

“DNA of Growing Churches” I

Week 1: What is not a growing church? (Acts 5:23-37)

Advent Study - Church		
Week 1	God's church in crisis?	What is the church?(Acts 1:1-11)
Week 2	Church after Christendom	Who are the disciples?(Acts 1:12-26)
Week 3	Living in the Post-Modern world	Who is the Holy Spirit(Acts 2:1-21)
Week 4	Post-Christendom <i>ekklesia</i>	Fellowship of the believers(Acts 2:22-47)
Lenten Study - Jesus		
Week 1	Uniting Church in transition	What do we believe(Acts 3:1-15)
Week 2	Secular to Multifaith Society	Who is Jesus (Acts 3:12-26)
Week 3	Living as Christian radicals	Why did Jesus die? (Acts 4:1-12)
Week 4	30 years of Multiculturalism in UCA	Why and how should I read the Bible?(Acts 4:13-22)
Week 5	Basis of Union and other inheritances	Why and how do I pray?(Acts 4:23-37)
Easter Study - Movement		
Week 1	The idol of Church Growth	What is not a growing church?(Acts 5:25-42)

Prayer

God of Hope,
 Christ with us,
 In your image we are created.
 In you we are made complete.
 In your way we seek to follow.
 In your truth we are revealed.
 In you we find life.
 God of Hope,
 Christ with us,
 Redeem and transform us,
 That we may truly be your people.
 This we ask in Jesus name.
 Amen.

Adopted from Rev Jon Humphries 2015 Lent Event Daily Prayer

Getting Started

- See the following list of the characteristics of the early churches we found in Acts 1-2.
 - Week 1: Waiting, united, faithful, reframing, fearful, expectant, promised community.
 - Week 2: Praying, convinced, committed, inspired, devoted community (or disciple).
 - Week 3: Saved, inspired, spirited, growing, empowered, talented, multicultural, sharing, excited community.
 - Week 4: Growing, acting, resurrected, generous, faithful, committed, united community

Can you remember our discussion about what was the source or origin of these characteristics?

- How can you describe Jesus?

The Idol of Church Growth

All too frequently, when we talk about church growth, it is really a desire about a building, property or numeric build up of membership. What really is ‘Church Growth’? How can it relate to the principal message of Jesus in Matthew 6:33, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”(NIV)

Regis Nicoll, in his article *The idol of Church Growth*, describes his experience at a church conference ‘How to grow church membership.’ “During the discussion, one person asked how they could tailor their service to ‘please’ both young and old. (Yes, she said ‘please’) Others expressed the desire to attract more young people and families.”

Acknowledging there is nothing wrong with wanting one’s church to grow, Regis suggests the question churches should be asking is not “How do we grow our church?” but “How do we grow His kingdom?”. He continues saying, “When church growth is motivated by what we want rather than by what the kingdom needs, it becomes an idol. When it is the result of ‘seeking the kingdom,’ it is a faithful pursuit that can have some surprises.”

When Rev Dorothy McRae McMahan was ordained she was called to Pitt Street Uniting Church, Sydney, which was on the verge of closing down. As she observed the church, “It looks plain from the outside but inside it’s really stunning.” She felt ‘life’ in the church and started working with 17 members in a social justice ministry.

Pitt Street UCA is not one of the mega churches but it is certainly a Kingdom focused church seeking God’s justice in our community.



Chris Morgan 1994

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Messages from Acts 5:25-42

25 Then someone arrived and announced, "Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!" 26 Then the captain went with the temple police and brought them, but without violence, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people. 27 When they had brought them, they had them stand before the council. The high priest questioned them, 28 saying, "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you are determined to bring this man's blood on us." 29 But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than any human authority. 30 The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him." 33 When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. 34 But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, respected by all the people, stood up and ordered the men to be put outside for a short time. 35 Then he said to them, "Fellow Israelites, consider carefully what you propose to do to these men. 36 For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him; but he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and disappeared. 37 After him Judas the Galilean rose up at the time of the census and got people to follow him; he also perished, and all who followed him were scattered. 38 So in the present case, I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone; because if this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; 39 but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them—in that case you may even be found fighting against God!" They were convinced by him, 40 and when they had called in the apostles, they had them

flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. 41 As they left the council, they rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name. 42 And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease to teach and proclaim Jesus as the Messiah.(NRSV)

DNA of Growing Churches

Read the passage together then discuss:

1. What does it mean for us to obey God rather than any human authority? (v.28-29)
2. Gamaliel suggests, "If this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them." (v.38-39) How can we make sure something is not our will, but of God?
3. What is "not" a growing church? What are the characteristics of not growing churches?

Closing prayer

Lord Jesus,
 You bring us hope.
 You came to save.
 You gave your life for us
 Beginning in your incarnation.
 Living simply and simply living.
 Teaching and healing.
 Rebuking and cajoling
 Dying and rising.
 In you we meet God's love face to face.
 In you we see the grace of God.
 In you we grasp the depth of God's compassion.
 In you we know God is for us and no one can be against us. Lord Jesus,
 We are your people.
 May we be found in you again.
 Of you we ask. Amen.



Adopted from Rev Jon Humphries 2015 Lent Event Daily Prayer

POINT TO PONDER

"When church growth is motivated by what we want rather than by what the kingdom needs, it becomes an idol. When it is the result of 'seeking the kingdom,' it is a faithful pursuit that can have some surprises." (Regis Nicoll, *The idol of Church Growth*)

VERSE TO REMEMBER

"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (*Matthew 6:33 NIV*)



“DNA of Growing Churches” 2

Week 2: What burdens us not to grow? (Acts 10:1-20)

Advent Study - Church		
Week 1	God's church in crisis?	What is the church?(Acts 1:1-11)
Week 2	Church after Christendom	Who are the disciples?(Acts 1:12-26)
Week 3	Living in the Post-Modern world	Who is the Holy Spirit(Acts 2:1-21)
Week 4	Post-Christendom <i>ekklesia</i>	Fellowship of the believers(Acts 2:22-47)
Lenten Study - Jesus		
Week 1	Uniting Church in transition	What do we believe(Acts 3:1-15)
Week 2	Secular to Multifaith Society	Who is Jesus (Acts 3:12-26)
Week 3	Living as Christian radicals	Why did Jesus die? (Acts 4:1-12)
Week 4	30 years of Multiculturalism in UCA	Why and how should I read the Bible?(Acts 4:13-22)
Week 5	Basis of Union and other inheritances	Why and how do I pray?(Acts 4:23-37)
Easter Study - Movement		
Week 1	The idol of Church Growth	What is not a growing church?(Acts 5:25-42)
Week 2	Four scenarios of our future	What burdens us not to grow?(Acts 10:1-20)

Prayer

Lord of Truth,
 As we remember your sacrifice;
 As we hear of your love;
 As we listen for your call,
 Awaken with in us our discipleship anew.
 May the passion of your living revive our devotion.
 May the sign of your cross lead us to repentance.
 May this time awaken our faith.
 Christ of the Cross,
 Forgive us our shallow religion.
 Make us your disciples in your kingdom.
 (We pray this in Jesus name.) Amen.
Adopted from Rev Jon Humphries 2015 Lent Event Daily Prayer

Getting Started

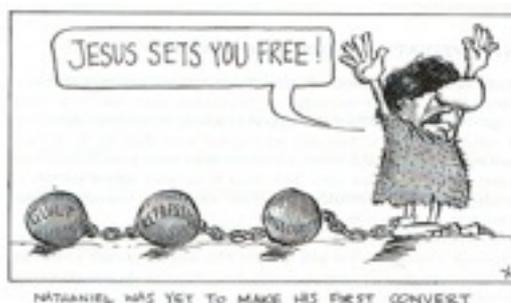
1. Last week we talked about what is not a growing church. What can you remember from last week’s study? What are the characteristics of churches that doesn’t grow?
2. What was the principle message of Matthew 6:33 that we ought to pursue?

Four scenarios of our future

Dr Keith Suter is a consultant on strategic planning and wrote *The future of the Uniting Church in Australia* in 2013. He described four possible scenarios for the Uniting Church. The first scenario, ‘Word and Deed’, examines how the Uniting Church could become a

church of a small number of large parishes providing both spiritual activities and social welfare. The second one, ‘Secular Welfare’, suggests how the Uniting Church could just let the parishes fade away and focus on the provision of social welfare. The third scenario, ‘Return to the Early Church’ tries to explain how the church could reinvent itself as per the first three centuries of the Christian Church. The last one is ‘Recessional’, slowly dispersing. Dr Suter quotes from Tom Ehrlich who argued, “Jesus moved about. Our church stays stubbornly in place. Jesus talked about wealth and power. We talk about sex and ordination... Jesus stood up to the religious establishment. We are the religious establishment.” He also said for the third scenario, “Jesus is, in commercial terms, the Uniting Church’s greatest selling point for this scenario... The Uniting Church has to be less focussed on itself and more focussed on Jesus.”

A church that focuses on Jesus in its ministry, for example, is Saddleback Church in Orange County, California. In 1980, Rick Warren sent letter to 15,000 households an Easter Invitation, saying “At last! A new church for those who’ve given up on traditional church services!” Responding to his letter, on Palm Sunday, 40 people attended the first worship and 240 people on Easter day. On Palm Sunday he preached his vision of 20,000 membership and now average attendance is 20,000. His Palm Sunday sermon started with his vision of spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ to local people, and now they are sharing it globally with its Bible study, “Purpose driven Life” of “40 days of Purpose” Campaign series.



Messages from Acts 10:1-20

1 In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called. 2 He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God. 3 One afternoon at about three o'clock he had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius." 4 He stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" He answered, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. 5 Now send men to Joppa for a certain Simon who is called Peter; 6 he is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea-side." 7 When the angel who spoke to him had left, he called two of his slaves and a devout soldier from the ranks of those who served him, 8 and after telling them everything, he sent them to Joppa. 9 About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. 10 He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. 11 He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. 12 In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. 13 Then he heard a voice saying, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." 14 But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean." 15 The voice said to him again, a second time, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." 16 This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven. 17 Now while Peter was greatly puzzled about what to make of the vision that he had seen, suddenly the men sent by Cornelius appeared. They were asking for Simon's house and were standing by the gate. 18 They called out to ask whether Simon, who was called Peter, was staying there. 19 While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Look, three men are searching for you. 20 Now get up, go down, and go with

them without hesitation; for I have sent them." (NRSV)

DNA of Growing Churches

Read the passage together then discuss;

1. What was the barrier Peter couldn't cross over? (v.11-14)
2. Can you think of anything else that we have decided is unclean? Why does it happen to us repeatedly in our history that we call unclean to what God has made clean?
3. What other barriers or burdens have we created, which are making our church not to grow?
4. Cornelius and Peter both prayed to God regularly. When and how do you pray and how do you know that you are connected with God?
5. How does God speak to you?

Closing prayer

Spirit of God,
 Push us into the wilderness
 of learning.
 Challenge and test our
 faith.
 Grow us,
 Inspire us,
 Lead us,
 Teach us.
 Open our hearts, Open our souls,
 Open our minds, Open us up.
 In this season of Easter,
 As we listen to your story,
 Reinvigorate our discipleship.
 Renew our sense of call and purpose.
 Teach us who we are.
 Reform us as your people.
 Please help us make this so.
 (In Jesus name we pray) Amen.

Adopted from Rev Jon Humphries 2015 Lent Event Daily Prayer



POINT TO PONDER

“Jesus is, in commercial terms, the Uniting Church’s greatest selling point for this scenario... The Uniting Church has to be less focussed on itself and more focussed on Jesus.” (Keith Suter)

VERSE TO REMEMBER

“The voice said to him again, a second time, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane."” (Acts 10:15, NRSV)



“DNA of Growing Churches” 3

Week 3: What drives us to grow? (Acts 10:1-20)

Advent Study - Church		
Week 1	God's church in crisis?	What is the church?(Acts 1:1-11)
Week 2	Church after Christendom	Who are the disciples?(Acts 1:12-26)
Week 3	Living in the Post-Modern world	Who is the Holy Spirit(Acts 2:1-21)
Week 4	Post-Christendom <i>ekklesia</i>	Fellowship of the believers(Acts 2:22-47)
Lenten Study - Jesus		
Week 1	Uniting Church in transition	What do we believe(Acts 3:1-15)
Week 2	Secular to Multifaith Society	Who is Jesus (Acts 3:12-26)
Week 3	Living as Christian radicals	Why did Jesus die? (Acts 4:1-12)
Week 4	30 years of Multiculturalism in UCA	Why and how should I read the Bible?(Acts 4:13-22)
Week 5	Basis of Union and other inheritances	Why and how do I pray?(Acts 4:23-37)
Easter Study - Movement		
Week 1	The idol of Church Growth	What is not a growing church?(Acts 5:25-42)
Week 2	Four scenarios of our future	What burdens us not to grow?(Acts 10:1-20)
Week 3	Attractional to Kingdom model	What drives us to grow?(Acts 9:1-18)

Prayer

God of freedom,
 You who are.
 Hosanna - save us.
 Set us free from our enslavement to our culture of wants and excesses.
 Break us away from the tendrils of consumerism that are so entwined in our thinking and worldview.
 Confront the misguided values which choke selflessness and generosity in our spirit.
 Do not pass over our unrighteousness.
 Put to death in us that which kills the spirit and deadens our living.
 Lead us in to the wilderness of freedom where we may learn your ways again.
 Guide us to the promised end so that we may enter your kingdom.
We pray in Jesus name. AMEN!
Adopted from Rev Jon Humphries 2015 Lent Event Daily Prayer

Getting Started

1. Last week we talked about what burdens us so we don't grow. What can you remember? What was blocking Peter in Acts 10? What are the things that imprison us, both institutional and personal?
2. What would be some reasons why people come to church?



Attractional to Kingdom Model

According to Gerald Rose, writer of *Re-imagining church* (2014), 52 percent of Churches of Christ were in a long-term trend of decline, 12-15 percent were more or less stable and the other third were growing. Only one in five churches had been able to progress from decline to stability or from stability to growth. This was often accomplished by making their worship services more 'attractional'. However, those succeeded in attracting were church-goers from elsewhere. What they were doing was 'recycling Christians' and, as Alan Hirsch, former South Melbourne Church of Christ minister, pointed out, not 'doing any sort of Kingdom [of God] growth.'

What does being a church that seeks Kingdom growth mean to us?

The Alpha Course was started at Holy Trinity Brompton Anglican Church in England in 1977 by Charles Marnham. Later in 1990 Nicky Gumbel took over this 10 week course and revised with weekend programs adding topics of 'The Holy Spirit'. Nowadays it is spread over 170 countries serving people who constantly having questions about faith and God. The course starts with the question "Who is Jesus?" and lead people to the Holy Spirit and how to live as Christians in this world.

Despite some criticism, the Alpha Course tried to answer the questions of people, especially the 80% of Christians between ages 17-30 who left the church in the 1970s. Their questions were: 1. Show God's love in action. 2. Prove the existence of God. Nicky Gumbel tried to answer that this was by the touch of the Spirit that helps us to build personal relationship with God.

Sometimes people seeking to be part of a big forest forget the fact that they are trees which need to grow in that forest, otherwise they will wither when other trees grow higher, blocking sun light. It is important to remember that we, the church, should grow in order for the Kingdom of God to expand.

Messages from Acts 9:1-18

1 Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. 3 Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" 5 He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 6 But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." 7 The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. 8 Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. 9 For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. 10 Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord." 11 The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, 12 and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." 13 But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; 14 and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name." 15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; 16 I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." 17 So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, (NRSV)

DNA of Growing Churches

Read the passage together then discuss;

1. What was driving Saul to persecute Christians?
2. Encountering God on his way to Damascus changed Saul's life. What was the driving force for Paul? How does God call us in modern days? Think of your own experience or stories you heard and share with the group.
3. How difficult was it for Ananias to follow the message of God?
4. Ananias heard this message in a vision. (v.10) What does it mean to us and does God still speak in visions?
5. How does God speak to you (from last week's study)?

Closing prayer

Lord of hope and freedom,
 Cross us over from the land of sin and death in your realm of eternal life.
 May we not fall into temptation to despair or seek easy hollow gods.
 May we be prepared to bear the cost.
 May we accept that hardship will test our commitment.
 May we rely on your provision for our needs.
 May you set before us your way.
 Send us your Spirit that we may walk by faith into freedom.
 God of freedom,
 You who are.
 Amen - may it be so.
Adopted from Rev Jon Humphries 2015 Lent Event Daily Prayer



POINT TO PONDER

“However, those succeeded in attracting were church-goers from elsewhere. What they were doing was ‘recycling Christians’ and, as Alan Hirsch, former South Melbourne Church of Christ minister, pointed out, not ‘doing any sort of Kingdom [of God] growth.’”(Gerald Rose *Re-imagining Church*, 2014, p.32)

VERSE TO REMEMBER

“Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”
(Acts 9:17, NRSV)



“DNA of Growing Churches” 4

Week 4: Life-giving Church. How? (Acts 8:9-25)

Advent Study - Church		
Week 1	God's church in crisis?	What is the church?(Acts 1:1-11)
Week 2	Church after Christendom	Who are the disciples?(Acts 1:12-26)
Week 3	Living in the Post-Modern world	Who is the Holy Spirit(Acts 2:1-21)
Week 4	Post-Christendom <i>ekklesia</i>	Fellowship of the believers(Acts 2:22-47)
Lenten Study - Jesus		
Week 1	Uniting Church in transition	What do we believe(Acts 3:1-15)
Week 2	Secular to Multifaith Society	Who is Jesus (Acts 3:12-26)
Week 3	Living as Christian radicals	Why did Jesus die? (Acts 4:1-12)
Week 4	30 years of Multiculturalism in UCA	Why and how should I read the Bible?(Acts 4:13-22)
Week 5	Basis of Union and other inheritances	Why and how do I pray?(Acts 4:23-37)
Easter Study - Movement		
Week 1	The idol of Church Growth	What is not a growing church?(Acts 5:25-42)
Week 2	Four scenarios of our future	What burdens us not to grow?(Acts 10:1-20)
Week 3	Attractional to Kingdom model	What drives us to grow?(Acts 9:1-18)
Week 4	Mission or Worship	Life-giving Church. How? (Acts 8:9-25)

Prayer

In the Lord, I will be ever thankful,
 In the Lord, I will rejoice.
 Look to God, do not be afraid.
 Lift up your voices the Lord is near.
 Lift up your voices the Lord is near. (repeat)

A chant by Taize community

Getting Started

1. Last week we talked about what drives us to grow which also means what motivates us. Can you remember what drove Paul to be a missionary of the Gospel?
2. What are the things that make us imprisoned? Think about the image of a prison cell, its base, walls and roof.

Mission or worship

Gerald Rose, writer of *Re-imagining church*, asks in his thesis, “What was your experience of transcendence?” He suggests that church needs to be an experiential instead of a traditional or modern institution. He also points out the question, “What sort of church do we want to be?” is a wrong one. Instead we should ask, “What is the Spirit saying to us today?”

Rev Jea-Chul Lee compares life-giving material with life-burying material. The same wood can be used for constructing houses or furniture which will be beneficial for people, but some

wood can be used for coffins that are for burying dead bodies under the ground.

A church or Christian can also be either life-giving material or a life-burying box.

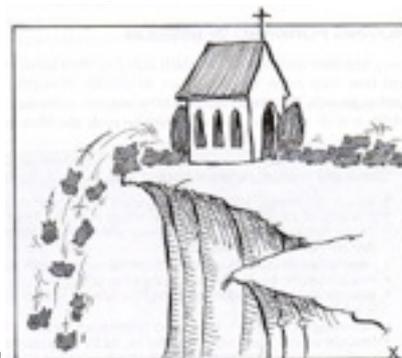
The big difference is whether there is a life within it or not. The one with life will be always a life-bearing agent whatever they do.

Nowadays, many churches struggling with their membership, try to focus outside of the church hoping they can bring some people in. With this intention, many programs are developed and disappeared. In order to win people over, we’ve been emphasizing a lot about ‘mission’ or ‘evangelism’. However, in doing so, we forgot to ask ourselves “Why is this mission so important to us?”

The Brothers of Karamazov, written by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, contains a story about the Grand Inquisitor who arrests and returns Jesus to prison arguing that Jesus was all wrong in the first place when He refused the three temptations that essentially made him free of human desire during his ministry. The inquisitor says that people don’t want freedom but a powerful leadership and says to Jesus, “Don’t worry about this world for we are doing well”, and asks him never come back.

John Piper, author of *Desiring God*, also says that “Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. ... Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. ... Worship, therefore, is the fuel and goal of missions.”

What gives us life and joy, and how can we be a life-giving church? Jesus said, in John 8:31-32, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” Are we set free?



SEACLIFF BAPTIST CHURCH, WITH A SPECIAL MINISTRY TO LEMMINGS, WERE JUSTIFIABLY PROUD OF THEIR INTAKE OF NEWCOMERS.

Messages from Acts 8:9-25

9 Now a certain man named Simon had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he was someone great. 10 All of them, from the least to the greatest, listened to him eagerly, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called Great." 11 And they listened eagerly to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. 12 But when they believed Philip, who was proclaiming the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. 13 Even Simon himself believed. After being baptized, he stayed constantly with Philip and was amazed when he saw the signs and great miracles that took place. 14 Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. 15 The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit 16 (for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). 17 Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. 18 Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, 19 saying, "Give me also this power so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." 20 But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain God's gift with money! 21 You have no part or share in this, for your heart is not right before God. 22 Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. 23 For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and the chains of wickedness." 24 Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may happen to me." 25 Now after Peter and John had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, proclaiming the good news to many villages of the Samaritans. (NRSV)



POINT TO PONDER

"Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. ... Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. ... Worship, therefore, is the fuel and goal of missions." (John Piper, *Desiring God*)

VERSE TO REMEMBER

"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (*John 8:31a-32, NRSV*)

DNA of Growing Churches

Read the passage together then discuss:

1. What is the power of God and power of man?
2. Simon said, "Give me also this power so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." (v19) Have you ever wished like Simon?
3. Materialism in our society is much more wide spread than in Simon's time. How do we deal with this 'silver'?
4. We talked about a life-giving church. How can we be a life-giving, burden-lifting (Matthew 11:28), and mind-freeing (John 8:32) church of Christ?



Closing prayer

Lord of life,
 Things are not as they
 should be.
 Our world is not as you intended.
 We have overreached our place in the world.
 We have upset the balance of nature.
 We do not live in harmony with the environment.
 We should be sorry.
 But little do we change.
 Do not forgive our token gestures.
 Hold us accountable until we repent.
 Grant us the shocking vision of the truth.
 But also call us to your purpose.
 Awaken in us the seeds of change.
 Help us take up our responsibility.
 Show us how to make amends.
 Join us to your mission.
 That our world be renewed.
 That we may be redeemed.
 That the Creating Christ may be served.
 In his name. Amen.

Adopted from Rev Jon Humphries 2015 Lent Event Daily Prayer