

Imagine a Church . . .
Matthew 5:14-16

Introduction

Good morning! Last week, we talked about God's vision for our families – it was a very intimate and personal reflection on the work God is doing in our individual families. Two weeks ago, Chad shared the vision what God is doing globally as he shared the work going on in Uganda and how Northlake can begin to be involved.

Today, we are going to talk again about vision. However, this time we are going to focus on our local community. Simply put, I want to talk with you about how God may want to use the people of Northlake to impact this community with His love, and the good news of salvation that is found only in His Son.

Much of what I will be discussing is found in a brochure we handed out at our potluck earlier this month. If you did not get one then, or have not picked one up over the past few weeks, please pick one up at the welcome center after the service.

Let's Pray

Matthew 5:14-16

14“**You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; 15nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16“Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.**

Imagine a Church . . .

Imagine a church where men and women, old and young, gather to glorify God in unity by encouraging one another, serving one another, and loving one another. Imagine a people whose purpose is to give away all that they have, knowing firmly that they can never run out.

Imagine a church where people gather around a common purpose to impact their local community with the good news of salvation that is found only in Jesus Christ. Imagine uncommon acts of kindness and service poured lavishly on the community for no other reason than the fact that the community is loved by God and is loved by the local church.

The Elders of Northlake Christian Church believe that God has called us to be that kind of church – not “one day aspiring” to be that church, but to actually have that reputation amongst community that surrounds us. To achieve this vision will not be easy. Nothing worth while ever is. There will be much hard work ahead as we allow ourselves, individually and corporately, to be examined by God, and like children, open our hands to Him and ask Him to change us.

Imagine Northlake Christian Church as a lighthouse to the community of Bothell, Mill Creek, Brier, Mountlake Terrace, Everett, Edmonds and Lynnwood. Imagine people, surrounded by the darkness of unbelief, the darkness of addiction, the darkness of failed relationships, the darkness of . . . the list goes on and on - imagine this community drawn

to the corner of North and Filbert because there is a people gathered there who, though not perfect, are at peace. A people whose faith is not in their ability to work stuff out, but whose faith is in their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who has promised to never leave them nor forsake them. Imagine the community drawn to the stories and rumors they have heard of healthy relationships that are blossoming at Northlake - relationships that don't sound anything like the dark, selfish, hurtful relationships they are used to.

The people are all around us, and more are coming. Our question is, Is Our Lighthouse Ready?

Why Bother?

But some of us may be honestly thinking – this sounds like a lot of work. Do we really want to bother with new ministries, make changes to our church, invest in opportunities to interact with the non-Christian community around us? What if this works! What if people who don't act like we do actually start coming to this church, what do we do then?

They won't know the words to the songs we sing. They might try to change us. We come here to be "safe" from the world around us – don't let them know where we are!

The religious leaders in Jesus' day had similar concerns. Listen to Jesus' reply to them in Luke 15:

Luke 15:1-7

1Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. 2Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." 3So He told them this parable, saying, 4"What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? 5"When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6"And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' 7"I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Jesus, through these parables, gives us a picture of the Kingdom of God. In the Kingdom of God, people who are lost matter greatly. There is a great effort put forth in seeking out lost people. Lost people are not avoided, they are sought after. And when those lost people are found, when those lost people surrender their lives to Jesus Christ, there is great rejoicing.

To be completely honest, it has been my experience that the Evangelical Church has been really good at rejoicing when people turn their hearts to Jesus, but too often we don't want to get our hands dirty by actually going out and engaging them.

However, I must also say that at Northlake there has been a tremendous ground-swell of effort put forth over the past few years in engaging and serving our community. You have heard us speak last year and this year about the upcoming Mill Creek Festival and how we want to participate and serve the people who are there – for no other reason than we believe that is what Jesus would do if He were there.

A couple of months ago we began serving a community dinner once a month and inviting our neighbors over for a meal. Again, for no other reason than as we read the gospels, we believe that is what Jesus would use our kitchen for.

There are many other opportunities I could speak of, but the point is that it is so encouraging to see the people of this church, inspired by what God has done in their lives, to go and seek the lost.

Jesus told us:

Luke 19:10

10“For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

Jesus knew His purpose. Do we know ours? Jesus told us to go into the world and preach the good news. Northlake is very involved in the world as you’ve heard over the past few months. We need to make sure that we don’t leap-frog over our own backyard.

The Elders believe the time has come for us to make some very specific improvements to our church campus which will allow us to impact our community to a greater degree. I’d like to take the remainder of this morning to talk about these changes. For those of you at the potluck a few weeks ago, this will be somewhat of a review.

Our Planned Changes

Northlake Christian Church is not a building. Northlake is a group of people who gather occasionally in a building, as well as in homes, and in our neighborhoods. Northlake is people – our building is a tool. Although it is very big, and quite expensive, our building does not bring people to Christ, or provide an understanding shoulder to cry on in times of desperation. Our building does not help people understand the majesty of God, or how He is glorified as we grow to live in dependence on Him. Our building does not teach people how “to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings” (Phil. 3:10 – NIV).

But let us not minimize the importance of our building. Our building provides a place for us to learn, a place to serve, a place to rejoice, and a place to sympathize. God has blessed Northlake with a wonderful building in a strategic location. For over fifteen years, God has used the building at North and Filbert to minister to thousands. We believe God is now leading us into the next chapter of our ministry.

We propose:

A multi-purpose Community Center, designed as a second large gathering area, whose purpose is to serve our local community through outreach programs. Our vision is that this center will house community service programs such as a local food bank, clothing bank, basic skills training, etc. This will also be a place for our church community as well as local community youth to hang out, fellowship, learn and serve one another. This

Community Center would be situated to the south of our existing building, just beyond our current main entrance.

Additional Classroom Space. Every room in our facility is used on Sunday mornings with our worship service and youth/children's ministries. We currently have one adult "Sunday School" class on-going, but our vision is to offer more classes on a regular basis. Further, our mid-week "Family Life Tuesday Nights" completely fill our building with no room to expand our existing classes or to offer more. Our vision is to develop a bank of classrooms on two levels to the west of our existing building for the entire length of our western exposure. Using foldable walls, this will give us the flexibility of two large areas (one upstairs, one downstairs) or up to eight smaller meeting areas.

An Expanded Lobby. Our vision is for our lobby to be a gathering space for fellowship, as well as a potential 3rd large meeting area. We envision having semi-permanent displays for all of our ministries in this expanded lobby, providing a newcomer to meet with people from our various ministries to "get a taste" of what we're about. Further, we want to provide tables and chairs for people to meet in a relaxed area for fellowship, prayer and coffee!

Completion of our Balcony. Currently, our balcony seats approximately 60 people. Due to the design, these seats have poor line-of-site, and the people in the balcony often feel disengaged from what is going on in the Worship Center. Also, whenever we call the church together for prayer, or ministry at the altar, the balcony is excluded as there is no direct access from the balcony to the main floor. Our vision is to complete the balcony in a "horse-shoe" shape with stairs leading down to the main floor on either side. The completion of the balcony will add an approximate 100 seats to our Worship Center capacity.

There are many more details in the booklet I mentioned before, including rough estimates on cost and how we plan to pay for these improvements. Also, myself and the other elders are always available to answer any questions you may have. I've been gathering all the comments from our potluck a few weeks ago, and we'll be publishing them in the next week or so to enable all of you to see the questions and responses from others.

We will be talking more about this through the summer, and at the same time gathering more information to help us finalize decisions and make more concrete plans this coming fall.

Conclusion

Jesus told us that we are the light of the world. He did not say that we are one of several lights. Jesus Christ is the only hope for this fallen world, and we have been charged with the task of sharing His good news.

You know, you can hire the best architects, the best engineers, the best builders in the world to make the best lighthouse ever seen. But unless there is a light shining from the lighthouse, boats will still crash. The lighthouse only serves its purpose if light comes out of it.

As I said before, Northlake is not this building. Northlake is you and me. Beyond making plans to improve our building, are we also committed to making ourselves ready? Are we committed to being used of God even in (and perhaps especially in) areas and ministries where we're not real comfortable? Can we express God's love to people who on their exterior are not particularly lovely?

That is what Jesus did. That is what Jesus still wants to do through you and me.

Let's pray.