

St. Paul: On The Same page

for 09.28.14



Day One: Mark 6:30-48

The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught.³¹ And he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.”

In his little book, “Make Him Known,” Andrew Fitzgerald has a diagram with three circles. They represent three directions of focus – one is upward, toward God. One is inward, toward our own church. And one is out, to the world where people still need to learn about Jesus.

Fitzgerald argues that we need to focus on all three for the church to be healthy. If we are focused only on God, we will have a pointless spiritualism. If we focus only on ourselves, our church will

starve and die. If we focus only outward at the needs of society, we will provide programs, but no purpose.

In the 6th chapter of Mark we see all three. Jesus is focused upward on his Father. He takes time away to talk to God.

Jesus is focused inward on the care of his disciples, calling them to rest. He sets aside time away from the crowds to teach them.

And Jesus is focused outward to the spiritual needs of the world. When he sees the multitudes of the lost, he is moved to compassion and he provides food for both body and soul.

Which of these three things do you think our church is missing? Which one is most missing in your life?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, help me to look to you, to long for your word, and to spend time in prayer. Help me to look to my family and friends, and to care for them. Help me to look outward to those in need and to share with them the treasure of eternal life you have given me. I have been best at looking to myself and my own needs. Give me new eyes to see the world around me in as you do. Amen.*

Day Two:

The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught.³¹ And he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.³² And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves.

Time management seminars love to tell the story, usually attributed to Steven Covey, of the man given an assignment to fill a large glass jar with sand, gravel, and rocks. The bottom line of the story is that the big rocks have to go in first or you’ll never get them in. It’s about priorities.

What do you suppose Jesus’ task list would have looked like? How many lesson plans? How many lectures? How many places to go, people to see, issues to address?

Jesus ministry was like a 3-year presidential campaign tour. Traveling from town to town, arrangements for food and housing for his disciples and himself, constant crowds, constant questions, incessant needs of people for healing. What are the “big rocks” for Jesus? What must come first?

For Jesus it was this: time with his heavenly Father.

The world was crying out for what Jesus brought, but he began his ministry with 40 days of fasting and meditation in the desert. Hundreds of towns and villages needed to hear the gospel, but Jesus spent every Sabbath day in the synagogue to hear the Word, and the remainder of the day in rest. People were poor, and sick, and hungry, and lost, and they came to Jesus with their needs. But Jesus left them behind to go pray.

We need to look upward. Each one of us needs time in prayer, time in God’s word, time to be silent, time to rest. Our lives are filled with things that cry out for our attention, but we need to attend to our Savior. Our whole church needs to look up, to be focused on God’s design.

But not only up. We look up in order to be prepared to look elsewhere.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you took your disciples aside for prayer. Take me aside. Turn me away from all the things that are shouting at me, and let me rest with you and be refreshed. Amen.*

Day Three:

And he began to teach them many things. ³⁵ And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. ³⁶ Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." ³⁷ But he answered them, "You give them something to eat."

Jesus looked in. He not only looked up to his heavenly Father, but he also looked in to the needs of his disciples.

Those who followed Jesus were hungry, and so were his 12 closest students. It's a fact of life in congregations that there is an awful lot of work just in taking care of basic needs, putting on dinners, producing documents, teaching, leading, cleaning, maintaining, managing the details of an organization.

It's great when a church has skilled organizers to do all those things. And we all love to attend a church that really "has its act together" and does things well. But caring for our own, and running good programs is not what makes a healthy church.

Instead, an inward focus makes us unhealthy. We reach

no one. We gradually grow more distant from our Lord. We become a club for the benefit of ourselves alone.

Jesus arranged things so that his disciples had what they needed, their daily bread. But here he challenges them to provide for others also. "You give them something to eat." And they were overwhelmed by the size of the task.

We might be also. How can we provide a church building for so many people? Do you know what that costs? How can we have the staff, the facilities, and all the stuff needed to teach so many children? We're tempted to become fixated on the needs we can't meet.

But Jesus showed them, he could provide all that was needed, if they only followed him. When the disciples looked, they found all they needed to share.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, we need to look inward, to care for one another within the church. But we worry about having enough. We fret that the task is too large and we can't do it. Lord, help us to offer freely what we have, and trust that you will make it enough, and more than enough. Amen.*

Day Four:

When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things.

Jesus looked out. He looked up to his Father. He looked in to care for his disciples. But he always looked out, at those in need. And what did he see?

I spoke to someone today who had just returned from a trip. The weather was unusually clear for his flight, and he talked about how stunningly beautiful the world was, seen from 35,000 feet. But then how ugly it was again when he landed and saw the throngs of people in the airport. He wondered how it all looked to God.

Of course, we think that God sees the world from very high up (although that's a rather childish picture of God). And he sees the beautiful world that he made. And we assume that when God sees people and the things they do, the mess they have made of the world, that he sees that as very ugly.

No doubt he does. But God is not just angry at sin. God sees the beauty of the

world he made, but he is even more struck by the beauty of the people he created so tenderly. He sees us, and through the eyes of his love he sees even past our sins to the person that he desires to make his own forever and ever.

God sees the murderers and terrorists and is angered at their hate – but he aches to bring them back to himself. Jesus sees the crowds, the people he was trying to escape in order to rest, and he sees their needs. He is filled with loving compassion.

If we look up to our Father – and if we look in to care for one another – then we are ready to look out, to the needs of others whom God would have us bring in. We look out, as Jesus did, not out of obligation but out of compassion.

And then what? Then we rest with our Father again. *“Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat ... And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray.*

Prayer: *Look up, look in, look out. Lord Jesus, help me to do all these things as I follow you. Let me look to you, and with you to the world. Amen.*

