

10.27.2019

Vision Day: **Awakening Faith**

Text: Matthew 9.35-38...And the first 7 chapters of Acts

Welcome to Mercy Church. We are glad you are here. Today is Vision Day here at Mercy. The idea is that we take this weekend to zoom out a little bit and talk about who we are as a church, where we've been and where we sense God is taking us from here.

So here's how we are going to do it. Our vision, just like everything else core to who we are, comes straight out of God's word. If you are newer to Mercy, the scriptures are where we get our direction and guidance. And what God often does is he takes his holy Word and his Holy Spirit and through those two he breathes fresh faith into a local group of believers. That's how a spiritual awakening begins. Our vision, the thing we are asking God for, is for a gospel awakening to come to Charlotte that gets carried to the ends of the earth. We don't just want our time to be going through the motions of a religious routine, we want to see God move.

We believe there is real power for real life in the gospel of Jesus Christ. We believe God loves every single person and that his grace gives real hope to anyone who asks him for it. We believe he is actively present in this world and that he sees you and cares for you and desires to awaken you to his powerful love for you. Awakenings come one person at a time and our belief is that he has put us here in this time and space to say to those who've never really heard the gospel... Come taste and see that the Lord is good. To say to sleepy

Christians... as the apostle Paul says in Ephesians 5.14 "Get up sleeper, and rise up from the dead and Christ will shine on you."

And we've seen God move. A couple of years ago a man comes up to me, 80 years old at the time, & he is sitting in our service because his grandson had persistently invited him to church. And one weekend he said it was like there was no one else in the room and I was speaking directly to him about exactly where he was. And I said Malcom, that wasn't me that was God. He said it was like God woke him up to his need for God. And he came to our office, met with pastor Scott and gave his life to Christ.

Two years ago a college student who grew up in church was running from the Lord. And a couple of our students kept after him. Shared the gospel with him. And though he KNEW all the information about Christianity, he wasn't following Christ. And he would come around and then disappear and did that for a while. Until the moment where God woke him up. Woke him up to the need for Christ to be more than his heritage...He needed Christ to be his savior. Gave his life to Christ and has led several others to Christ since. And now that young man is serving on our college staff here at Mercy.

Last Week a guy who has been attending our services for some time, who had a family heritage of church...who knew some of the stories... Sat down with a guy who NEVER went to church until the Lord woke him up at 23 after a drug overdose. And here's how God does it sometimes: the guy who grew UP far from Jesus and then was saved by Jesus 5 years ago, led

formerly churching guy to Christ right here at Mercy Church.
THAT WAS LAST WEEKEND.

God is moving Mercy Church! I've been praying this verse over our church for several weeks now:

19 Therefore repent and turn back, so that your sins may be wiped out, 20 that seasons of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord. -- Acts 3:19-20a (CSB)

When I say awakening, it's what comes from that refreshing presence of the Lord among us. And it's happening. Thanks to your sacrifice to make room, God is bringing more people to hear the gospel in our weekend services than ever before. Our membership has grown to over 400. Do you know today will mark the 50th person we've baptized in 2019!? Ya'll that's the most for us in a single year and there are still 2 months to go!

Awakenings happen one by one. Even 3000 people at once like we saw in Acts 2...is three thousand individuals God came personally to and reconciled them back to himself. God wakes up people with NO prior church background, he wakes up people who THOUGHT they knew him, and he wakes up people everywhere in between.

We've been in the first section of the book of Acts this fall and I believe God is speaking to our church, through our study of the book of Acts, about what awakening faith looks like. By Awakening Faith I mean

1) **The Activity of God.** what happens when God begins to awaken people to their need for him and his great love for them.

2) **The activity of God's people.** The kind of belief that characterizes a church ready to see God move.

Awakenings don't stop at salvation. That's what I love about Acts 3:20 is that a 'season of refreshing' is talking about our whole lives. It's talking about the Holy Spirit igniting fresh life to cold marriages, breaking chains of addiction that have ensnared you for years. I'm hearing stories of that. Just the other day a guy told me God set him free during our time of prayer from a 15-year addiction to cigarettes. Hasn't touched one since. And you hear about awakenings throughout history...there is a fresh rejection of sin & desire for closeness to God. A hunger for his word.

Awakening in North Hampton Connecticut in 1742. The one word to describe it pastor Jonathan Edwards used was "new." The same word was being preached but there was a new force coming through it & tears over hearing it. Prayer was still prayer but it was so much more now. A new sense of the powerful majesty of God was on them. That's what we saw in the first 7 chapters of Acts as the Spirit of God rushed in and began to turn the world upside down. That's what he's doing in us.

Here's what I want to do. I want to show you the heart of God for our city. Because we are called to love what God loves. And then the steps of faith we sense God calling us as a church to take in 2020 in light of his purpose and mission.

35 Jesus continued going around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness. 36 When he saw the crowds, he felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few. 38 Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest." -- Matthew 9:35-38

Ok let me break this down verse by verse.

Verse 35 shows us the twin engines of Jesus' ministry that we've talked about throughout the Acts series. Proclamation and demonstration. He preached the good news of the kingdom and then he verified the power of this news through healing. The good news of the kingdom is that God loves sinners! God doesn't hate sinners, God isn't disinterested in sinners, and God does not write sinners off because they are lost causes. God isn't some ethereal force, nor is God a temperamental tyrant who is out to frustrate your life for his entertainment. God is the one true king who created the universe and the good news is he loves you and he wants you.

And he has the power to HEAL your soul. See that's what the healings were about. Jesus healed EVERY disease and EVERY sickness. And the healings were a sign that he can do something far bigger and far more important. He can heal your soul. – get up and walk.

Ya'll see Friday when Kanye dropped his Jesus is King album and the internet blew up? It was awesome and so you know I

am here for every last bit of what God is doing in Kanye. Yes I'm gonna see the movie yes I listened to the whole album. In his song "God is" he said

"Every time I look up I see God's faithfulness, and it shows just how much he is miraculous. I can't keep it to myself, I can't sit here and be still. Everybody I will tell - til the whole world is HEALED."

Again I don't know what God is doing in Kanye but he is on to something there. When you think of the kingdom advancing...do you think of more people being healed. Of their souls being restored to what they were meant for. And listen you here who have gone through religious routines and sat in church for years but never experienced God's transforming power in your life...maybe you've never really given your life over to Christ. Friends that story is regular here. Maybe that's you today. Listen to verse 36

36 When he saw the crowds, he felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd.

Compassion – That word there is splagitzomai. It's where we get our word spleen. And its how the greeks described the seat of your emotions. Something different than the heart...it's a feeling in the GUT. When Jesus saw those faces he felt something down in his gut. A GROANING for them. A love for them and a sadness for them over their situation where they are apart from God. And he says they were distressed and dejected. Like sheep without a shepherd. Here's what he's saying...The crowds are like sheep. They are helpless without

God intervening. Sheep are a wonderful illustration because of how helpless they are.

They aren't aggressive creatures or creatures with any real self defense mechanisms. They are sheep. They aren't very bright. They are the epitome of vulnerable. I heard a guy said the other day you will never read a headline that says "raging heard of sheep attack local village." Never. They are sheep. And without a shepherd they are vulnerable to attack. In fact 'distressed and dejected' is the imagery of a herd of sheep being torn apart by an enemy & having no hope to stop the slaughter.

And Christ says that is every person's fate apart from God intervening. And so he groaned with compassion. And if you do not know Christ, he has compassion towards you. He loves you! You are lost without him. Sheep with no shepherd. But he has come for you and wants to restore you.

Believers, when is the last time you groaned over the state of someone's soul? When is the last time you doubled over in agony before God pleading with him to save them from their lostness?

37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few."

He says there is plenty of work to be done. The harvest is abundant. Mercy...there are over 100 people who move to Charlotte every single day. Every single day Charlotte is the most populated it's been in it's history. Over 100 languages are spoken in our metro area. And in the last generation church growth has been 43% SLOWER than population growth. In fact if trends continue by the year 2025 there will

be more people in Charlotte who are DE-CHURCHED than who are actively in a church. That means more people who said "Nah, this isn't for me" than who are following Jesus. 29% of Charlotteans in the millennial age range (age 23 – 38) claim no religious affiliation. And its close to 50% for Gen Z coming behind them.

And if that causes you to fear, Jesus looks at the disciples and at a crowd with FAR FEWER followers than that and says...that's a HARVEST waiting to be reaped! THOSE ARE PEOPLE GOD DEEPLY LOVES AND THEY ARE WAITING TO BE RESCUED! THAT'S A LANDSCAPE WAITING FOR AN AWAKENING. There isn't a harvest shortage there is a worker shortage. The workers are few. 98% of Christians will not share their faith in their lifetime.

You say "I don't have the ability to tell people." That's called the sin of ability. We think our ability is what will determine the success of our mission. Look at what he says next...

38 Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest."

See that? The HARVEST has an owner. See what he's saying? The harvest...its not like you go out into it and hopefully you can convince somebody. Like the gospel is a car you are selling. No. Jesus IS LORD OF THE HARVEST! In fact...pray that he sends workers into HIS harvest.

I love it. He doesn't need you. He wants you! He WANTS you to experience the joy of seeing first hand up close a friend, brother, co-worker finding salvation in Christ. This is so

powerful to me. He is simultaneously sending you out and inviting you in. He's sending you out with his power and inviting you in to his mission. He's telling you to pray...for yourself.

Then the start of chapter 10...

Summoning his twelve disciples, he gave them authority over unclean spirits, to drive them out and to heal every disease and sickness. -- Matthew 10:1

He sends them out to do what he was doing! And now that's what he's doing with us. In chapter 9 he was doing the work himself. In chapter 10 he starts empowering his people to do the work. In chapter 28 he says go to ALL nations. And in Acts 2 he empowers all his disciples for that work. He's sending us out and inviting us in.

Listen: God loves the people of Charlotte. And he's sending us out to tell them that. Awakening faith has that dual rhythm to it. We run harder towards God...and faster towards the lost. And HE provides the strength for us. What does this mean for Mercy? 3 things for us in 2020.

1. **Desperate Prayer** – Awakening faith is not something we conjure up on our own strength. Awakening faith draws from a deep dependence on God. We want to be carried forward in his strength. The elders are calling on the members of Mercy Church to devote themselves to a renewed season of prayer in 2020 both personally and corporately. We hope to hear stories of God moving in your life as you renew your dependence on him.

The early church basically stayed in prayer and then left to go do some preaching & stuff then went back to prayer. But prayer was home base. From the moment Jesus Ascended. 12 Then they returned to Jerusalem... When they arrived, they went to the room upstairs... They all were continually united in prayer, -- Acts 1:12-14

Acts 1. They prayed for 3 days...peter preached for 10 minutes, and 3,000 people got saved. We flip the emphasis don't we. I think prayer is the greatest sign of a heart that truly wants God. We want this to be Mercy Church. In fact I'm borrowing a prayer I heard from a fellow pastor recently. He told me right before he gets up he prays "Holy Spirit, preach a better sermon than the one I'm about to give." Prayer unlocks the power of God. It says "you do it God."

Once a month the elders will be leading a day of fasting and prayer to confess our sin before the Lord and to call on him for boldness as we carry the hope of Christ to so many who need it. If nothing else, 2020 will be the year of Prayer for Mercy Church.

See awakenings cannot be manipulated, cannot be forced. We can prepare ourselves for God to move and expect him to move, but ultimately, HE moves. Preparing for God to move in our church is like steering a sailboat. I went to a week long camp growing up that was soccer, tennis, and sailing. And we learned how to assemble a sailboat and take it out. It was really cool. BUT, at the end of the day while we could get the boat out on the water...and we could do everything right...we couldn't make the wind blow. BUT, on a windy day...those who knew what they were doing could absolutely fly around the lake. Ya'll we cannot manufacture the winds of an

awakening. But we can hoist the sail and tighten the ropes and ask God for it.

That's what prayer is. It is believing God wants to move and asking him to do so. It is dependence on him.

We want to hoist the sail and Ask God to move.

2. **Committed Community.** Awakening Faith will invite a Holy-Spirit-led disruption to casual Christians who are snuggled up into comfortable routines. We want to see every believer in the Mercy family seeking to follow God into serving one another and practicing the one-anothers Christ calls them into. **Discipleship happens in relationships.** That isn't surprising. Jesus says in John 13 this is how the world will know you are my disciples...if you love one another. But Christianity is not a solo sport. And our current community is more isolated than any generation of humans in history. We are digitally connected but relationally stunted. We find more comfort in the digital appearance of friendship than we do in the presence of real friends. But God has created us as relational beings. To know and be known. And maybe in this space more than in any other the church has a chance to write a new narrative for our world. Come and belong. You can be known here. You don't have to be perfect here. You can be known...and you can be loved. You can be a part of something. And we will lock arms together and you will contribute to this community and you will receive from this community. God has created you for that. We can be that.

While relationship building can be scary to a generation marked by anxiety and skepticism, we know obedience to Christ is worth the risk and he will be faithful to bless our

steps of faith. Listen no joke in 2020 we need to double the number of community groups we have here at Mercy Church. That's not random, that's based on current capacity and need. That's based on how many of us are here on a weekend versus how many are in groups. These groups are greenhouses for discipleship. It's a group of 10-20 that you can go deeper with than you can here on the weekend. Listen: I preach the word as your pastor to you but I cannot personalize it to you nor can I hold you accountable to following through on the steps the Lord calls you to take. That's what happens in community groups. You take the gospel & press it into the recesses of your life. Listen some of you need to say my step of awakening faith is leading a community group. It will be a giant step of faith. We will equip you.

We have got to make a big jump in relationship space. What step is God calling you to take.

3. **Missional Urgency**

Jesus looks at the lost with compassion. And tells us to pray for workers. Then the start of chapter 10 is Jesus commissioning the disciples to go out healing and proclaiming the kingdom. So they go out with the power of Christ to do the work of Christ. After Christ's resurrection his disciples think great, you are back. That's proof you are the true king. Will you restore your kingdom in full?

7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." -- Acts 1:7-8

So the early church prayed for boldness to tell everyone. They had the compassion of Christ. And so they went out. Many of them followed the model of their savior and were killed because they preached the gospel. Do you know right now the fastest church growth movement is in Iran? The church is growing by 20% a year! All former Muslims. Close to ½ a million Christians now. There is a documentary called 'sheep among wolves' and they label this the Iranian Awakening. And what you see are testimonies of couples saying 'we are willing to die so that Christ can be proclaimed.' Because apart from Christ there is no hope. Awakenings have an urgency to them because eternity is at stake.

The most dangerous gospel isn't the prosperity gospel right now, it's the apathy gospel. The apathy gospel is embraced and by those who claim to love truth and the scriptures and Jesus, but hell doesn't bother them & they never share that Jesus. Prayer eludes them because they don't need God. Apathy kills faith. The Gospel is NEWS. It must be shared with urgency and it is worth everything, even our lives to do so. So we will take the gospel with urgency to our community here and to the far corners of the world. In 2020 we will continue to give 10% of our budget to missions work in CLT & around the world.

Over the last 4 years we have sent missionaries to serve overseas and we have sent them to plant churches here in our country. We will continue to do both. We are a strategic partner with the international mission board to help our Cuban brothers and sisters reach their nation for Christ.

Next weekend pastor Derrick Delain is coming here to preach. The reason he's coming is because he is planting a church in

Nashville, TN in 2020 and has asked us to be a strategic partner with him. We believe this is a sister city to Charlotte who needs healthy gospel preaching churches and I am going to stand here and tell you that you need to pray about going to join their launch team because we trust him and the mission is urgent. We are going to hold an interest meeting next weekend for that. And it is painful to think about some of you leaving. It is every time. And yet, we believe the mission is worth the sacrifice. And we want to send our best.

Let me tell you what missional urgency means for mercy church here in Charlotte next year. Our elders have agreed on a pretty bold step we sense the lord calling us to take in 2020.

As our elders have looked at where our members are living and where our guests are coming from, we've identified a few concentrated areas that we've begun to pray over. We are asking the Lord to help us figure out the best steps to help our members reach people in their community. Some of you drive 25-30+ minutes to get here and we love you for it. Mandy Foster our kids director says "A church alive is worth the drive." And yet we know its hard for you to invite your friends & neighbors to make that drive. But you believe in the mission and vision of Mercy. Mercy is YOUR church. So we are asking how can we help you practice awakening faith closer to where you live.

One of these areas is the Northeast Charlotte area. University City, Concord, & Harrisburg. You know reaching the next generation is core to who we are and UNC-Charlotte sits in the northeast corner of the city. In 2-3 years it will house the largest undergrad student body of any school in North

Carolina. College students are the most reachable, trainable, sendable group of people in the world and if we are going to see an awakening it will involve college students. But college students aren't the only ones coming from that area. We have 2 community groups and a steady stream of families. So, our elders are in agreement and excited to tell you that we are prayerfully looking to launch Mercy Northeast on a target timeline of August 2020.

Our hope is to have the opportunity to partner with a church like we did at our Providence Rd campus as this has been an incredible turn-around story for gospel ministry in this area. But, we are going to be open to whatever location options should arise. We intend to build a launch team over the next several months. If you are interested in being a part of this, if you know a church that may be open to revitalization, or if you want to donate 15 acres of land...email Jake at MercyNE@mercycharlotte.com
I know many questions come up in an announcement like this. Let me address two.

1. What will this mean for our Independence Campus? Long-term & short term answer. Long Term we believe Mercy should continue to have a location in the Matthews – Union County area. A quarter of our members live there, the population is growing by 7% a year, and its an area where there is the possibility to actually build something to suite us. Short term – our contract at the levine senior center expires in June of next year and we believe we should not extend it. Since we cannot do everything we want to do all at once, we anticipate closing independence in Summer 2020 giving our

members who attend there plenty of time to relocate to Providence Rd for the time being or consider being a part of our launch team in Northeast. We have already spoken with some members interested in bringing Mercy to union county and we intend to have more of those conversations throughout 2020.

2. Are we also going to plant churches in Charlotte? YES! In fact, I had a meeting Thursday night with a group of local churches we are in partnership with for the purpose of reaching charlotte. We give financially to it, I serve on the board of it, and our aim is to plant like-minded gospel preaching churches. I am excited to tell you we are planting 5 new local churches in 2020 in the charlotte area. Almost ALL led by minority culture pastors. In our family of 150 churches the gospel is now preached in over 30 languages each weekend! We believe an awakening will not be confined to one church or one language. So yes we will plant churches. We are also training pastors here at Mercy and will continue to do so that we may deploy them throughout our city and the world. Because the mission is urgent! So we will plant campuses and churches with urgency. Not carelessly of course. We will be good stewards of our resources but the reality of eternity is in front of us and the compassion of Christ compels us.

Mercy, one of the reasons we are where we are is because you've trusted God up to this point. I love our church. I love how you sacrifice, and I love how generous you are. I believe this vision of awakening faith is an expression of the DNA of who we are. You want to be a sending church I feel that hope

of seeing an awakening pulsing through our church family. It takes bold steps of faith and I am excited to join you in it. Christ said pray for workers. So why don't we pray together now.