

Mission Opportunities Mean Sacrifice

At our Visioning Celebration last month, I was interested to learn that our main building, built in 1928, cost over \$500,000 in 2009 dollars, and that doesn't include the labor, since we did most of that ourselves. Did you know that the Sunday school addition, dedicated in 1960, cost \$1 million in 2009 dollars? That puts the \$1.2 million structure that we are imagining in proper perspective. We've accomplished this before!

Accomplishing a goal takes vision. It takes clarity of purpose. That is why you can walk out back and see the outline of what the new building will look like, painted on the pavement. That is why we have building plans, and elevations. We have to see it and believe it in our mind's eye first. Our hearts have to already be living into its existence. Once it exists in our hearts and minds, the physical part will quickly come.

Jesus enjoyed clarity of vision about his mission and his purpose. When we read Mark 8:27-38, we can tell that Jesus sees it. The disciples are getting it. Jesus asks, "Who do you say that I am?" As soon as Peter answers, "You are the Messiah," Jesus knows they are getting it and he starts telling them where this is headed. The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and die, and three days later rise. The goal is the cross, and beyond it to the empty tomb.

As a congregation, we have exciting opportunities for increasing our mission. We can see them:

1. As we seek Christ's own clarity of vision and purpose at Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church, we will know the right track because it will involve sacrifice. For example, if you are not already tithing, now is the time to start. It is essential for the daily mission of our church. Worship and gospel sharing, Christian education, opportunities to serve, opportunities to invite others to experience Jesus – all these depend upon the regular weekly offerings of every one of us. And \$5 bucks a week ain't it, unless your income is \$50 a week. \$20 a week doesn't cut it unless your income is \$200 a week. It is time to get on your knees and pray and get our priorities right. My daughter looks away when she doesn't want to hear the discipline her parents are sharing. Too often we look the other way when God commands us to tithe as a spiritual discipline.

But, you know, tithes usually only seem like a sacrifice. Most of the time they are simply our firstfruits giving. The tithe is our giving off the top, from our abundance and blessings. It is an equal share from everyone. A sacrifice is more than that. Once we check the tithe off our list, then we are freed up to truly consider what sacrificial giving God is calling us into.

2. When we speak of something as major as a new building we need to know that all of us will be asked to sacrifice time for this endeavor. Time in prayer, time on teams and committees. When we speak of something as major as a new building we need to know that a sacrifice of money is required. Every person's sacrifice is needed and is important, even if it is just an extra five or fifteen dollars a week. Big results can come from small changes in behavior.

3. A new worship service will also require sacrifice. We will sacrifice some informal fellowship opportunities. But hopefully this will be somewhat offset by intentional use of our new building for fellowship. We will sacrifice some of our internal sense of community for an external focus on community.

4. Stephen Ministry requires the sacrifice of a big funding expense to start it up (although one person's gift can be used to pay for it, it is still a sacrifice). But mainly it is a sacrifice of time for Stephen leaders and Stephen ministers, who are trained to offer Christian caregiving. It is also an emotional sacrifice to comfort, to care, to grieve with, and walk with, and pray with those who are suffering.

Jesus invites us with him on this sacrificial journey of faith. He makes no bones about it. It requires sacrifice and commitment. But we journey with Jesus, and in faith we follow.

What an exciting time to be the church!

Peace,
Pastor Chris