



THE EXHORTER

“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40

The Palmer Road church of Christ, Westland, Mi. (prchurchofchrist.org)

February 18, 2018

Jump Start # 2019

Matthew 28:19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."

Well, I didn't intend for this to happen, but it did. A couple of days ago I wrote about challenges facing today's church. That led to another Jump Start yesterday on the same topic. And, here we are with still another installment. A series has developed.

Another great challenge facing today's church is reaching others and evangelism. Teaching the Gospel to the lost and bringing them to Christ is the main avenue for a church to continue and grow. In far too many places, the number that moves away or passes away by death, out paces the number being converted. The congregation is losing numbers. Unless something changes, the future looks bleak. Given a decade or two, will there even be a congregation still meeting there? Much of our energy is devoted to keeping house and not reaching out.

Herein, lies one of the great challenges facing the church today, converting the lost.

Part of the problem lies in the fact that too many do not have a burning desire and love to save the lost. They'd rather just maintain what we now have. New people brings in people that we do not know and they do not know us. I feel some have the idea that we have preachers, let them do that work. Yet, each of us has our own network of family and friends and we could open doors of opportunity among them.

Second, times have changed. With that, people have changed. Certainly, some core issues remain the same. Man continues to sin and needs a Savior. That has never changed. But the thinking of man and the way he operates has. Many congregations continue to have Gospel meetings, in which a visiting preacher is invited to come and preach salvation lessons. However, no one except the church attends those lessons. No visitors visit. No one comes who is lost. The work and effort has missed it's mark. There was a time when many, many people from the community came to Gospel meetings. On a Monday evening, a visitor may hear what's wrong with denominationalism. He'd go home upset and look through his Bible. He'd come back the next night, hear another lesson and be immersed in Jesus Christ. That once worked. Today, using that same game plan, a person would hear that first lesson about denominationalism, and he would go home and never come back. He'd close the door forever. Likewise, there was a time when you could knock on a stranger's door, start a conversation about life and arrange a Bible study. Many of us have done that for years.

(OVER)

Today, if you knock on a stranger's door, he'll probably not answer it, or if he does, his first words will be, "WHAT!" You have bothered him and now he is in no mood to talk to you about anything. Do we and do congregations recognize these changes?

Third, there was a time when you could hand someone a tract and they would read it. A recent poll revealed that 80% of Americans did not read a book last year. Folks aren't reading much. To hand someone a twenty page, black and white, tract and expect to get back with him on that, probably won't be successful. There has been bold cultural changes in the past decade. Sexual identity issues, same-sex marriages, the I-generation that is in love with self, fears commitments and is unsure of who they are, dominate the social media blogs. People want legalized pot. Many are weary of the old time religion that seems tired and out of place.

And here we are, trying to stay afloat in a world that is flowing downstream, smiling and having a good time as they go. Challenges. Challenges in evangelism. Before us are some important decisions. We know enough that the only way a person is saved is by teaching the Gospel of Christ. That cannot change. It's the methods that we are looking at. Continue to hold gospel meetings with a sign in a church yard that we hope some random car will pull into the parking lot and they will walk in? Continue to knock on doors? Continue to mail out flyers and cards hoping some stranger will just walk in and then be converted?

We look historically, and we notice that methods have changed. Long gone are those two week meetings with nearly hour long preaching every night. Once that worked and was effective. Today, the members couldn't endure it, let alone hoping for a visitor to come. That method wasn't working so most churches made changes. The meetings were shorter. The sermons were shorter. Preachers started using series of lessons that tied everything together. They started preaching lessons that would be useful for anyone in the audience.

One of the greatest challenges is to even recognize these things. Those that don't, scratch their heads and conclude that the world today is no longer interested in God. However, the stats don't support that. The number one downloaded app for phones and tablets is YouVersion, the Bible app. The last I looked, over 100 million downloads of that app. If people are not interested in God, why are there so many downloads of the Bible? With all the other apps available, why do people continue to go to Bible apps? Maybe, instead of hoping for people to show up at the church building, we need more conversations like Philip had with the Ethiopian. Out of the temple. On the road. In his vehicle. It wasn't about coming to my church, but coming to Jesus.

The mega church concept is very appealing to many people. Large crowds, where you do not have to connect unless you want to. Impressive music. Light shows. Cutting edge message that is laced with modern expressions and humor and the impression that I am right with God. Little fellowship. Little accountable. Little expectations. Little fear. So, divorce is never discussed. Modesty, never comes up in lessons. Partying, drinking, not touched. A lifestyle that allows one foot in the church and one foot in the world. Pretty cool. Pretty appealing. It's either the no religion, or the mega church concept, this is where people are today.

How does the church today compete? How does the church today deal with these evangelistic challenges? Stay the course, which isn't really working. Keep telling ourselves that no one is interested in Jesus, when that isn't true. Or, finally, take a serious look at our methods and our purpose.

- Take inventory of those tracts. Has anyone read them? Maybe it's time to change them. Short, colorful, bullet point articles that can be read in a number of seconds. Just a bridge to the next step. Or, ditch them, and try some other method.