

MISSIONAL CHURCH: Treasure in Clay Jars

Lesson Three: Faithfulness to God's Calling and Taking the Gospel

Outcome Objectives:

1. Learners will examine God's mission of taking the gospel to every people and every nation.
2. Learners will explore what it means for the congregation to grow in living out the mission of God in the location where they find themselves.
3. Learners will seek to discern God's specific missional identity for them personally and for the congregation.

Introduction:

1. Teacher will examine passages which describe the mission of God to redeem the world to himself. Jesus' final words to the disciples are recorded in Matthew 28:16-20. He gathered with the remaining eleven disciples in Galilee before his return to heaven. His authoritative charge to the disciples declared their future mission. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."
2. Paul articulates the message of God's mission in II Corinthians 5:17-21. "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting the trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us, we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."
3. God calls all people to him. The God who calls all people is most perfectly seen in Jesus Christ. It is our task to imitate him. Colossians 1:15-20 says it this way, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church, he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased

to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of Jesus.”

Exploration

1. Scripture tells us that as clay jars we display his glory of God. It is not about us, but his all-surpassing power (II Corinthians 4:7) Using the theme of disciples being God’s vessel as clay jars, the book **Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness**, (Lois Y. Barrett et al.) calls congregations to continue forging a missional identity in the 21st century. The word “missional” denotes every member of a congregation living as a missionary and minister in the contexts where we find ourselves. Rather than thinking in terms of a church’s mission, the concept presented in the book encourages Christians to think of their identity as a “mission with a people.” The book provides eight patterns of missional congregations that serve as an outline for the following eight lessons in this series. A brief synopsis of the book is attached (see Attachment 1).
2. Principle one, or pattern one, in Barrett’s book speaks to the importance of a congregation developing an identity around the mission of God. Being a missional church is all about a sense of identity, shared pervasively in a congregation that knows it is caught up into God’s intent for the world. It comes from having heard the still small voice that says, “You are mine. I have called you to me. I join you to my compassionate approach to the whole world for its healing. You are witnesses to what I have done and what I will yet do.” (page 36)
3. Ask learners to respond to the “Where Are We?” question, in reference to our congregation. Record responses on overhead/white board, while learners record responses on attached sheet. (See Attachment 3)
4. Following the same pattern, discuss the “When Are We?”, “Who Are We?”, and “Why Are We?” questions and record responses.

Response

1. In this closing section, it is important to encourage learners to integrate the mission principles of scripture with the current missional identity of the congregation.
2. Divide the class into two groups. Assign each group one of the scenarios describing Church A and Church B. (Attachment 2) Each group will read

the scenario assigned to the group and discuss it using the following questions:

- a. How realistic is it to expect Christians attending a regional congregation to move into the neighborhoods near the church building?
 - b. What are essential commitments a congregation needs to adopt to minister effectively to the people in their vicinity?
 - c. In way ways is this congregation living out the mission of God as described in scripture?
3. Allow 10 minutes for group discussion, then bring the two groups together. Assign one person from each group to summarize their scenario and observations for the rest of the class.
 4. Conclude with a prayer for the congregation to continue maturing into the mission of God.

Lois Barrett et al. **Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness**
(Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2004) Gospel and Our Culture Series

According to the authors of *Treasure in Clay Jars*, *a missional church is a church that is shaped by participating in God's mission, which is to set things right in a broken, sinful world, to redeem it, to restore it to what God has always intended for the world. Missional churches see themselves not so much sending, as being sent. A Missional congregation lets God's mission permeate everything that the congregation does – from worship to witness to training members for discipleship. It bridges the gap between outreach and congregational life, since, in its life together, the church is to embody God's mission* (Introduction, page xi)

Seven researchers investigated nine congregations in various regions of North America. The missional team identified eight impulses or patterns evident in the congregations, which included both large and small communities of faith. The study includes a diverse group of congregations – diverse in terms of geography, tradition, ethnicity, and size – who are seeking faithfulness to God's call.

The authors express concern that the book not serve as a “how-to-become-a-successful-church” book. Rather, they seek to establish principles to encourage church leaders on their journey toward becoming missional.

II Corinthians 4:2 ***But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belong to God and does not come from us.***

Church A

When Church A outgrew its facilities in one neighborhood in Detroit and moved it to another, it assumed that many of the members would now move into the new neighborhood. The new building was once a grand Packard showroom in a half-mile-square area that had once been housing for management in the hey-day of Detroit's automotive industry. Now the housing had become run down, and the area was known for its drug dealing, alcohol consumption, and downward economic spirals. Families were mostly broken ones. Despair had become the normal way of life. But the members of Church A knew that the divine intent was to bring healing and deliverance to this neighborhood, and the fortunes that landed them in this facility were not an accident.

Henry Lewis, the preacher for Church A, believed in the mantra of "Love everybody" in whatever context you find yourself. That means, when you establish your worship center in the middle of a new neighborhood, your new neighbors are the obvious prime candidates for the same "love everybody."

From the moment the move was confirmed, the idea of "loving everybody" from a comfortable commute didn't seem to make much sense to the people of Church A. At least half of the families found homes in the new community and lived alongside the "everybodies" that God was sending them to "love." One of the staff members was among those who left a comfortable house in the suburbs to move to the Packard community.

Shortly after the move, a new staff member, was added for worship and community development. He had been taught that the three Rs of Christian community development were relocation, reconciliation, and redistribution. He quickly joined many of the other staff and elders in relocating to the new location. If Church A was to be the healing presence of Christ in this neighborhood, anchored in this new worship center, it would be so as a community of new neighbors sharing life as other neighbors saw and experienced it.

Church B

Church B, in the Williamsburg area of Brooklyn had experience a severe decline by the late 1950's. Originally a congregation of German immigrants, the character of the community had changed. Increasingly Puerto Rican immigrants lived there along with many Jews. When the preacher arrived there, he knew he was ill-prepared for ministry among poor Puerto Rican immigrants. His first instinct was to seek permission to live in an apartment among them. His own sense of vocation was formed by reading about how God entered the human condition and in fact took up residence among the poor of Israel. That vocation has passed to the new congregation that formed and flourished. It is now a large vibrant Hispanic congregation. Their reason for being is to be "present with Christ in the Lord's Supper and present with the poorest of the poor."

Church B's understanding of its vocation is rooted in Phil. 2:5-11 – God leaving behind power and glory to take the form of a peasant in a land of poverty. Small group leaders meet together on Saturday mornings for reflection and discussion, where the focus of worship is the life-giving and life-saving sacrifice of Jesus. After their worship time they share lunch with a group of formerly homeless men who reside at a church facility. Obviously, this church seeks to be what it believes. It's vocation is to be the living incarnation of Jesus Christ. In other words, they say, "We are Matthew 25."

Where Are We?

Geographically, Socially, Culturally

When Are We?

In the flow of history and change

Who Are We?

Living out the gospel in our homes, workplaces, recreational venues

Why Are We?

Welcoming God's call, entering God's coming reign