

BEING THE CHURCH IN A POST-CHURCH AGE**Isaiah 61; Luke 4:14-21****(Read Luke 4:14-21)**

Intro: When my nephew Greg was about 15 years old and still a year away from having a driver's license, he learned of a rusted 1968 Mustang Fastback sitting on blocks in someone's backyard. (What is pictured is not the car, Greg's was actually a lot worse than this) This was a dream come true for him and he was able to make a deal with the owner and get it hauled to his home. Then he and he and his dad set about to restoring it. Over the next couple years, they painstakingly took it apart, piece by piece, restoring what they could and replacing what they couldn't. They also got the engine rebuilt by a family friend. When the project was done it was a picture of transformation. It gleamed as if it was brand new and perfectly cared for rather than the 20-year rusted hulk it had been just a couple years before. He had raised it from the ruins.

Speaking of ruins, this has been a tough month for the Church. Our leaders have not represented by the Body of Christ very well and it has caught up with us. One church leadership guru I have followed and learned from for over 25 years, is one of those who fall into this category. Since the beginning of the year there have been more and more reports concerning his inappropriate activities over the years. He resigned in the Spring but at the beginning of this month the entire top leadership of his large church, pastors and board, have stepped down in order for a complete restructure to happen. That church, Willow Creek Community Church, has been shaken to its core.

And then, a couple weeks ago, a long investigation into illicit activities has revealed that thousands of priests in most of the Catholic dioceses in Pennsylvania have engaged in widespread abuse of all kinds. And lest we think we're off the hook, it's not just Catholics who are guilty. Every denomination would be implicated if it came down to it. The Church, God's called out ones are not looking very good.

What a way to start a sermon right? I usually begin my talks with an interesting or funny story to get you primed and ready for what the Bible says. But I have a method to my madness.

You see, the world is out to get us. No, I'm not paranoid. Satan, as he has always been, is out to get us. And he is making sure that any chink in the armor of God's people is exploited. He is making hay with the headlines that talk about the indiscretions of megachurch pastors and perverted priests. Another big chink in our armor has been that we have rested on our laurels and taken our faith for granted. Being a Christian was "accepted" practice for most of our history here in America. Not being a Christian was weird and frowned upon. Now, being a Christian is weird and frowned upon. It's not popular. We live in a post-Church world.

That is why I have spoken on the need for revival for the past three months. And while Satan thinks he has us where he wants us, the truth is, God is the one who has got us where he wants us. More and more we are seeing that we have to rely on the Holy Spirit in order to remain faithful in this world rather than looking for deliverance from a society and a government that is wrapped up in itself. God's got us where he wants us so that we can be the Church (his "called out ones") in a post-church world. Now we can get down to business to be what he has always desired us to be. We are in many ways a rusted hulk of what once was gleaming and beautiful. But God has a restoration project going on and the promise is, in Revelation 21 that everything, including his church, will be shiny and new.

That is what Isaiah was prophesying in the scripture that Chris read from Isaiah 61. He was announcing the Jubilee written about in Leviticus 25. He was promising that God's people would be raised from the ruins and returned from captivity. And they would do a do a new thing and bring glory to God. In other words, Isaiah's promise was **THE BEST IS YET TO COME!**

And that best that was promised was Jesus. And that Jesus began his ministry by opening up the scroll in the synagogue and reading from that very same passage from Isaiah 61. Jesus came proclaiming good news to the poor, proclaiming freedom for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, and setting the oppressed free. Jesus came to bring revival and that is exactly what he did, and what he wants us to do too for us as well. He promises to drag us out of the weeds that have grown up around us, obscuring his plan with the things of this world, and make us gleaming and new. To do that . . .

We need to recover the Good News

- Greg Lyons in his book *NEXT CHRISTIANS* we need "to relearn and fall in love again with that historic, beautiful, redemptive, faithful, demanding, reconciling, all-powerful, restorative, atoning, grace-abounding,

soul-quenching, spiritually fulfilling good news of God's love." Look at all those descriptors! You can't argue with any of them. They describe the church described in Acts. It is what caused at least 40% growth in every decade of the first three centuries of the church's existence.

- And then ask yourself, "How many of these describe my walk with God?" This is a good exercise because I would venture to say that for most of us, the answer is, not many. For many Christians their faith has become rote and shallow and maybe even cold, like the religious establishment Jesus encountered as he entered ministry. He came to do a new thing. He came to proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, and freedom from oppression. He did this by reading just part of Isaiah 61, and then had the audacity to say he was the one who would fulfill that scripture, as he rolled up the scroll and sat down.
- The religious leaders and others were, first of all, fascinated. Then they went, "Hey! Wait a minute! Who are you? And who do you think we are?" They didn't like the confrontation. And neither do we. We don't like to be told we've been missing the boat. But we have. It is too often true that people are not seeing Jesus in the people who bear his name.
- That's why its time we had a new encounter with Jesus. A fresh start, as it were. That way people will encounter Jesus when they encounter us. And . . .

When people encounter Jesus, they get saved

- I know I say it over and over again, but I can't say it enough – we need to be Jesus to a hurting world. But we can't do that if we are distracted.
- We can get distracted by arguments over what is the best style of worship. We can have our attention stolen by what is politically correct or incorrect, for that matter. In fact, politics is a huge thief of ministry time. We can get so wrapped up in what is wrong and what is right that we miss the fact that we are dealing with people who need Jesus and he's the one who brings transformation, not us.
- But how do people encounter Jesus? Well . . .

It's about relationships

- Three times this past week I was blasted with the message that relationships are where it's at. This is the truth. And it is becoming more and more true in this areligious age that people will not know Jesus unless they see him in you. Their impression of the church is an angry preacher from their childhood, or news reports of the scandals hitting the Catholic Church, or a slick TV preacher manipulating their minds for a donation. This is what they think is the church. This is what they think Christians are. You can change their impression. But it will not be a formula or a door to door campaign or a special speaker for few nights. It will take God's people being good neighbors. That's relationship. That what it takes to be the Church in a post church world.
- So, who are your neighbors? In Luke 10 Jesus was asked that very same question and Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan. He shared how a man was traveling the dangerous Jericho road and bandits attacked him, beat him and stole all he had and left him for dead. Two people came by, both religious leaders, and saw the suffering man lying in the ditch and they quickly hurried on by, probably hoping the same fate would avoid them. And then along came a Samaritan, someone from a group of people despised by the Jews, and he stopped, gave the man medical help and took him on to an inn and paid for his care until he was well. Who is our neighbor? It seems it's just about everyone – and certainly anyone who has fallen on hard times.
- How is that a relationship? When you pull someone from a ditch and help with their hurts, you are in relationship with them. And they will see Jesus in you. They might not know its him they see, so eventually they may ask and you can share him with them. But this takes time. And we need to take the time.

Conclusion: We've talked about revival all summer in the context of restoring the world. Far too long into the process someone asked the question "What is revival?" and I realized I'd been remiss in defining some old church terminology. About that same time Dale installed our new AED device beside the mailboxes and I thought – revival is applying the AED to a dying church. What does the AED do? It jolts a person's heart back to life. What does revival do? It jolts an unconscious church back to life.

When we are shocked back to reality, what passed by our inattention before now enacts a visceral response to do something. We know that just going to church on Sunday isn't enough – in Gabe Lyon's words, "*we have a calling and a responsibility to think, work, and live in terms of how the world ought to be in contrast to reacting*

to how it really is.” In other words, we have a picture in our mind’s of God’s vision for what the world is supposed to be, and we aim for that. That’s revival – that’s resuscitating a dying world.

Let’s have our eyes open ABC. What can ABC do to minister to this community and this world? Nothing is off limits – we have a great God. And Jesus is returning sometime – let’s be ready – and let’s take as many with us as possible. Let’s be the church in a post-church world. Amen.