

Text: 1 Corinthians 9: 19-22

Title: State of the Church Address

Location: Community Presbyterian Church, Celebration, FL

Preacher: Rev. Dr. William Lewis, Senior Pastor

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President Obama outlined a hopeful track for our country's future in his state of the Union address, so I thought it appropriate to ascertain where we are going as a congregation.

What the Lord accomplished through Patrick and the rest of you was amazing in the church's first twelve years! To grow from a New Church Development that started in Faron and RK Kelley's living room into an 880 member church in a decade, reveals the Holy Spirit has been moving within and around this ministry.

We are now launching into the second chapter of our ministry. I've shared with you in the past that a number of miraculous events took place that confirmed God's appointment to be part of your spiritual lives. In one of my conversations with Patrick he mentioned that Satan wants this church. He said he had to fight the devil off on numerous occasions and warned me Satan will come after me and this church again—from the inside, because he does not want us to continue the great ministry God has inspired here.

One of the easiest ways for us to stall the movement of God would be to shrug our shoulders and say we've arrived; we are a neat church, so no need to stretch ourselves to see what other incredible endeavors God might accomplish through us. Too Busy...Distracted, Tomorrow (the devils favorite word)

It is NOT easy to do ministry in this secularized world, where the mind set is tolerate all ideas except Christian thoughts and relativism—the concept that there is no absolute truth for humanity to adhere to thus we are not accountable to any authority other than the self.

Mainline Churches are struggling: The Presbyterian Denomination loses 30-40,000 members annually. Congregations are closing regularly. A high % of pastors leave church ministry after 5 yrs-disillusioned. Only 22-39% (depending upon geography) of Americans Christians attend church. It is in this climate we are called to be a relevant force for Jesus Christ.

Actually the harvest is riper today than at any other time in history since the days of the apostles. There is an estimated 80 million un churchd adults who live in the United States. The irony is most Americans believe in God and have an interest in spiritual matters. A few years ago Newsweek featured an article Talking to God. Their research cited 91% of American Women pray. 85% of American men pray. Astonishingly, one out of five atheist pray! 52% of the un churchd have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. Newsweek concluded in an allegedly rootless, materialistic, self centered America there is a hunger for a personal experience with God.

They believe in God, but are not finding their way to church. Theologian John Dunne tells of a group of early Spanish sailors who reached the continent of South America after an arduous voyage. Their

caravels sailed into the head waters of the Amazon, an expanse of water so wide the sailors presumed it to be a continuation of the Atlantic Ocean. It never occurred to them to drink the water, since they expected it to be saline. As a result some of the sailors died of thirst. The scene of men dying of thirst as their ship floated on the world's largest source of freshwater has become a metaphor for our age.

People are starving spiritually, looking in all kinds of places...while the waters of abundant life are available to them. Friends—we the church of Jesus Christ possess this life giving water.

Let me explain the magnificent calling we have as Christians: Just as God first spoke through Creation, then through the Scriptures, then through Jesus Christ, now God speaks through US His people—the church.

The disconnect between the spiritually thirsting world and Christ's church—might be because we are not strategically reaching into our culture.

Which brings us to the vision for our church for this year. While it would be easy to feel good about ourselves and maintain our present standard of ministry, the English Statesman, Oliver Cromwell warns, "When we cease to be better we cease to be good." We need to be planning for the future ministry.

It is Christ's expectation that His church be a vibrant, alive exciting environment with a faith that makes a difference in the lives of the people around us.

Which brings us to our first priority, that we lead people to Jesus. I remember one of the members of my Small Group pondering out loud "has our church brought anyone to Christ recently?" In response the comment was made we don't care about numbers as long as those here are committed. No! If we are not growing numerically, that indicates we are not fulfilling our calling to make disciples, find the lost, bear fruit, reconcile others with God.

Arch Bishop William Temple points out the church is the only organization that exists for those who are not their members. The church is a community with a mission to the world. Our Lord said in John 20:21 as the Father has sent Me, so I send you. Even the great Commandment to love one another is to be viewed as a mission to the world. By this all will know that you are My disciples...

A personal challenge to each one of you is to bring someone to church this year. You don't have to convert them or answer their difficult questions about Predestination or Why does a good God allow suffering...just invite them to church. Offer to pick them up

Luke 15: 7 tells us there is more Joy in heaven when one sinner repents than over the 99 righteous. All of us are surrounded by people who are hurting; invite them to church to come meet the great Physician. Just as someone introduced you to Jesus and invested in your spiritual journey, return the favor.

I had a fascinating experience a few years ago, I was taking a kid home from a party my son had, so I asked him Where are you going to church Christmas eve? He asks, Church—what happens at church- is there a party? I said oh yes, we celebrate Jesus' arrival in our lives. He replies who? Could it be this child

has never heard the gospel message. I inquired you've never been to church? No, my parents don't go to church. So I took the long way home and told him about God who created us and loves us and at Christmas we celebrate His son Jesus who came to remove the bad elements of life that destroy our world.

How is it possible that a seventh grader in our culture has never heard of Jesus in our society? Well they won't hear about God at school, not will they see anything about Jesus on T.V. and if the parents do not go to church—it is possible that numerous children are growing up around us that have not heard of Jesus Christ. & even worse those who classify themselves as Christians are not teaching their kids about Jesus. This is why we want to keep our children's ministry a priority...

As a congregation we want to strategize about how we can reach our culture. We are initiating a Visioning process from January –May with the Session and Staff that will also include other key leaders within our church so that we can assess our resources and opportunities.

If people are clamoring for an encounter with God but are under the impression they will not find it at Church, then we need to re- consider our target group...We live in an age where 99% of Americans have T.V.s in their homes while only 97% of them have plumbing! Two generations have now grown up on electronic mass media.

The average College graduate reads less than two books a year. We live in a post literate age where American culture receives most information from a source other than the printed text. Technology is the language of our culture. Experts say that technology is a life and death issue for the church.

Just as missionaries communicate the Christian message in the native language, so we must figure out how to connect with our society. When the Biblical message is communicated in the language and thought forms of the people, it has the highest probability of connecting with listeners.

I installed multimedia in the last couple of churches I served, and I remember getting comments are we going to serve popcorn too? No--unless you think it will bring people to Jesus—then we should get two machines! 1 Corinthians 9:22 I become all things to all people that I may by all means save some.

That's why we want to prioritize our Web site and other technological avenues like Facebook, U Tube, Twitter. Faron Kelley our the Communication Elder on Session is strategizing about a prayer chain we can use on our phones so that we can text prayer requests to church members so we all will immediately stop and lift someone up before God.

Another priority for 2010 is making sure we are a Mission driven church. Missions is not a program in the church it is the purpose of the church. The way the church responded to the Haiti request last week is an indicator of the positive spiritual pulse of our church! We collected almost \$7,000. Our Missions team pointed out that we surpassed our goal of 12% of the budget going towards Missions—we gave 13%! But their hope is that we do not merely give dollars, but also invest ourselves finding opportunities to have personal encounters with those we want to reach. Shaun does a great job getting our kids into real life experiences that are life changing.

Another priority is continuing to develop the community within our congregation. Our world makes it easy for people to live in isolation so we need to be a place where people can have a family. It is always so moving when Nancy points out this is your family! The typical American male has no intimate relationships. T.V. sitcoms like Friends and Seinfeld are popular because they represent the longed for intimacy with others.

That's why we stress Small Groups and our in-reach programs...so that people can be touched by Jesus through our hands!

In the book, Have a Little Faith by Mitch Albom an emphasis is put on each one of us having an intentional mentoring ministry so that we are passing along our faith. Christianity is about being a part of each other's lives. If someone is about to slip, someone else should catch them. If they hit the ground we are to restore them. Getting involved in other people's spiritual journey is part of our identity as Christians.

Most of us are dealing with personal stuff, so in Small Groups we can encourage one another as we go through our trials. The model we ought to be striving for is found in Acts 2: 43-47... Go to the table outside where the guy with the funny hat stands meet the folks from the TLC committee, the Small Group, Snow Birds, the other ministries where you can get plugged.

I do want to thank you for the way you have responded in supporting the ministry through your tithes and offerings. I'm positive God is going to surprise you with His favor. When we commit our finances to Christ, we are making the statement my sustenance is based on God's promises. As a Church we are aiming at doing something special for Christ's kingdom.

We only get one shot at this life, let's pour ourselves into what really matters. I met the manager of Chick-fil-A, at the Water tower. What a powerful Christian. He brings his faith to work and has trained his team "we have a 20 minute opportunity to impact someone's life!" That's the guy who sells chicken.

He added it is amazing what God can do when we make ourselves available.

Let me wrap this message up. The first step in accomplishing our Vision is to be people of prayer. Turn all your thoughts into prayers and expect the Living God to channel our energy into divine possibilities. All of the great revivals in Church history were started by people who prayed. John Wesley said give me 100 men I don't care if they are clergy or not 100 who are committed to prayer and we will shake the gates of Hell. Make sure you have a prayer life...

In 2010 let's be New Testament Christians. Let's be Christians that leave a legacy that will inspire the next generation that follows us!