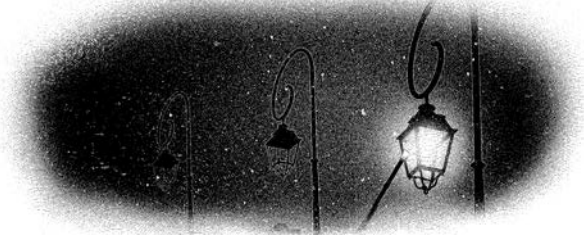


Jesus on Community Outreach



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 4:16–19, 10:25–37, Matt. 5:13, Isa. 2:8, John 4:35–38, Matt. 13:3–9.*

Memory Text: “Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people” (*Matthew 4:23, NKJV*).

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 lamp-lighter 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.

We've seen a bit of what the Old Testament said about helping those in need. We are now going to look at what the New Testament says, and what better place to start than with Jesus? And one of Jesus' well-known teachings is that we are to be “the light of the world” (*Matt. 5:14*). In so doing, we reflect Jesus, the True Light of the world (*John 8:12*). Jesus' teachings, which He modeled in His own earthly ministry, provide powerful instructions concerning how we, through Him, can poke holes in the darkness.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 30.

Jesus' Mission Statement

Jesus, the young rabbi from Nazareth, had become very popular in the region of Galilee (*Luke 4:15*). When He spoke, “the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (*Matt. 7:28, 29, NKJV*). One Sabbath, when handed the scroll of Isaiah, Jesus read the first two verses of Isaiah 61, stopping in midsentence just before the phrase “and the day of vengeance of our God” (*Isa. 61:2, NIV*).

Read *Luke 4:16–19*. Where have we heard these words before? (*See Isa. 61:1, 2*.) What was Jesus proclaiming by reading those texts?

As we already saw, the phrase “the year of the LORD’s favor” is identified as the year of jubilee (*see Leviticus 25*). In this visit to Nazareth, Jesus quotes a Messianic passage from Scripture and assures His hearers that “today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (*Luke 4:21, NIV*). In this sermon, He reveals Himself as the Anointed One who preaches good news to the poor, freedom for prisoners, sight for the blind, release for the oppressed, and jubilee restoration. This list well describes His earthly ministry, which was focused on teaching, healing, and ministering, especially to those in need.

Why would Jesus stop short of completing the sentence in Isaiah 61:2?

Perhaps Jesus stopped short of the phrase “the day of vengeance of our God” because Jesus did not want His ministry to be associated with the prevailing concept that the Messiah would come to lead armies to vanquish the oppressors of Israel and bring them under Israel’s power. That was a false conception that would, unfortunately, keep many of His fellow countrymen from seeing Him and His ministry for what it really was. Instead, He focused on what He would do for those who needed what He had to offer right then and there, regardless of the political situation of the time.

What should it say to us that Jesus announces His ministry in this way; that is, what should we take away for ourselves by His emphasizing here the practical work that we would be doing?

Loving Your Neighbor

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself” (*Luke 10:27*).

Read Luke 10:25–37. What message is given here to us in regard to the whole question of helping those in need?

The expert in the law understood that all the commandments revolve around loving God with all you have and loving your neighbor as yourself. The question that remained to be answered was “Who is my neighbor?”

Given that the prevailing thought among the people of Israel in Christ’s time was to favor their own kind as neighbors and relegate all others as outsiders, this expert in the law sought to have Jesus clarify the issue. The parable that Jesus tells reveals a totally different perspective. Our neighbor is *anyone* we encounter who is in need. Being a neighbor is meeting the needs of a neighbor. The priest and the Levite were more concerned about defiling themselves and protecting their godly duties from contamination. What a convenient way to use their religion as an excuse not to have to die to self in order to help someone who, most likely, could never pay them back.

In contrast, the Samaritan saw this wounded “outsider” and “enemy” as his neighbor, mercifully meeting his needs rather than his own. The point is that instead of asking “Who is my neighbor?” we need to be asking, “Who will be a neighbor to the downtrodden and oppressed?” It doesn’t matter who a person is: the one in need is the one whom we should 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*, p. 386.

What prejudices might be hindering you from being the neighbor you must be?

The Whole Recipe

“‘You are the salt of the earth’” (*Matt. 5:13, NIV*).

In this passage, Jesus is calling His followers to be “salt,” which is a transforming agent. The church is a “saltshaker,” which contains the “salt of the earth.” With what or whom should we, this “salt,” mix? Only with ourselves, or with ingredients different from ourselves?

You can better understand the answer to this question if you fill one loaf pan with only salt and another loaf pan with bread that has salt as one of its ingredients. In the first pan, salt is the whole recipe; it hardly would be tasty, much less edible. In the second pan, salt is part of the recipe and is mixed with ingredients different from itself. And, as such, it transforms a loaf of bread from bland to delicious. Salt does more good when it mixes with elements unlike itself. The same is true of Christians. This won’t happen if we stay comfortably in the church “saltshaker.”

Thus, there’s a point here we shouldn’t miss. We can, in every which way, be moral in that we don’t smoke or drink or carouse or gamble or engage in crime. All that is important. But the question isn’t just What don’t we do? Rather, it is *What do we do?* That is, what do we do to help our community and those who are in need?

Read Matthew 5:13 again, concentrating on the rest of the verse. How can the salt lose its savor?

“But if the salt has lost its savor; if there is only a profession of godliness, without the love of Christ, there is no power for good. The life can exert no saving influence upon the world.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 439.

Go back to the recipe symbol. As we saw, if all we have is salt, it is no good. In fact, too much salt in the diet can be toxic. Salt has to be mixed with what is different from it. Thus, if we are too much like the world, we won’t make a difference in it. We will have nothing to offer. The salt becomes good for nothing. And what does Jesus say happens to it then?

However, permeated with the savor of the love of Christ, we will desire to become “insiders” with the “outsiders,” mixing with others in order to be a transforming agent, to be something that will make a positive difference in their lives and, by extension, leading others to what really matters in life: salvation in Jesus.

Read Deuteronomy 12:30, 31:20, and Isaiah 2:8. What danger do these texts warn about, and how can we be careful not to fall into this trap?

On Being a Farmer

Read John 4:35–38. What is Jesus telling us here about the different steps needed in reaching souls?

The work of a farmer is multifaceted. Other types of farming work must be done *before* a harvest can be plentiful (*Matt. 9:35–38*). Not only reapers are needed in the Lord’s harvest field. Can you imagine a farmer at harvesttime saying to his farmhands, “Harvesttime is here, so we must start planting seeds”? Reaping is best done after you have been farming all along.

Farming includes preparing the soil, for not all ground is good ground at first. (*Read Matt. 13:3–9.*)

What can your church do in your community to soften “hard ground” and remove “rocks” and “thorns”?

Workers have done the hard farming work before the harvest, and other workers reap the benefits of their labor. Sometimes evangelistic outreach strategies have emphasized reaping more than they do the preparatory farming. This is not how it should be done. The soil should be prepared long before the evangelist just shows up and starts preaching in hopes of reaping a harvest.

We should look at working in the harvest field as a *process*: testing the soil, preparing/cultivating the soil, planting, watering, fertilizing, fighting pests, waiting, reaping, and preserving the harvest.

Reaping the harvest is only one part of the process. In the church, the “farming” process could include soil-testing activities, such as community needs assessment surveys, demographics, and interviews with community leaders. There can be soil preparing/cultivating activities, such as meeting needs in the community, which are revealed by the community assessment; seed-planting activities, such as seminars, Bible studies, and small groups; and praying for the rain—the Holy Spirit. Few people are won to Christ with only one exposure. We need to nurture them with a process of multiple exposures, increasing the likelihood that they will be ready for harvesting. If we rely only on scattered events, it is unlikely that the new plants will survive until the harvest.

What role should you be playing in the whole process of winning souls, as opposed to the role, if any, that you are now playing?

Church Planting

Read Matthew 10:5–10. Why would Jesus send His disciples out into the surrounding towns and villages without any resources?

It seems strange that Jesus' disciples would have direct orders to enter their ministry territory with little to sustain themselves. Apparently, Jesus placed His disciples in this situation to teach them dependence on God and also the importance of creating friendships through service to the local residents. These local residents would then value their service enough to provide support for the ministry.

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 benefited 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.

Further Thought: Read other teachings of Jesus that inform you and your church's role in the community: Matthew 7:12, 23:23, 25:31–46, Mark 4:1–34, 6:1–13, Luke 6:36, 11:42, 12:13–21, 14:16–24, 16:13, 18:18–27, 19:1–10, John 10:10, 12:8, 17:13–18. Read Ellen G. White, “‘The Least of These My Brethren,’” pp. 637–641, in *The Desire of Ages*; “‘The Missionary’s Pattern,’” in *Signs of the Times*, March 19, 1894.

“Unless the church is the light of the world, it is darkness.”—Ellen G. White, in *Signs of the Times*, September 11, 1893. That’s a powerful thought. It reminds us of Jesus’ words, “‘He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad’ ” (*Matt. 12:30, NKJV*). Jesus is making it plain: there is no neutral territory in the great controversy. We are on Christ’s side or the devil’s. To have been given great light and to do nothing with it, really, is to be working against it. We have been called to be lights in the world; if we aren’t light, then we are darkness. Though the immediate context is different, the principle is the same: “‘If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!’ ” (*Matt. 6:23, NIV*). Perhaps all this could be summed up with the words: “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more” (*Luke 12:48*).

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Discuss how we are to mingle with the world in order to reach out to others. How do we strike the right balance here; that is, how do we mingle with the world in a way that we can do others some good, while at the same time not getting so caught up in it that we become part of the problem, not the solution?
- 2 So often, if we are involved in our community, the question of politics arises. After all, many of the issues that we want to help with—poverty, education, health care, and so on—are part of the political debate. How can we be careful that we don’t allow the inevitable polarization of politics to contaminate what we want to do? Some political involvement seems unavoidable, so how can we position ourselves in a way to keep out of the political fray as much as possible?
- 3 Or, on the other hand, are there situations in which we need to be in the political arena in order to best minister to the community? If so, what are they, and how can we operate in ways so that we don’t compromise our gospel commission?