

“Risk-Taking Mission and Service”

Five Fruitful Practices, part 4

Luke 10:25-37 (and Micah 6:6-8)

[title slide] *Welcome, prayer.*

Dear God, breathe on us this morning with your Holy Spirit so that we can be filled with your presence. If there is anything you want us to change, God, we are ready and willing. Help us to see the needs of the world around us with new eyes, and help us to move when you move. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

[Book and website] In the last few weeks, we have discussed The Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations based on the book by Bishop Robert Schnase. We are learning how to do these different practices because we want to accomplish our church’s mission: to make disciples of Jesus Christ who transform the world.

[Hospitality, Worship, Discipleship] The first practice was “Radical Hospitality,” and it was all about welcoming and loving people into a relationship with Christ and His Church. The second practice was “Passionate Worship.” As part of that relationship, we worship God in Jesus Christ with everything that we are. And the third practice, “Intentional Faith Development,” we summed up with the phrase, “We can learn!” We realize that as we invite and as we worship, we need to take seriously our own growth in faith and the growth of others around us.

[Mission] The fourth practice we are examining today is “Risk-Taking Mission and Service.”

[Risk game] Now, I like Risk, the board game. It’s fun to place your little armies on the board and roll the dice, and if you win, great, and if you lose, well, it was still fun to play. But the risk I’m talking about today is much greater than a board game. We’re talking about risking something to answer the call of Jesus Christ.

[Reynosa, Mexico] Let me give you a personal example. When I was 15, my youth group decided to go to Reynosa, Mexico, to build houses and run a one-week Vacation Bible School for children. I had no idea what I was really getting into. But I understood that taking part in this project was something Jesus

wanted me to do. There was a lot of effort to prepare for it. Meetings. Fundraisers. Prayer. Learning to say, “¿Dónde está el baño?” (Where is the bathroom?)

[My photos] However, preparation is nothing like actually being there. I still remember the shock of seeing the ghettos for the first time. I remember the overpowering heat and smell as we walked across border to the project site. We spent one week building a 12-foot by 12-foot raised-platform house, what most of us would call a shed. No plumbing or electricity. Just four walls, a roof, and a window. I can't even remember how many people could sleep inside of it. And the amazing thing was, it was a dramatic improvement over the homeowner's original shelter.

When we left, I had no idea if the homeowner had become a Christian. I never heard from her again. But I know, for that one moment, we had made a difference by allowing God to use us. She didn't have to sleep on the ground or in the mud if it rained. She could close her door, have privacy and security. Her life had changed.

Honestly, so did mine. That project changed my worldview. Suddenly I was much more aware of the unfair distribution of wealth in the world. Of our extravagance and wastefulness. I was also aware of how God was not just the God of America, but of the world, of different languages. I came back with a lot of questions and a desire to do more. Since that first trip, I have made seven other mission trips to different locations, to serve others. Each time, I have grown in my faith.

[title slide] I have a question for you: when has serving someone else significantly changed your life? Maybe you had an experience like me, way outside your comfort zone helping someone. Or maybe it was in your own hometown, your own backyard. Who did you help? What did they look like? How did they talk? What were their values? How similar were their lives to yours?

[Samaritans] Today's story is commonly known as the Good Samaritan. Maybe you've heard that expression before. The hero in this little story by Jesus is the Samaritan. Who were the Samaritans? Briefly, they are a half-Jewish race

of people who lived just to the north of Jerusalem. They were essentially left behind when the Assyrian army had captured half of the Israel and exiled most of the people into slavery. The remnant, the Samaritans, stuck around, intermarrying with other races the Assyrians had brought in. They had a half-Jewish religion that incorporated elements of both Judaism and paganism. In short, Samaritans were the “weird cousins” of the Jews. They did not get along well.

[Samaritan woman] The relationship between the Jews and Samaritans was so bad, Jesus’ disciples at one point asked if they should call down fire from heaven on the Samaritan towns (Luke 9). When Jesus met a Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well, she was shocked that he even spoke to her (John 4). This animosity went way deeper than a Spartans vs. Wolverines argument. Worse than Packers vs. Lions. More like, Northern Ireland Protestants and Catholics, or Iraqi Sunni and Shiites. The Jews and Samaritans despised each other.

[Jesus and scholar] You have to understand that fact to realize how provoking Jesus’ story is. At first, the scholar seemed to ask a simple question. “Tell me what to do to have eternal life.” Jesus threw it back at him. “You know God’s law. What do you think?” The scholar said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.” This is not new stuff. This is what we’ve been saying all along. “Love God. Love people.” But the scholar pressed for more clarification. It’s like he wanted a pat on the back, a “good boy” moment, where Jesus affirmed him and he could leave unchanged. And there was no way Jesus would let him off of the hook.

The scholar asked, “And who is my neighbor?” That’s an important question for all of us. And Jesus told a story the unmistakably answers that question, for the scholar, and for us. He told the ultimate story of risk-taking service on the road to Jericho.

[Valley road] The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was literally downhill all the way. The road is 17 miles long and drops from Jerusalem at 2500 feet above sea level to Jericho at 800 feet below. It’s rocky, desert country, with lots of steep canyons to hide in. A perfect place for a bandit.

[Priest and injured man] In this story, it appears that the man in distress was a Jew, although Jesus never actually said that. So when a priest happened by, the people must have thought, “Oh, good, the priest knows the right thing to do.... But, wait, he didn’t stop? Well, he must have had a good reason. Right?”

[Priest] There might have been two reasons that the priest didn’t stop. First, it could have been a setup. There might have been another bandit nearby, waiting to rob him. Or, second, the priest might have not looked long enough to see if the man actually was dead or alive. The Jews had very meticulous laws about what was clean and unclean. If the priest touched a dead man, he wouldn’t be able to serve in the temple for a time. Maybe he was just protecting his job. In fact, those same arguments could be used for the Levite, as well, since Levites were supposed to help in the temple, and therefore would want to remain clean.

[Priest leaving] But here’s one other thought: the priest, the scripture says, was also going down. He was leaving Jerusalem. He wasn’t on his way to worship. The same was true of the Levite. It appears as Jesus told this story, the real reason these two Jewish men refused to stop and help was: it was too inconvenient for them. They just didn’t want to help.

[Samaritan] So what did the Samaritan do? He saw the man, he stopped, and forgoing whatever plans he had for that day, he helped, spending his own money on the injured man, enough to cover the bill for at least two whole months.

[Samaritan and inn keeper] Imagine the shock of the crowd as they heard this story. They were expecting the Samaritan to spit on the man, ignore him, insult him, maybe steal whatever he had left. But help him? No way!

[Jesus and scholar] Indeed, the scholar was so shocked, he couldn’t even bring himself to use the word “Samaritan.” Who was the neighbor? “The, uh, one who had compassion on him.” “Go and do likewise,” Jesus said.

Wow. Go and be a Samaritan.

[Samaritan and injured man] This story isn’t about correct religion. It is about risk. How far did the Samaritan go to help the injured man? Are you that desperate to serve someone? Are you willing to get dirty, to risk yourself? To

help someone with your hard-earned money, your precious time? Even if that someone is so unlike you, they would never expect your help?

[Tale of two churches] I want to explain something about risk-taking mission and service today. As a church, we have two choices. We can be attractional, or we can be missional. Attractional churches have really nice buildings, lots of welcoming people who worship God with all their heart, and they invite others to come and be a part of the church. They hope and pray that God will send some nice new people, hopefully a young family with children, who will join the church, give a tithe, serve on a committee, and “save the church” from decline. That’s attractional.

And then there’s missional. The missional church also has a really nice building, lots of welcoming people who worship God with all their heart, and they invite others to come and be a part of the church. However, on Sunday morning worship as they exit the building, they are asking God, “How can I be like the Samaritan? How can I serve others?” The purpose of the missional congregation is to take the church with them wherever they go.

[Couple in church] When new people join the congregation, attractional churches ask them to just show up, but missional churches invite them into a partnership in mission to the world. The Samaritan didn’t try to convert the Jew over to his religion. He didn’t recruit him to come to church. He didn’t interview him to find out what part of Jerusalem he was from. The Samaritan simply loved the man in trouble. He had compassion on him. He saw the injured man and met his needs.

[title slide] The goal of a missional church is not recruits, it’s relationships. As a church, we must commit to do mission with people, not just do ministry to people. Mission is not a one-way street. It’s a dialogue. Mission is not just something missionaries to do in remote places in the world. It is for all of us, right here and right now. We should expect risk-taking mission and service to form our faith and shape our lives.

We don’t have to have all the answers. But there are a few things we do need: Humility. Empathy. Compassion. A thirst for justice. Eyes to recognize inequality. A desire to be missional, not attractional.

[Mission ideas] My advice to you is, start small. Ask, what can be done right here in the Keweenaw, in your own neighborhood? Could you help at the Salvation Army, Little Brothers, or Habitat for Humanity? Volunteer at the school? Rake your neighbor’s lawn? Read to a child? Those are just a few opportunities to take a risk and serve someone.

[title slide] Will we be an attractational church or a missional church? We already have a mission statement. It comes down to whether or not we will accept it. Our mission is to serve others because Jesus Christ served us first. To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. To invite all people into a saving relationship with Jesus for the glory of God. That’s a great mission. So let’s do it.

Memory Verse: Micah 6:8 “What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

Reflection questions:

1. When was the last time you helped someone vastly different from yourself?
When was the last time you received help?
2. Have you ever met a missionary? What was their story?
3. What is the most unexpected place to which your faith in Christ has taken you in order to make a difference in someone’s life?
4. What gifts do you have to offer to be in mission with the least, the last, and the lost?