. Centrifugal force is the opposite. As it spins, it flings things away from it. Think of David's sling spinning around and around, then releasing that stone to sail into the air.

Churches can either have centripetal or centrifugal force – inward or outward. Another way to say it is that we can be about mission or we can be about maintenance. Centripetal force in a church is when we spend all our energy concentrating everything on US, working to build bigger programs or buildings, trying hard to retain every person that walks through the door, campaigning for money all the time. It's preservation mode.

In the little church where I grew up, which was struggling for survival, they had a sign in the sanctuary. Every week they would post how many people had been there the previous week compared to the year before and how much money had come in. It's what is known as counting nickels and noses. And I can remember as a kid focusing in on that during the service and hoping we would be slightly ahead each time, which it never seemed to be. That was a maintenance church.

I know a pastor who interviewed for a job at a church in California. The church told him they really wanted to make a difference in their community. They wanted to be outreach oriented. He was excited about the prospect of being part of that kind of church. But after they hired him, the board came to him and said, "We changed our minds. We really think we need to focus on our own needs first." It was a bait and switch. At least they came clean about it. Most churches would deny they were that concerned about self-preservation.

But when it comes right down to it, the whole concept of self-preservation goes against the very heart of Christianity. Jesus said,

Mark 10:45

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Again, with the Church being the body of Christ, we are to follow his pattern. One of the boldest examples I've heard of where a church lived by that value was in Nairobi, Kenya. Nairobi Chapel was a megachurch. Thousands of people from all over the city attended Sunday services. That's a lot of power and prestige. But the leaders felt strongly that God didn't want them to try to hold onto that power or to try to keep getting bigger. Instead, they did some self analysis about how their largely middle class church could best stay on their mission to reach the poor with the gospel (Nairobi has a slum with more than a million people in it).

After praying about it, they decided they were too centralized. So they divided the church into five smaller congregations that would be more accessible to more parts of the city. As much as they liked their big church status, they redistributed themselves on a smaller scale. That is putting the kingdom mission above the needs of the church. Instinct would say giving up the life of the megachurch was crazy. But a mission mindset says it's what Christ would have done, giving himself up to reach more people.

When a ministry opportunity presents itself and our primary concern is *maintenance*, our question will be, “How will we survive if we do that?” When our primary concern is *mission* our question will be, “Is God calling us to do this?” It’s radical obedience, regardless of the personal cost. Douglas Webster once wrote, “Every form of mission leads to some form of cross.” If God called New Day to do something that could potentially mean a real sacrifice for New Day, would we do it? How far are we willing to go to look like Christ?

The thought of that can sound depressing can’t it? “You’re gonna have to make sacrifices people.” The irony is that the sacrifice ends up being completely worth the pain. We find everything we were looking for in the first place. In his book “The Missionary Nature of the church,” Johannes Blauw wrote this: *It is exactly by going outside itself that the Church is itself and comes to itself.*

Jesus was the one who said we’ll find our life when we lose it. All the stuff we want – the joy, the wholeness, the fulfillment – that’s on the far side of sacrifice. The author of Hebrews wrote that Jesus was able to endure the cross because of the joy that was waiting for him afterwards.

I always like it on Extreme Makeover when the builder says to the homeowner, “Not only did we build you this new home, but our company has paid off your mortgage on your old home for you. You don’t need to worry about that anymore.” The homeowners are always really happy, but I like to see how the builders handle it. They’re the ones who get the greatest satisfaction out of the moment – even though it was costly to them. You see all these construction type guys get choked up and start hugging each other.

The message we’ve got to share is so far greater and happier and more life changing. There is incredible joy in this mission, because we’ve got the best news possible to be able to tell people. Even costly sacrifices pale in comparison.

How do we as a church cultivate a mission mindset? Where are the points of need in our community that we can recognize and reach? How far are we willing to go to look like Christ in the world?

Mission almost always seems risky. Part of why it looks risky is why we use the word outpost. I think a picture might help us with that word.

If you ever happen to be driving northbound on State Route 291, about ten miles north of Spokane you’ll see this monument. It marks the site of the Spokane House, the first permanent outpost established by white folk in Washington State. It was a trading post of the North West Company, and it started out as just a makeshift little cabin built by two men in 1810.

North West Company was in the fur business. The Spokane House outpost was in an ideal location, because the Little Spokane River was very slow moving – the perfect place for furry little woodland creatures.

Surrounded by animals and trees, mountains and rivers, the little house stood as a **reminder of a bigger something**. There was a large trading company somewhere else. It was a link to a whole society somewhere else, a source of news from the outside world.

The Spokane House grew, and it became a gathering place for pioneers in the area. Life could get very lonely out in the wild when you had no neighbors, and the outpost was a place to reconnect with humanity. They would have dances and parties there to help people endure the long winters and enjoy being together. But people didn't stay – they always went back out to their various homesteads to work the land some more. Like the old Coca-Cola ads, it gave people **a pause that refreshes**.

In addition to being a gathering place, the Spokane House was also a trading post, a sort of **filling station**. So people were able to restock with the basic necessities before heading back out. They relied on it for important supplies they couldn't get from the forest.

After about 15 years, the furs began to be depleted. New ownership came in, and the post was moved to Fort Colville. Every last scrap of anything valuable was transplanted to the new location, so today historians have had a difficult time even finding the evidence that Spokane House even existed. It was only **a means to an end**. Today, this marker is about all there is to see.

I find that whole story to be such a good metaphor for how the church is an outpost. First, church should also be

A reminder of a bigger something.

Jesus told his disciples he was sending them out like sheep among wolves. They were going out into a harsh world, set up to be that reminder of God's love and salvation. As a church, we're out in the wild, giving people a glimpse of another civilization. We have the color, the flavor and even the smell of a different place that stands out against our surroundings. Paul said,

2 Corinthians 2:14

But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him.

Our very presence in this world, the fact that the church exists in this untamed spiritual wilderness points people to the larger reality of God's kingdom.

Secondly, just like an outpost, the church can provide

The pause that refreshes

We need our brothers and sisters for encouragement, especially as we get serious about the idea of mission. Even Paul needed that. He wrote to the church in Corinth and said,

1 Corinthians 16:17-18

I want you to know how delighted I am to have Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus here with me. They partially make up for your absence! They've refreshed me by keeping me in touch with you. Be proud that you have people like this among you.

He found other Christians refreshing. The word there for refresh means to give somebody a break from their work. When I hear it put that way, I want to be like Fortunatus or Achaius. I want to lighten people's loads and be refreshing. That should characterize the way we relate to each other at church.

Sometimes church becomes more of a place to work than to be refreshed. People regularly ask me, "What can I do to help? Give me a job in the church." And there are always a million jobs to be done. But I try as much as possible to remember to also turn their question around and say, "It's also the church's job to help you. What's your ministry out in the world? Where do you need help? How can we refresh you?"

Part of how that can happen is when the church fills its role as a

Filling Station

People replenished their larders at the outpost, and essentially that's what a church is to do as well.

Ephesians 4:11-12

He is the one who gave these gifts to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.

Imagine someone making their way to an outpost for supplies. They wouldn't just go in, browse around and buy random items. They would go in knowing what they needed and what they were wanting to do, whether it was get ingredients to bake bread or buy an axe to chop wood or a sewing machine to make clothes.

For the church to equip people, we first have to help them discover what God has called them to do so they can see what it is they need.

Sometimes people just need to be fed so they don't starve. Sometimes people need tools to do a job. Sometimes people need healing up. Church can be the resource center.

Historians aren't happy about it, but I love the fact that the Spokane House no longer exists. It was purely functional. Every scrap of it was put to use. Nobody gave a thought to creating a museum someday – if there was anything usable, it got used.

Church is **a means, not an end**. We're not building a museum here – we pour ourselves entirely into the work. If something can be better used somewhere else, so be it. If God

calls some of our New Dayers to other places and other churches, so be it. We want to be usable. We want to love Jesus more than we love being a church. Selfless, total abandonment to his cause. We're going to celebrate the Lord's Supper in just a minute – where we remember just how far Jesus was willing to go to sacrifice himself to save the world. As we prepare to do that, I'd like to give you two sentences to finish:

1. The mission God has for me is:

Do you know what God has put on your plate? Do you know what he's sent you to do? If it's fuzzy or you have no clue at all, ask him to show you, to make it specific to you.

It's not every week I get convicted by my own sermons, but this one hit me pretty directly. Now that I'm working full time for the church, it's so easy for my weeks to be entirely with an inward focus on the church. I meet with church people. I work on my sermon. I plan for church meetings and events.

But if I'm going to say the church value is to be more mission than maintenance, that needs to hold true in my personal life as well. I need to make it a priority to think about who and what are outside these walls, to engage people and hear the cries of the larger community. What's the mission God has for me?

2. My biggest fear about that is:

Fears can throw us off mission and into maintenance mode. If you know what God is calling you to, what makes you hesitate? "Every form of mission leads to some form of cross." Give that fear to God this morning. Ask him to free you and give you courage.

When Jesus sent out his disciples, he told them two things: "All authority is given to me. I'm in charge – nothing has power over me." Then he told them, "I will be with you always, forever and ever and ever."

We don't need to be afraid. Jesus is in control. He accomplished his mission on the cross, and he'll give us everything we need to accomplish ours. Because he will be right here with us. He's bigger than our inadequacies. He's bigger than our failures. He's bigger than church.

Are we ready to be people on a mission – the greatest mission in the world? There's a Steven Curtis Chapman song I quoted often when we started New Day, and it's a fitting way to wrap up this message:

*But we will never know the awesome power of the grace of God
Until we let ourselves get swept away into this holy flood
So if you'll take my hand, we'll close our eyes and count to three
And take the leap of faith
Come on let's go.*