

Sermon for Christ Church, Spotsylvania, VA
Third Sunday of Easter, Year B, April 15, 2018
The Rev. Bill Queen, "Spreading the Kingdom"
Acts 3:12-19, 1 John 3:1-7, Luke 24:36b-48, *Book of Common Prayer*
Catechism page 856

we are witnesses ... we are God's children ... repentance and forgiveness is to be proclaimed to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem ... beginning from Spotsylvania County; the theme running through all of our readings today is the idea of how, because we are witnesses to what a relationship with the risen Christ has to offer, we are supposed to look outward and go outward, to share that witness by proclaiming Jesus to the world around us in our words and in our actions

there is a question from our *Book of Common Prayer* Catechism (page 856) that addresses this same theme as it asks, "What is the duty of all Christians?"; the answer is partly this: "The duty of all Christians is to work, pray, and give for the spread of the kingdom of God"; now I want to commend all of you here at Christ Church for how you already have responded to this duty, as I have seen firsthand just how much all of you do work, pray, and give to this parish; but the optimal word I want to draw your attention to from the Catechism is the word "spread"; working, praying, and giving for the maintaining of the kingdom of God is not the same thing as working, praying, and giving for the spreading of the kingdom of God; working, praying, and giving for the maintaining of the parish of Christ Church is not the same thing as working, praying, and giving for the spreading of the ministries of Christ Church to reach further and further into our surrounding community; and the difference is not just one of amounts of dollars or of time commitments; it is a difference of mindset and of purpose

we give of ourselves and of our resources to this parish out of our love and care for this parish family; but this family, as it is currently constituted, is just the starting point; this church, its buildings, its activities, its sense of community is a treasure not meant for us to hoard and keep for ourselves; like all of God's gifts, it is a treasure meant to be shared with ever widening circles of people

overall we normally, and naturally, plan activities that meet our needs, offered around the times of day and days of the week that work best for us; it is a totally different approach to think about the activities that might meet the needs of other people, on days and times that might fit their schedules; again, what I'm talking about is a change of mindset, is a different way of looking at why we do our ministries and for whom do we do our ministries; there are literally thousands of churches across the country, of Episcopal and of every other denomination, who are withering away and shutting their doors, because they have not concerned themselves with spreading the Kingdom of God

Christ Church is in a relatively stable position now, but there is no guarantee it will stay that way unless we can become more focused on those who are not yet a part of this parish; maybe you have heard the oft-repeated, and true, phrase "the church exists primarily for those that do not as yet belong to it;" to work, pray, and give for the spread of the kingdom of God effectively requires us to think and to plan exactly how we are going to spread the kingdom of God in this community by touching the lives of people that do not as yet belong to it; and may never belong to it; we cannot limit our ministries only to people who might become members of this or of any other church; I would restate the phrase to say "the church exists primarily to serve the world"

the Vestry will soon be holding a day-long retreat to review the information that was gathered at the Annual Meeting, in our Lent Series, and in the Search Survey; one phrase that keeps surfacing for me from that material is "faith community building;" this was something we saw as one of God's biggest hopes and dreams for us as a parish: our mission, our purpose, our vision, the "why" we are here in this place; "faith community building" was understood to be taken in the largest sense possible, the increase in faith impact we can have on the larger community around us; we are going to be looking for new ways to be open to the community, in ways that would actively invite our neighbors to join us for Sunday worship and other activities; and not just invite them to our existing activities, but to come up with new activities that might be attractive to them

I want to make sure that everyone understands that what I'm talking about is not a survival strategy; I'm not saying we need more people so that they can help cover the costs we're now having to cover by ourselves—that would be a selfish approach at best and an unchristian approach at worst; spreading the kingdom of God ultimately is exposing ourselves to new people and to their new ideas; and we can't even imagine in what ways the presence of new and different people will bring us new blessings

the African-American author, educator, civil rights leader, and theologian Howard Thurman has wisely said: "community cannot feed on itself. It can only flourish with the coming of others from beyond—their unknown and undiscovered brothers [and sisters]" (from *The Search For Common Ground: An Inquiry into The Basis of Man's Experience of Community*); the only way our parish will find and welcome these as yet undiscovered brothers and sisters will be to think and act differently in our placing of priorities and in our planning of ministries

in whatever roles you play in our church activities, try to put yourself, and help others put themselves, into this mindset of spreading and growing—of considering who is not yet part of our church community, and what we might do differently to attract them, to welcome them, to learn from them, and to grow in Christ with them

recall that in my first sermon here I used the prayer, "glory to God whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine; glory to God from generation to generation"; we need to work, to pray, to give, to think, and to plan in such a way that all of our activities are preparing us for a larger future; one that stretches our imaginations; one that trusts God; one that will reach out to new groups of people right now, as well as to the generations to come; we can only do that by more than just maintaining God's kingdom; we can only do that by spreading God's kingdom