

A Three "M" Church  
Ephesians 1:3-14  
February 7, 2010

Slide One: A 3 M Church

A Presbyterian minister boarded a United flight at La Guardia airport to attend a meeting at the O'Hare Hilton. His seat-mate was a nattily dressed Chicago investment banker who carried the tools of his trade, a well-organized leather bound attaché case and a lap-top computer.

When the beverage cart came around, the banker put away his work, leaned back, and ordered a martini. "Time to celebrate," he said, which the minister--always ready to be pastorally responsive--took as a cue that the man wanted to talk.

"Just made a deal, a block-buster, he crowed. And for the next thirty minutes, well into martini number two, he dazzled the minister with stories of leveraged buy-outs, hostile take-overs, and creative financing. Finishing his martini, he looked at the minister and asked, "And who did you say you're with? What do you do?"

Ministers learn early on the perils of revealing their identity on air-lines. Since I usually like to read on planes, and don't like small talk, I have come up with the line, "I sell life-insurance." That shuts them up nearly every time, and they can't wait to get off the plane and away from you.

But on this particular flight, the minister decided to go with a version of the truth. "I'm with a major multinational," he said. We have operations of every continent. In fact, we have sales reps in every nation of the world."

He was getting the banker's attention. "Where are you located?" the banker asked.

"Well, that depends on who you talk to. We began as a near eastern enterprise, spread north and west into Europe, and from there all over the world. We have a lot of regional offices; the one in Rome likes to think of itself as our corporate headquarters."

"You've been in business a while, then," the increasingly interested banker remarked.

"Yes, we have. Given a few hostile takeover attempts, a recession\depressional trough about every century or so, divestment a few hundred times, and a very major restructuring about four and a half centuries ago, we've been in business for about 2,000 years." <sup>1</sup>

I need that story because it reminds me of the permanence of the church. I need that story and so, I think, does all the TVPC family, because it makes us re-think why the church has had such staying power. Anybody who has been on the street as long as we have has to have been doing something right.

So let's get back to basics this morning. What is the secret of the church's longevity? Why is the church here? What is its purpose?

To help us on our way I want to lift out a few words from Paul's letter to the Ephesian Church.

Slide 2: Ephesians 1:4

Paul says that God chose us *in Christ* before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. Before the foundation of the world God chose us to be God's people, to be the church. Before the foundation of the world God chose us to manifest Christ, to make His way known

So how do we do it? How do we take this high and lofty purpose from Ephesians 3 and bring it down to earth?

As I think about that, I think of three words, which to me, sum up what the church is about and why we are here.

Slide 3: MAKE DISCIPLES, MARK DISCIPLES, MATURE DISCIPLES

A vital church always exhibits three clear-cut values. It must MAKE disciples. It must MARK disciples. It must MATURE disciples.

## I.

Jesus began his own ministry by wandering the waterfronts and waysides in search of disciples. When he called his first followers, he promised them that they would become fishers of men and women.

The church has always known that unless it takes this first step into ministry, there will never be a second step.

#### SLIDE 4: MAKE DISCIPLES

WE MUST MAKE DISCIPLES. We form evangelism committees. We do mailings to the community. We strategize for membership growth.

A Presbyterian minister received a knock on his door one Saturday afternoon. There were two young men, dressed conservatively in black suits. Mormons! His first thought was that he would rather see two rabid pit bulls there than a couple of Mormons. But he invited them in, and they had a lively discussion. No one's theology was changed that afternoon. But as those two L.D.S. young men left to go on to the next house the Presbyterian minister realized that here they were, visiting every home in his community, and no one in his church of 300 members had visited anyone in the past decade to tell them about the abundant life in Jesus Christ. No wonder we have a membership hemorrhage in our denomination.

Let's face it. If we do not evangelize, we offer the world by default to those who PAGANIZE.

If we do not evangelize, we offer the world by default to those who ADVERTISE.

If we do not evangelize, we offer the world by default to those who SECULARIZE.

If we do not evangelize, we offer the world by default to those who MILITARIZE.

If we do not evangelize, we offer the world by default to those who DEHUMANIZE.

Making new disciples is the first task of the church. All of us can speak a good word for our Lord wherever we are. We don't have to be systematic theologians or Biblical scholars to say to a friend, "My faith means a lot to me. I attend a great church. Why not come along with me next week?"

II.

#### SLIDE 5: MARK DISCIPLES

Making disciples, however, is not enough. There is a second step, Marking disciples. Once we, as a body of Christ, have brought new disciples into our midst, we have only just begun. Conversion is not the be-all and end-all of discipleship. The writer of Ephesians proclaims that as a holy community in Christ we are called to "live for the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:12).

There was a man who attended a Bible study at his church. The teacher gave the class three questions to answer.

Question one asked him to list his most important value. He answered, "My personal relationship with Jesus Christ."

The second question asked him to list his free-time activities. He put watching t.v., house and yard projects, and planning his work. When he got to question three, it asked him to compare what he had said was most important in my life to what he actually did with his time and to draw his own conclusions. When he did that, he realized that the way he was spending his time contradicted what he said was most important to him.<sup>2</sup>

That's why once disciples are made, the church must mark them with the defining characteristics of the Christian community. And what are those defining characteristics?

#### SLIDE 6: DIDACHE, DIAKONIA, KOINONIA, ETC.

In Greek, they are known as *didache*, *diakononia*, *koinonia*, *maryturia*, and *kerygma*. You will have already recognized some of those words. The church is a teaching community, a serving community, a fellowshiping community, a witnessing community, and a praying community.

Do we mark members of our congregations and charge them with the responsibility of learning and teaching the church's story to others? If we don't, who will?

Do we intentionally gather together and celebrate our diversity, instead of continuously splintering into factions and opposing sides? If we don't, who will?

Do we offer ourselves, risk security, expose our vulnerabilities for the sake of sharing the Christ who has saved us? If we don't, who

will?

Do we believe in a God who answers prayers? Are we praying each day that God will transform this congregation? If we don't who will?

The second task of the church is to mark disciples.

### III.

But MAKING and MARKING disciples are not enough. There remains one other ingredient. Look once again at the ministry of Jesus. After calling followers to his side, he spent intensive time with them, teaching them, mentoring them, praying with them.

#### SLIDE 7: MAKING, MARKING, MATURING

These activities were designed to create MATURE DISCIPLES. Jesus knew that the journey was long, and up-hill all the way, and only a mature faith will be adequate for the long haul.

Ruth Graham, the wife of Billy Graham, told her family that she had seen a sign she wanted placed on her tombstone. Ruth and Billy Graham were on a trip somewhere, and the highway crews were working on the road. At the place where the road work ended and they could get back on the good road, there was a sign that said, "Construction finished; thanks for your patience."

I can identify with that. I look at my own life, 34 years of it as a Christian, and I feel like I am under construction and there's a long way to go before any progress can be detected. Only in recent years have I begun to grapple with what it really means to be a mature Christian, that the marks of a mature Christian are not the marks of this culture, to be successful or rich, or notable, but rather to be vulnerable, transparent, and broken.

And that's why you and I need the church; we cannot arrive at maturity on our own. We need each other for that to happen. And God needs each of us to make it happen for one another.

A pastor in a church in Texas called on one of his church members. He was so touched by that pastoral visit that he wrote a poem about it, he called "Gladys":

I called on a church member.

Shyly

She showed me her Purdue sorority alumnae magazine,

Which told of extraordinary people  
Who volunteer.  
She had received an award for her varied efforts.  
At seventy-eight  
She was co-chair of her local Crime Watch group,  
Checked the citizens band radios,  
Organized the night patrol,  
took over if needed the eleven-to-three a.m. shift  
Was a backup driver for Meals-On-Wheels,  
Served as a substitute high school mother,  
Brought sick students home,  
aided a handicapped woman with her weekly errands,  
Played golf once a week  
Other years founded the Northwest Alumnae Chapter in Houston,  
Served in every office, regular attender, loyal supporter.  
Now in her eighties  
Health not quite as good,  
She phones church neighbors,  
Makes dinner for friends beleaguered by illness,  
Endures pain,  
Appreciates when others bring her to church,  
can and does get herself there,  
smiles and,  
As always,  
Lives her faith.<sup>3</sup>

I have known several of Gladys in the churches I have served and so have you. To see the strength and joy in them is to witness what can happen when we spend a long time in the church, letting Christ work his transforming miracle in us, polishing us until all the rough edges disappear and we sparkle. Oh, what a blessing to shine with the luster of Christian maturity.

So there you have it. What we have been talking about all along today is what makes the church the church.

#### SLIDE 8: A 3 M CHURCH

We exist to make disciples, to mark disciples, and to mature disciples. With apologies to the Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company, I'm praying for a

vital 3 M church.

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- 1.. From a sermon preached by Dr. John Buchanan at The Fourth Presbyterian Church of Chicago, May 29, 1994.
- 2.. Pauline Young, "The Upper Room", November, 1993.
- 3.. James T. MacColl in "Monday Morning," May 2, 1994, p. 19