

## Following Jesus Together | Doing what Jesus Did | January 19, 2020

Good Morning. And Happy STC Weekend, to you! I'm Michael one of the pastors.

If you're a guest, STC Weekend is a pretty big weekend for our family of churches. Every year we take MLK weekend to flood our community with the love of Jesus. It's not the only time we do that, for sure... but it's one big weekend where all 3 churches come together to do so in a heavily concentrated way.

From the very beginning, we wanted our churches to exist for the benefit of our community. Early on we read a book - that we can't even remember the title of now - that asked, "Would your city know if your church vanished? Would you be missed?" And that thought really resonated with us. We want to be the type of church that would be missed if we were gone.

So, from the onset, our goal has been to be a church that makes our area better, specifically we wanted to be known for caring for the vulnerable and marginalized. So early on in our history we did all kinds of things.

- When Extreme Home Makeover was a thing, we did a big makeover to one of the women's shelter's housing facilities to essentially double their capacity - we had the bus out there and everything. To this day, that housing complex is called "the Midtown house".
- Homeless for the Homeless - to raise awareness for homelessness in our area, we'd become homeless for a night and it was always not by plan, but by the sovereign hand of God the coldest night of the year.

And all of those things were incredibly fun and good for what they were, but throughout the years of our churches began to sense that the best way we could serve our city was to move beyond isolated serving events and instead move to developing year-round ongoing relationships with strategic partners in our community. So about 4 years ago, we selected 6-7 organizations in the Columbia/Lexington area to come alongside. If you're unfamiliar, those organizations are:

- Epworth Children's Home
- Ezekiel Ministries
- Home Works for America
- Department of Social Services
- Prisma Health Children's Hospital
- Daybreak Crisis Pregnancy Center
- Transitions Homeless Center

In year 4 of STC, this strategy has been incredibly fruitful. If you missed the rally this weekend, here are some stories of God working that that were shared this weekend.

- Epworth - all cottages coming to our downtown Student ministry - which is huge. Our church is the first non-Methodist church they've ever allowed students to come to... and now it's not just allowed, but they literally bus their kids in.
- Transitions - started a Sunday LifeGroup for Transition Residents. Which for us is huge - because LifeGroups are where the rubber meets the road for us being church family. Having a transitions LifeGroup means we're getting folks from homeless situations connected to church family.
  - Celebrated Mr. Cornell's birthday during their lifegroup time. Mr. Cornell is like a 60 something year-old homeless man - who has just bought in. His "wish" when he blew out his candles - his words, not mine - was "to have many more birthdays with us and to continue to learn how to follow God faithfully." That's just awesome.

- Over at DSS this year, we saw somewhere between 300-320 foster parents receive training that they wouldn't have otherwise received. And that really can't be undersold, IMO. If you don't know - a lot of times foster parents just sorta get thrust out into the game with little opportunity for backup... and to get to be a part of that - honestly, system-wide - change is incredible.

And I could go on and on about how the Children's Hospital has now invited us to become a part of the Ronald McDonald House to care for parents with Kids in long-term care, and invited us to help them staff and host Camp Kemo and other events at their camp facility right outside of Hopkins and how on an almost weekly basis, we get phone calls and thank you cards from our partners for the work that we do with them - but last week's sermon was almost an hour and I don't want to do that to you 2 weeks in a row.

But, I can honestly say, if we no longer existed we would be missed by these organizations. We have made a real impact and difference for each organization and its clients. And so, I think STC is one of the most beautiful and best things we do as a church. And I want to thank all of you who are giving your time and energy to serve this weekend.

But, this is not ultimately why we do it. The ultimate reason, why we do it isn't just because we want our city to miss us if we're gone, it's not so we can say "hey look at how great we are". No, ultimately we do all of these things because of Jesus.

Because Jesus cares about the oppressed. Jesus cares about the marginalized and the hurting... and loving and serving the physically and spiritually needy (which is all of us) is the very stuff that Jesus himself did... and like we said last week - our aim as followers of Jesus is 3-fold: **to be with Jesus, to become like Jesus and to do the things that Jesus did.**

So, as much as STC is one avenue for pursuing these things, it's really just another tool in our toolbelt to be a people who are becoming like Jesus.

We believe waking up early on a Saturday morning to sacrifice of our time to watch kids for foster trainings, or redo the plumbing in a house with Home Works, or throwing parties for children at the Children's Hospital, overtime those things shape you into a certain type of person - a person like Jesus - who loves and serves in every sphere of life.

Because the work of the Kingdom isn't just at our STC partners, the work of the Kingdom is at your job, in your neighborhood, with your family. In every space, followers of Jesus are meant to be agents of His Kingdom coming. And that's what I want to talk with you about this morning...

Let's look at one passage of Scripture together to show you the idea, and then I want to give us some pastoral guidance on getting there.

**Matthew 9:35-38** [35] And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. So Jesus is out doing the work of the kingdom... preaching the gospel and bringing hope and healing to people who need it. And his disciples are with him. [36] When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. [37] Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; [38] therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

Jesus looks out at all the people who are coming to him and has compassion. He sees their need for Him. Their need for the gospel - for grace, for hope, for healing and redemption and he's moved for them.

So, he leans into his disciples and says, "Look... the harvest is plentiful. There are so many out there who not only need the kingdom, but are ready for it - but the workers are few." Pray then, that God would send out more workers into the harvest - more people to do the work of the Kingdom.

The word "send" in English actually comes from the same root word where we get the word "mission" from and every derivative off of it - like the word: missionary. **What a missionary is is simply someone one sent by God into the Kingdom work of Jesus.**

This specific word for send that Jesus uses in Greek actually carries the connotation of force - like how you would heave a basketball if you were trying to make a halfcourt shot. He's saying "Ask God to HEAVE workers - lots of workers - out into the field."

And the very next thing Jesus does is appoint 12 of his disciples - the 12 apostles, which means "the sent ones" - to go out and start doing what He's been doing. He sends them out to proclaim the good news of God's kingdom - to heal and bring freedom.

I love what he tells them in verse 8 of chapter 10: **You received without paying; give without pay.**

You've been following me around now for however long. You've freely been experiencing and received the love and the grace of the Father through me. You've been up front and center for all that I do and provide. So, now, go and share what you've been given with others... and He sends them out to do what he does - to carry on the work of His Kingdom - preaching the gospel and bringing hope and healing to the world.

And this is a pattern throughout Jesus ministry - sending his disciples out - and it ultimately concludes in **Matthew 28:18-20...** "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Jesus' parting words to His people are sending words - He sends them out to keep carrying on the work that He did - and He promises to be with them - by the Spirit - through it all.

And here's the thing: this is his aim for you, too. A key aspect of following Jesus is carrying on the work that Jesus did.

The way we often say it around here is "**Every Christian is a missionary**" **Every Christian is sent by God to join God in what He is doing in the world.**

If you are a believer in Jesus, you are one of the ones Jesus told his disciples to ask God to heave out into the world for His Kingdom. Ultimately, when I talk about becoming a people who do what Jesus did - this is what I mean. Becoming a sent people, a missionary people, or a "serve the city" people or whatever description you find most helpful.

A people who when we have the opportunity to help others understand the things of God... we take it. When we see our neighbor, or co-worker, or student or whomever in need, we are the ones who step in to

care for them. A people who don't see the problems of others as someone else's responsibility, but an opportunity for us to love like Jesus.. A people who help others see Jesus, know Jesus and ultimately, trust Jesus. .

If you've been around here for any amount of time - none of that should sound new to you. We talk about this all the time. So I could just stop here and say, "Alright, we're missionaries. Let's go get it!" And pray and be done - but 1.) that would be a 15 minute sermon, and I think I'm physically incapable of doing that... but 2.) I don't think that would be all that helpful for you.

So, here's what I want to do with the remainder of our time. I just want to get to be your pastor for a few minutes. I want give you 4 things - **4 encouragements** - to help and guide us to become these types of people.

**1. Look for the small.**

In Matthew 13, listen to how Jesus teaches that the Kingdom will work...

**Matthew 13:31-32** [31] He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. [32] It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

He says, the Kingdom starts with the small - the unassuming, the ordinary - and blossoms into something incredible. You know, it's easy to think that becoming the type of people who do the things Jesus does must always constitute large or seemingly significant actions. It's why when most of us think about "missionaries" we don't think of ourselves but rather people who sell everything and move half a world away.

And there's not anything wrong with that, but what happens is we tend to make the idea of mission so grand or complex that only a few people can actually do it and the rest of us stall out.

And when I say, look for the small, what I mean is: Don't underestimate the power of simply, faithfully following of Jesus in everyday, ordinary life. The seemingly ordinary stuff isn't insignificant.

Tim Chester, is British author of a book called "A Meal with Jesus". In it he looks at two instances where the work of Jesus is discussed in Luke. Luke 19:10 which says, "The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost." And Luke 7:34, "The Son of Man came eating and drinking." And he does this really neat things where he draws this really simple, but profound connection between these to tings - that one of the ways Jesus seeks and saves the lost is by eating and drinking with them.

One NT scholar says that in Luke's biography especially, "Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming from a meal." That's virtually where all the action takes place.

I mean, here was Jesus' strategy - He'd walk into a town and say, "Hey you, Zach. Yeah, you. The short guy, up in the tree? What are you doing for dinner? Let's go eat... but, look, not at my place. Let's go to yours because I'm homeless. Invite your friends. Bring some water, I'll take care of the wine... let's eat and chat."

And listen, that's only a slightly hyperbolic retelling of that story. And if you're familiar, you know that meal changed the course of Zaccheaus' entire life. The point is, for Jesus it wasn't rocket science. For Jesus, seeking and saving the lost was tied to something as common and ordinary as the dinner table.

So how do we become a people who do what Jesus does? Again, not rocket science. It's simply by embracing the small, ordinary, but potentially meaningful opportunities to love those around us.

- It's the extra two minutes you could spend outside chatting with your neighbor that might lead to - "Hey, what are you doing thursday at 6? I make a mean chili. Let's get together."
- It's "hey co-worker, what are you doing for lunch? Imma go with you. Or being the one to give them a lift to the office when their car breaks down
- It's turning the radio down on the way to or from school, and having a heartfelt conversation about things that actually matter with your kids... and possibly their friends, if you rock that carpool life.
- It's taking a few extra minutes to really listen and care for your clients, or patients or students, or whomever it is your job serves instead of just trying get them in and get them out for the sake of the bottom line.
- It's, "I know so-and-so, is going through a hard time. So, you know what, I'm not gonna watch the Office for the billionth time tonight and instead I'm gonna give them a call or run them over a meal and chat for a few... maybe pray with them."

Simple. Small. But significant.

But that leads me to the next one...

## 2. Embrace the Interruption.

Here's the thing - your neighbor isn't going to say to you, "Hey, tomorrow at 9:30, I'm going to have a really significant life event - and I'm gonna need you be there for that. K? Thanks!"

That's not how life works. The opportunities to care for the needs of others, to share the hope of Jesus with a hurting friend, or whatever aren't things you pencil into your calendar - like, "Okay - 8am - preach the gospel 10:30 - feed the hungry, noon - bear my neighbors burden. That's just not a thing.

What I'm learning is that **love actually happens in the interruption.**

In my experience, at least - becoming a person who does what Jesus did - almost always happens as an interruption to the rest of my life. An interruption to my plans, to my schedule - an interruption to my comfort or my desires. Rarely, if ever, in my life has becoming a person of love like Jesus - not required me to sacrifice or at the very least be uncomfortable.

When we look at Jesus, here's what we see. We see that **Jesus had an uncanny ability to just see people.** I mean, this is what Matthew 9 says, "He saw the crowds... and was moved with compassion." In the midst of other things going on, He had this ability to see people, to care about them and engage no matter how it might have interrupted his plans.

I think about the woman who'd been bleeding for years who, in Luke 8, just touches his cloak in a crowd and Jesus stops what he's doing to speak and be with her. I think of the interruption of Jairus' and the centurion coming to Jesus while he's headed elsewhere to ask him to heal someone in their family... and Jesus just stops and does it... He doesn't say, "man, look, I would but I've got this thing. Maybe we can set

up that healing for next week. He doesn't say, "Dude, I'm God and my time is more valuable elsewhere." No, He simply embraces the perceived interruption.

And I'll be honest with you, this is something that has been really convicting for me. What I'm realizing is that if, per chance, God wanted to anything in my neighbor's life... I'd actually miss it because I'm not looking for it. If he wanted me to lovingly serve someone or share the gospel with someone or whatever... a lot of the time, I'd miss it.

If I'm honest, most days, I just run on autopilot. After work, it's just into the driveway, into the house, get the kids fed and in bed and then on the couch for netflix or curling up with a book. And it's not that those things are bad or even unnecessary all of the time. However, for me, it just becomes my routine. To where it's not one or two days a week where it happens, but 3, 4, 5.

And what I need is to remember what Jesus essentially said to his disciples: "Look. Look, Michael, Look. The harvest is plentiful." There are people all around you in need and ready for the Kingdom. Look.

**So, I'm starting to pray this simple prayer in the mornings. I just call it my "eyes up" prayer.** Where I simply wake up in the morning and ask, "God, help me to have my eyes up today - to see what you're doing around me and give me the will to join in. To embrace the interruption of your Kingdom breaking through."

And FWIW, that might be a prayer that you need to pray, too. Because the truth is God is up to stuff... all around you... in every sphere of life that you inhabit - work, school, the neighborhood, the soccer field... all of it.

### **3. Take advantage of your season of life.**

Anyone remember WWJD? We laugh (or maybe groan) but let's be honest - despite the fact that we decided to put it on every bit of jewelry imaginable - it was kind of great. What would Jesus do is a great question. Honestly, if I could get all of us asking that question alone, I would consider it a win. But it's also a bit of a misleading question.

Here's what I mean: Jesus was a 1 century male Jewish itinerant rabbi.... And, as far as I know, you aren't. So, that makes becoming a people who do what Jesus did a bit more complicated.

For example, if you're praying about where you should live. Should we build, should we buy?... live on land or live in a neighborhood?... you're praying about it and you're asking the Spirit what would Jesus do - that's probably not gonna be very helpful... because Jesus would probably camp a lot and couch surf with his rich friends. Because that's what he did!

The heart behind WWJD is great, but I'd submit that even better question is **What would Jesus do if he were you?** What would Jesus do if he were your gender? What would Jesus do if he was your age? With your job? Your ethnicity? Your background? What would Jesus do if he lived where you live and had the money that you have?

**Being a disciple is doing the things He did in your context and that begs tons of questions:**

- How would Jesus approach your job? What would his attitude and agenda be there?
- Who in your life would Jesus pray for and what about? And how would he follow-up on that with them?

- How would Jesus interact with a smartphone? And facebook? And how would he handle the 'gram?
- What and how many extracurriculars would Jesus encourage and devote time to if He parented your kids? How would he approach them?
- What people or needs would Jesus intentionally seek out if He were you, with your gifts and passions and resources?

And that takes a bit more work, right? That takes creativity and community to sort through. But is more true to the work that Jesus wants to do in and through you.

The truth is God has gifted you in unique ways. He's given each of you unique jobs and responsibilities. He's put each of you in different and unique seasons of life - to do work he uniquely intends to do through you in your context... and so when it comes to being agents of His Kingdom, when it comes to doing what Jesus did, we have to consider these things.

So, for example, I know a lot of us here are moms and dads of anywhere between 1-4 kids. You're in a spot where you're up to your eyeballs in responsibility and chaos management and diapers, and school, and dance, and sports, and the list goes on and on. That's your season. Now, that's not gonna be forever, but it is what is right now.

But, here's what this means: It doesn't mean don't do anything. It means you need to take advantage of where you're at. Do the things that Jesus would do as someone who is following Jesus with a packed out mini-van.

- Spend time teaching your little captive audience about Jesus and teach them how to care about their friends."
- Build relationships with other parents with young kids and invite them over.
- Let your house be the neighborhood house - the one where the kids and parents know they can come and play and be safe.
- Don't look at the trip to the soccer field as just an event to watch your kid play a sport they're not gonna go pro in. Look at it as an opportunity for the Kingdom.
- Invite single people into your home: 1 - to let them know they are a part of your family in Jesus and model for your kids what the church means and 2 - so that they might feel sorry for you and offer to help.

Take advantage of where God has you.

I'll add this nugget here: The hard part about leading a church and preaching to us is that we're all not in the same place. We're not all in the same season. We're not all operating at the same capacity. At all times, we're all in different spaces needing different things.

So I know there are some of us that need a completely loving, but a complete swift kick in the pants - to get off of netflix and get out there and contribute to the kingdom of God. And yet, others of us need to be told, yo... slow down... and let the Holy Spirit do some work in your soul.

Some of you think you're too busy to do anything... and that's simply not true. Having kids, or working a demanding job is not a valid excuse to not do what Jesus did... it's just a special circumstance you have to consider for what it can look like.

And some of you, are going at breakneck speed right now and the rest of your life is in shambles and you need remember that you are invited to participate in God's work, but you are not invited to act like it all depends on you.

But that actually leads me to the 4th and final thing for you this morning.

#### **4. You Are Not Alone**

A guy in my LifeGroup this week, when we were talking about this said, "This whole "doing what Jesus did" thing is a really intimidating idea to me - because it's like Jesus is Lebron... but I'm a 5'9 white dude who can't jump."

And, to be honest, I appreciated that so much because it's true. But the difference according to the Scriptures, is that Lebron doesn't live inside of you... but the Spirit of Jesus does. And that actually changes everything.

Look back at Jesus' words in **Matthew 28:**

**[19] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. *And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*"**

Jesus does not send us out alone. Jesus is with you. Jesus - through the Spirit - is with you. And he is the one at work around you - doing things that you can't even see in the lives your friends, and your neighbors and your co-workers and kids - and He is the one empowering every action we undertake to share His love and makes it fruitful. Not matter how fumbling or insufficient might think it is.

And so for however ill-equipped or nervous or awkward you might feel about any of this - reaching out to your co-worker, sharing your faith and your hope with your friend, or even taking the 10 small steps across your yard to meet your neighbor - for however overwhelmed or impossible you feel that all of this is due to your job or your family or your season of life - the good news is **God is with you**. And if God is with you - that is all you need.

If the Spirit is with us, then all of us can join in. Regardless of your season... all of us can look for the small things - all of us can do things like sitting around a table with someone far from God - all of us can slow down and open our eyes and see the Kingdom of God breaking in like weeds breaking in through pavement, and all of us through His grace and the power of his spirit, can see what God is up to and join.

The only real question is will you join Him?

**Pray**



And I'll say it another way, too. Do not underestimate the power of simple, faithful following of Jesus with other followers of Jesus in everyday, ordinary life. I absolutely love the way that Jesus teaches about this in his Sermon on the Mount. This is from **Matthew 5:14–16**

[14] “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. [15] Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. [16] In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

I've said this to you before, but one person can't be a city. That takes a group. And Jesus' vision for his people is one where their faithfulness to follow Him together becomes compelling to the world around them. That the world would look and see the way of life embodied by Jesus' people and it would just draw them in.

Like imagine if our church was one where people said, “Man, those Midtown people it's a little weird how involved they are in each others lives... but man, whenever crap hits the fan with someone... they're always the first ones to respond.”

- “those Midtown people have uncommonly high bar for forgiveness. They are so different from each other, but somehow they get along and make it work despite those things... None of my relationships are like that... I gotta figure out what's going on.”
- “Man, you know those Midtown people... they don't treat money the way we do. They give it away... a lot. And are so content with what they got... they aren't stuck in the same cycle of spending more than they make to keep up with Jones' like I am... I want to find out why?”

I just think that'd be incredible. Simple. Small. But significant.

Essentially, there's only one of me. And I can't go to all the towns at once. And I can't be with every person at once.

This is where it's important to remember that while Jesus was 100% God, he was also 100% man - bound by the same limitations of time and space that you and I are.

First, Holy Spirit empowers.

But, there's another side to it. We look at ourselves and we feel so far away. This is where it is important to remember, following Jesus isn't about making ourselves worthy - or earning anything with God - it's a response to what has been earned for us through Jesus. And it's a process - full of ups and downs and a whole lot of grace. And Jesus is going to say that's most important...

Luke actually records for us what happened when the disciples came back to debrief with Jesus. They come back from spreading the Kingdom and they're all pumped up. “Jesus, we can cast out demons! And heal people. The spirits are subject to us! This is crazy, we are doing what you do, isn't this amazing!” And I love how Jesus responds...

Luke 10:20 [20] Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

- God is not impressed nor upset with our progress or lack thereof. God delights in where we are. He is not annoyed by our consistent failures, but celebrates with every baby step forward and is encouraging us to more.
- Lewis - "Further in! Further up!"

Regardless of your stage... all of us can sit around a table with someone far from God, all of us can volunteer a bit of our time to serve, all of us can apprentice under Jesus to become people who are about what he is about, all of us can slow down and open our eyes and see the Kingdom of God breaking in like weeds breaking in through pavement, and through His grace and the power of his spirit, see what God is up to and join.