

Last week we concluded our series on the Holy Spirit by declaring that if we are full of the Holy Spirit, if we are under the influence of God's Spirit, we will bear fruit, we will be fruit-full. We learned that fruit can be defined a number of ways: 1. Fruit is excess life. 2. Fruit is character. Qualities like love, joy, peace, patience, etc. are the proof of His presence. 3. Fruit is the man or woman, boy or girl, who follows Christ because of our influence. And 4, fruit is the promise of the next generation. Any church that not committed to the next generation is committed to their own extinction.

Several months ago I showed you a video about the tragic results of a church that forgets the next generation. I want to show you a part of that video again this morning...

I don't want anyone to have a bigger vision for this church than I do. I'm not interested in building a museum. I want to be part of a movement. What will that take from us? It begins with an understanding of a very basic truth that Jesus taught over and over.

What I love about the teachings of Jesus is that, while they are always profound, they are profoundly simple. Jesus told stories. Often those stories were about simple subjects from the everyday world; a sheep or the lilies of the field or, as we considered last week, a vine and some branches. One of the lessons Jesus was fond of teaching was illustrated by the sower and the seed. There is something so natural, so earthy about this image that He used it many times as a metaphor for the work of God in the world. When the Gospel is planted in a fertile heart there will be a fruitful harvest.

There are lessons to be learned from the sower and the seed. Let's start with the seed.

The seed contains the promise of a next generation. Seeds are life containers. Every one of us carries within us the seeds of the Gospel. We have the capacity to reproduce disciples of Jesus Christ. But not every seed produces fruit. One reason a seed might remain fruitless is that the seed must die in order to be fruitful. If there is no death there will be no life. "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal." **John 12:23-25**

As long as we protect our own lives and do not give our lives away, we will be unfruitful.

Jesus taught that the abundance of the harvest depends, in part, on the activity of the sower. If the sower does not liberally scatter the seed there will be no harvest. Why wouldn't the sower scatter the seed? There are all sorts of reasons:

Laziness – someone else will do it. They always have.

Selfishness – our Western culture has raised the level of self-indulgence to Kardashian proportions. We consume God's blessings without so much as a thank you. In agricultural terms rather than plant the seed we eat it. Remember the Peace Corps ad I've shown you before,

“In 1962, the starving residents of an isolated Indian village received one plow and 1,700 pounds of seeds. They ate the seeds.” We can sit here for years and consume the resources God has given us and if we don’t share them, invest them, sow them we will be gone in one generation.

Cluelessness – “There is a church on every corner. We don’t need new churches.” There was a net gain of 547 churches in Texas from 1990 to 2000. In order to keep up with the population growth 4,277 churches were needed. We are falling farther behind every year.

Furthermore churches that are under 2 years of age see one new Christian for every 2 attendees. For a church that is over 10 years old it takes 200 attendees to see one conversion.

Forgetfulness – we often forget the sacrifices of a previous generation.

Any church that is oblivious to the next generation is living on borrowed time. In fact, I’ll state it more plainly; any church that ignores the next generation is doomed to extinction. Rick Warren used to teach that the most important thing you can do is to lead a friend to a faith relationship with Jesus. He now says, “I was wrong. We can do something even greater; help start a church.” Why? “Because a church is going to outlast you and everybody else.” A healthy church will continue to birth new believers – and a few new churches – for generations to come. (Lewis, *Culture Shift*, p. 140.)

There is only one logical course of action for the sower – Plant the seed; broadcast it, scatter it, give it up. That’s the only way you can expect a harvest. My challenge this morning is to give like Jesus. He poured His life into the lives of His disciples. He was keenly aware of His assignment and His limited time on the earth. Rather than make a name for Himself or build an organization, He poured His life into a few men. “It all started by Jesus calling a few men to follow him. This revealed immediately the direction his evangelistic strategy would take. His concern was not with the programs to reach the multitudes, but with the men whom the multitudes would follow. Remarkable as it may seem, Jesus started to gather these men before he ever organized an evangelistic campaign or even preached a sermon in public. Men were to be his method of winning the world to God.” Robert Coleman, *Master Plan of Evangelism*, P. 21

So we are going to do two things:

1. We have already given some people away to launch a movement in the White Rock/ Lake Highlands area. They have been meeting at Hotchkiss Elementary for over a year now. We are convinced that some of the churches that have served that area of the city through the years have grown old. There are young families moving into the area who want to do life with people in their life stage. We have planted there and we want to plant in other fields as well.

“Well if you send people out won’t our church get smaller?”

Yes, initially. But we don't have to grow THIS to grow THE church. In fact, the larger a church gets the more resources are consumed on simply sustaining and maintaining the institution. The mega-church movement has had some unintended consequences. Very few pastors can sustain the pressures of a mega-church without paying a high price to themselves and their families. We have twenty men in our midst right now who could pastor a church of 200-300 people. And there are more where they came from. We have the resources we just have to be willing to let go of them.

2. We are going to take a special Thanksgiving offering. We need to find a permanent home for our White Rock campus. DISD policy does not allow a church to meet in a school for more than two years so we need to move out of Hotchkiss Elementary. We have just a few months to nail down a location, lease it, and finish it out so that it is conducive for holding services there. Next week Gabe is going to be here to fill us in on what has been going on at White Rock and what their current plans are. Our goal is to raise \$300,000 as seed money. Envelopes, on-line gifts, over and above giving.

This is a challenge that will test our resolve because we also have a budget to support. Here is how that works.

Total budget/No. of givers/Average gift = 4.5M (we are currently \$240,000 behind).

So the bad news is that we are \$240,000 behind in our general budget. We need a great end of the year giving activity. Only half of our people give to the mission of this church. The economy stinks. And we need to raise \$300,000 in the next few weeks. That's the bad news.

The good news? God supports those who are passionately pursuing His Kingdom agenda.

Between 1973 and 1977 the original FBC decided that instead of getting bigger in one location they would sow some people and launch new congregations all over the city. 6 churches were planted in a 3-4 year period. We are one of what has become a movement of over 500 churches. Let's get back to our roots. Let's get busy sowing the seed God has given us.