

The Role of the Church in the Community

Jesus on Community Outreach

Lesson #5 for July 30, 2016

Scriptures: Luke 4:16-19; 10:25-37; Matthew 5:13; 13:3-9.; Isaiah 2:8; John 4:35-38.

1. This lesson will focus on some of the experiences of Jesus and His disciples. What can we learn from them about community outreach? What was Jesus's community?

Robert Louis Stevenson, best known for his adventure story *Treasure Island*, had been a sickly boy who couldn't go to school regularly. Finally, his parents hired a teacher to educate him and a nanny to help with his personal needs. One night when his nanny came to check on him before he went to bed, he was out of bed, and his hands and nose were pressed against the window. His nanny firmly told him to get back in bed before he got a chill.

Robert asked her to come to the window and see what he was seeing.

The nanny came to see. Down below on the street, there was a lamplighter lighting the streetlights. " 'Look there,' " Robert said, " 'there's a man poking holes in the darkness.' "—Margaret Davis, *Fear Not! Is There Anything Too Hard for God?* (Aspect Books, 2011), p. 332.—as quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Saturday, July 23, 2016.

2. Read Matthew 5:14. What does it mean to be "the light of the world"? Who was the best example of a true Light to the world? (John 8:12) Could we "poke holes in the darkness"? Aren't we supposed to be a "peculiar" people? Should Adventists do more mixing? To be "politically correct," our government is trying to give priority to every kind of belief except Christianity! They assume that all religions and all types of beliefs are equal.
3. Read Luke 4:15. Jesus the young Rabbi from Nazareth was having a very successful beginning to His ministry in Galilee. People were surprised and attracted by the fact that His teaching was not like the teaching they were so familiar with from the authorities and the scribes. (Matthew 7:28-29) When He finished speaking, what He meant was clear; when the authorities spoke, they were usually vague or ambiguous in their teachings.
4. Before long, He returned to His hometown in Nazareth. When Sabbath came, (Luke 4:16-30) "as His custom was," He went to the synagogue. They handed Him a scroll, and He read from Isaiah 61:1-2. But, He did not read the last phrase which was their favorite portion.

During His childhood and youth, Jesus had worshiped among His brethren in the synagogue at Nazareth. Since the opening of His ministry He had been absent from them, but they had not been ignorant of what had befallen Him. As He again appeared among them, their interest and expectation were excited to the highest pitch. Here were the familiar forms and faces of those whom He had known from infancy. Here were His mother, His brothers and sisters, and all eyes were turned upon Him as He entered the synagogue upon the Sabbath day, and took His place among the worshipers.

In the regular service for the day, the elder read from the prophets, and exhorted the people still to hope for the Coming One, who would bring in a glorious reign, and banish all oppression. He sought to encourage his hearers by rehearsing the evidence that the Messiah's coming was near. He described the glory of His advent, keeping prominent the thought that He would appear at the head of armies to deliver Israel.

When a rabbi was present at the synagogue, he was expected to deliver the sermon, and any Israelite might give the reading from the prophets. Upon this Sabbath Jesus was requested to take part in the service. He “stood up to read. And there was delivered unto Him a roll of the prophet Isaiah.” Luke 4:16, 17, R. V., margin. The scripture which He read was one that was understood as referring to the Messiah.—Ellen G. White (1898). *The Desire of Ages* 236.4. Pacific Press Publishing Association. [Bold type is added.]

5. Read Luke 4:16-19. Where have we heard these words before? (See Isaiah 61:1-2.) What was Jesus proclaiming by reading those texts? What language was Jesus reading? Hebrew. What was His mother tongue? Aramaic. He almost certainly also spoke Greek and perhaps Latin.

Jesus stood before the people as a living expositor of the prophecies concerning Himself. Explaining the words He had read, He spoke of the Messiah as a reliever of the oppressed, a liberator of captives, a healer of the afflicted, restoring sight to the blind, and revealing to the world the light of truth. His impressive manner and the wonderful import of His words thrilled the hearers with a power they had never felt before. The tide of divine influence broke every barrier down; like Moses, they beheld the Invisible. As their hearts were moved upon by the Holy Spirit, they responded with fervent amens and praises to the Lord.

But when Jesus announced, “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears,” they were suddenly recalled to think of themselves, and of the claims of Him who had been addressing them. **They, Israelites, children of Abraham, had been represented as in bondage. They had been addressed as prisoners to be delivered from the power of evil; as in darkness, and needing the light of truth. Their pride was offended, and their fears were roused. The words of Jesus indicated that His work for them was to be altogether different from what they desired. Their deeds might be investigated too closely. Notwithstanding their exactness in outward ceremonies, they shrank from inspection by those clear, searching eyes.**

Who is this Jesus? they questioned. He who had claimed for Himself the glory of the Messiah was the son of a carpenter, and had worked at His trade with His father Joseph. **They had seen Him toiling up and down the hills, they were acquainted with His brothers and sisters, and knew His life and labors. They had seen Him develop from childhood to youth, and from youth to manhood. Although His life had been spotless, they would not believe that He was the Promised One.**

What a contrast between His teaching in regard to the new kingdom and that which they had heard from their elder! Jesus had said nothing of delivering them from the Romans. They had heard of His miracles, and had hoped that His power would be exercised for their advantage, but they had seen no indication of such purpose.

As they opened the door to doubt, their hearts became so much the harder for having been momentarily softened. Satan was determined that blind eyes should not that day be opened, nor souls bound in slavery be set at liberty. With intense energy he worked to fasten them in unbelief. They made no account of the sign already given, when they had been stirred by the conviction that it was their Redeemer who addressed them.—Ellen G. White.

The Desire of Ages 237.2–238.2. [Bold type is added.]

6. Try to imagine yourself as a Jew in the 1st century listening to that message from Jesus. He was using language from Leviticus 25, describing the year of jubilee. But, then He went on to declare Himself as the Messiah for whom they had been waiting for so many centuries. But, their ideas about the Messiah were completely erroneous. **Their favorite part was that last phrase about giving them victory over their enemies. Jesus did not quote that part because He did not want to encourage their false ideas about the Messiah.** Could we make the same kind of mistake? Bible study and prayer is our safety.
7. Read Luke 10:25-37. The story of the good Samaritan is very familiar to Bible-believing-and-reading Christians. What do we know about the details of that story?
8. The expert in the law understood that all the commandments revolve around loving God with all one's heart and loving one's neighbor as one's self. The question that remained to be answered was, "Who is my neighbor?"

God in His providence had brought the priest and the Levite along the road where the wounded sufferer lay, that they might see his need of mercy and help. **All heaven watched to see if the hearts of these men would be touched with pity for human woe.**—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 500.1. [Bold type is added.]

9. We do not need to tell anyone who is familiar with the Scriptures how the Jews felt about the Samaritans and vice versa. Read John 4:9; compare Luke 9:54. The usual attitude between Jews and Samaritans could probably be best described as hatred.
10. While the whole universe was watching, the priest and the Levite came upon the wounded man. All those men could think about was themselves! We should not worry about all the surveillance cameras that are being installed because we already know the whole universe is watching us as it was that scene on the road from Jericho that day!

This was no imaginary scene, but an actual occurrence, which was known to be exactly as represented. The priest and the Levite who had passed by on the other side were in the company that listened to Christ's words.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 499.1.

The Levite was of the same tribe as was the wounded, bruised sufferer. All Heaven watched as the Levite passed down the road, to see if his heart would be touched with human woe. As he beheld the man he was convicted of what he ought to do; but as it was not an agreeable duty, he wished he had not come that way, so that he need not have seen the man who was wounded and bruised, naked and perishing, and in want of help from his fellow men. He passed on his way, persuading himself that it was none of his business, and that he had no need to trouble himself over the case. Claiming to be an expositor of the law, to be a minister in sacred things, he yet passed by on the other side.—Ellen G. White, *RH*, January 1, 1895 par. 5; *Welfare Ministry* 47.1. [Bold type is added.]

11. The priest and the Levite each asked himself the question: "What might happen to me if I stop and help this man?" The Samaritan asked: "What might happen to this man if I do not help him?" What is the difference between the two?

In the story of the good Samaritan, Christ illustrates the nature of true religion. He shows that it consists not in systems, creeds, or rites, but in the performance of loving deeds, in bringing the greatest good to others, in

genuine goodness.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 497.1.

The lesson is no less needed in the world today than when it fell from the lips of Jesus. Selfishness and cold formality have well-nigh extinguished the fire of love, and dispelled the graces that should make fragrant the character. **Many who profess His name have lost sight of the fact that Christians are to represent Christ. Unless there is practical self-sacrifice for the good of others, in the family circle, in the neighborhood, in the church, and wherever we may be, then whatever our profession, we are not Christians.**—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 504.2. [Bold type is added.]

12. To the Jews of Jesus's day, it was very clear that a neighbor would have to be a Jew—and probably a Jew of his own social class. For Jesus to suggest that a neighbor could be a Samaritan or even someone more foreign to them seemed incredible.
13. How do you think you would feel if you had been the Levite or the priest as you heard Jesus recount their story? Did Jesus point them out in any way? Did He even look at them, hinting that He knew that they were the ones involved?
14. The question then is: “Who will be a neighbor to the most needy?” That is the person we should be trying to help; period!

No distinction on account of nationality, race, or caste, is recognized by God. He is the Maker of all mankind. All men are of one family by creation, and all are one through redemption. Christ came to demolish every wall of partition, to throw open every compartment of the temple, that every soul may have free access to God. His love is so broad, so deep, so full, that it penetrates everywhere.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* 386.3.

15. The story of the good Samaritan is so well known even among unchurched people that it has become a part of our vocabulary.
16. So, how many Adventist churches are near people and places where help is needed?
17. Read Matthew 5:13. Does this statement apply even to us? Is our church a kind of “salt shaker”? Salt, of course, is only useful when it is mixed with the rest of the ingredients in the recipe. By itself, salt is not only useless but also even could be dangerous. If salt were a new medicine produced by some pharmaceutical company in our day, it would never be approved by the Food and Drug Administration! It has far too many harmful effects! But, mixed properly in the correct amounts in a recipe, it serves a wonderful function. It not only gives flavor to the ingredients in which it is mixed, but also it may serve other purposes as well. In the case of bread, it prevents the bread from rising too quickly.
18. Unfortunately, many Christians have become familiar with the terms *insiders* and *outsiders*. Some say, “Our people” or “OP” and “Not our people” or “NOP.” What is the meaning of those terms? Could we as Christians mix with people in our communities and be transforming agents?
19. How do we as Christians mingle with the world without being too much influenced by them?
20. Read Deuteronomy 12:30; 31:20; and Isaiah 2:8. What are the common “idols” in our day? What is implied by the fact that we have a television program entitled “American Idol”?
21. Read the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman as recorded in John 4:1-42. In this story Jesus broke just about every social norm in which the Jews believed. But, the Samaritan woman instead of being fixated on social differences reached out to her friends as soon as she recognized the truth about the One to whom she was speaking. In John 4:35-38, Jesus

used her response to say something that probably puzzled His disciples at first; He said that the harvest time had come. Then, He went on to say that while some may be planting seeds, others will be harvesting. What did He mean?

22. Ask any farmer about the process of raising crops. He will assure you that it is not just about harvesting. He not only has to plant the seeds, but also he has to prepare the soil. He may need to use fertilizer. He may need to fight pests. He has to wait hopefully until exactly the right time before he can harvest. Even before planting, there may need to be preparing/cultivating the soil. He might need to test it, and some crops must be watered.
23. How is the farming process related to winning souls for the gospel? Sometimes, we need to be involved in preparing/cultivating activities. We need to reach out and meet needs in the community. Small-group Bible studies may be possible; with the blessing of the Holy Spirit, they may bear fruit. Very few people are won to the church by a single exposure to the church. So, what role should each of us be playing in winning souls?
24. It has been demonstrated again and again that the best converts and the ones that stay in the church are those who have been brought in by church members over a fairly lengthy period of time as opposed to those who are brought in “quickly” by a visiting evangelist.
25. Real Christians, as we have seen, are those who are constantly looking for opportunities to reach out to others.
26. Read Matthew 10:5-10. Does it seem strange to you that Jesus would send out His disciples basically without any resources? What kind of people did He expect them to encounter? Jesus Himself had already been working in several areas in Galilee. Some of the places where His disciples went were some of those same towns and villages. Jesus wanted them to get the experience of working with the most receptive people first. Those who would welcome them into their homes were likely to be such people. Furthermore, He was teaching His disciples a very important lesson about dependence upon God. The disciples needed to learn how to reach out not only to Jewish communities but also later to communities around the then-known world and make friends of local residents. This was an absolutely essential skill that they needed.

Pastor Frank’s local conference asked him to plant a church in a section of a large city that had virtually no Adventist presence. Initially, he had no budget to do so. He consulted a map and determined the boundaries of that section of the city and studied the demographics of the people there. Then he parked his car in the busiest part of the neighborhood and began going from business to business asking questions about life in that area. He visited with political, business, and social agency leaders, asking questions about the greatest needs in that community. He made friends with some of the local residents, who invited him to join a local civic club. In that setting, he discovered other leaders who opened the way to rent the annex of a local Presbyterian church. The civic club members provided seed money to buy paint and cleaning supplies to refurbish the annex to use for community services. Interviews with community leaders indicated that health care was an important need in the community. Therefore, Pastor Frank brought together a team of volunteers who ran various health-screening programs and follow-up meetings in the annex for community residents. Those who benefitted from the screenings and programs paid a modest fee, which helped pay the expenses. Soon a branch Sabbath School was started, and some of the residents began to attend.

Pastor Frank soon learned that *one of the best ways to plant a church is to*

first plant a ministry that meets the needs of the community—and then grow a church through that ministry. This community-based ministry spawned a Seventh-day Adventist church of more than 140 members.

Pastor Frank's story illustrates what can happen when we follow Jesus' teachings about reaching our community. How did Jesus live out His own teachings about ministry? Next week we will begin exploring Christ's ministry method, which "will give true success in reaching the people."—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Thursday, July 28, 2016. [Italic type is in the original source.]

27. So, what has Jesus told us about those who are willing to go out into the community and work for others in contrast to those who are not willing?

In the great Judgment day, those who have not worked for Christ, who have drifted along thinking of themselves, caring for themselves, will be placed by the Judge of the whole earth with those who did evil. They receive the same condemnation.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 641.4.

Unless the church is the light of the world, it is darkness.—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, September 11, 1893, par. 3.

28. Is it true that if we are not lights, we are darkness?
29. As we discussed in a previous lesson, many of the issues that face us as Christians, trying to reach out to the community in which we live—including poverty, lack of education, lack of healthcare, and dealing with widows and orphans—have become political issues in many nations. In fact, they have caused an inevitable polarization in the population. How can we do our work as Christians without getting swept away to either side of these political debates?
30. Unfortunately, many Christian churches today focus exclusively on church members' needs and comforts. Have you ever been to a church that focuses instead on ministry to the community? What would be the basic difference between those two types of churches?
31. Does your church "pass by on the other side" when it finds someone in need as did the priest and Levite in the parable of the good Samaritan? If so, what can we do to change that approach?
32. Often, our churches take the approach that we need to make the church as attractive as possible to lure people in. That is not a bad idea; but, how would things be different if the church and members of the church were actually reaching out into the community?
33. It has been said: "The church is not a club for saints, but a hospital for sinners." How would that actually work in real life? We need to remember that every hurting, suffering person out there in the community is a child of God.
34. A number of years ago the Seventh-day Adventist Church launched a program with the logo, "The Caring Church." That sounds wonderful; but, in fact, a label of that nature needs to be suggested by someone outside the church and not by those who are inside!
35. So, how do people in your community view Seventh-day Adventists? Are we known for our love and care? What could we do to earn the label, "The Caring Church"?

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