

Jim Gill

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"Networking"

Isaiah 9:1-7 Matthew 4:12-22 | Corinthians 1:10-18

INTRODUCTION TO ISAIAH 9:1-7

Israel felt like a forgotten people. Isaiah, however, believed in a God who cares, and who never stops caring even when people turned their backs on God. Isaiah held out to his distraught people not only the knowledge that God lives, but the even more important truth that God cares. The prophet spoke of a time when "God will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations." Hear the word of the Lord from Isaiah 9:1-7

INTRODUCTION TO MATTHEW 4:12-22

Matthew, whose primary audience was Jewish, over and over seeks to prove that Jesus was the Messiah. He does this by pointing over and over again to the words of the prophets that foretold his coming. Matthew begins his telling of the beginning of Jesus public ministry by quoting from Isaiah, almost word for word what we read in chapter 9. Hear the word of the Lord from Matthew 4:12-22

Let's pray.

Lord, we marvel at these men who dropped everything they were doing and answered your call to follow you. Help us to hear you calling us to follow them and their example. We thank you for this peek into the beginnings of Jesus ministry and mission and pray they might give us insight into our own. Amen.

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There once was a woman who read somewhere that dogs were healthier if fed a tablespoon of cod liver oil each day. So each day she followed the same routine. She chased her dog until she caught it, wrestled it down, and managed to force the fishy remedy down the dog's throat.

One day, in the middle of this grueling medical effort, the bottle was kicked over. With a sigh, she loosed her grip on the dog so she could wipe up the mess. To her surprise the dog trotted over to the puddle and begin lapping up what had been spilled. As it turns out, the dog LOVED COD LIVER OIL. It was just the owner's method of application to which the dog objected.

Sometimes I think something like that has happened to the good news of the Kingdom of God. It has been so poorly presented that we have never been captured by its attractiveness and its power. .

Last week we read about John the Baptist giving away two of his disciples by pointing to Jesus and saying, "Behold the Lamb of God." When he did, those two quit following John and started to follow Jesus. One of those two was a fisherman named Andrew. We aren't told the name of who the other man was, but I happen to think it was John, the narrator of this particular part of the story. (Eight other times in John's gospel John refers to himself as the other disciple.)

Andrew and the other disciple started following Jesus and they went and spent the rest of the day with him. Later Andrew went and found his brother Simon and said, "We have found the Messiah!" .....and so began the networking.

With the arrest of John the Baptist, Jesus begins his ministry by following up on some of the folks who, according to John's gospel Jesus had met and talked to earlier. Having spent some time with them, when the time was right, Jesus makes a "follow up" call by going and finding them and saying to them, "Follow me....."

I've often thought that Jesus did Simon and Andrew and James and John a favor by calling them to follow him. Every time we see them fishing they aren't catching any fish. When it came to catching fish their nets were NOT working! Jesus said to them, I'm going to make you fishers of men, because you aren't doing so hot catching fish! I'm calling you to start catching people. I'm going to give you nets that work.

So how did Jesus propose they catch people for the kingdom of God? He did it through networking. John the Baptist knew who Jesus was and he pointed his own disciples to Jesus. On John's recommendation Andrew and, I think John, spent the day with Jesus. After having spent the day with Jesus Andrew goes and gets his brother Simon. Somewhere along the way John brought his brother James. Jesus repeats the process when he finds Phillip and then Philip goes and finds his friend Bartholomew who was day dreaming under a tree. The network was growing and it was growing. It's that kind of joy and enthusiasm that causes Peter and Andrew and James and John to drop their nets and follow Jesus. It should be that exciting for us as well.

There was an element of risk involved in dropping everything they had known to follow Jesus into the unknown. James and John left their family business. Matthew left a lucrative government job as a tax collector. We don't know if Bartholomew had a job to leave, after all he was daydreaming under a tree in the middle of the day, but even he took a big risk by leaving all he had even known to follow a man he just met for 3 years with no printed itinerary.

What risks are we being asked to take to follow their example of following Jesus? What have we tried before and it not worked that is keeping us from trying again? What have we not tried that seems too risky for us to even think of trying? What are we doing that is not working that we prefer to keep doing because we know how to do it?

I believe Jesus is calling us to gather together to grow closer to God through our worship and discipleship...and to grow closer to others through our fellowship, and... and to grow in our impact in our community through our stewardship of our

time, our talents, our tithes and our testimonies to call others to join us through the joys of ... networking.

This is what Paul was getting at in our epistle reading for this morning. Paul is urging the Corinthian Christians to stop their puny, petty squabbles over perceived differences and instead to embrace the greater unity that bound them together. These Corinthian Christians had benefitted from different teachers, Paul, Apollos, and Cephas and of course Christ. These followers hailed from different backgrounds, were of different generations, and drew from different social classes. They had genuinely unique histories and lives. But they all had one thing in common: they had ultimately been led to the same place of wood and water, the wood of the cross and the water of baptism. 1

I believe Jesus also wants us to get to know each other so we can join together in ministry and go out together in mission. As I've said before, I believe EVERY Christian has a message, a ministry and a mission. Our message is our story of what God has done and is doing in our lives. Our ministry is what we do in the church and our mission is what we do in the world. The last two Sundays we set new elders apart to take the lead in guiding our congregation. They can't do it alone. The session can't do it alone. The session's committees that you will hear from next week need help. Can you give one hour a month to join a committee and help them carry out their ministry and mission? I guarantee it will impact your message. Jesus calls us, and like Andrew and Philip he calls us to call others like Andrew called his brother Simon and Phillip called his friend Bartholomew.

A mother and son had an argument. It was one angry son that left the house and crashed the door shut so hard that the hinge came loose. Later, when he tried to re-enter the door wouldn't open.

"What's the matter with this door?" he shouted. "Someone let me in."

"Now, you've done it," said the mother.

"The door isn't broken," said the boy, "it is just the hinge."

"Well, I can't get it open," said the mother. "You'll have to wait until father gets home."

"You push and I'll pull," said the boy, "and we will get the door open."

They succeeded with a struggle and closed the door with a struggle. "You wouldn't think one little hinge would make such a difference," said the boy.

It is true that the doorways of life have hinges. Those doors hinge on important matters, which we often take for granted. Our democracy hinges on the respect for the rights of every individual. Many take these rights for granted, while denying the privileges to others. So many good things are short changed by millions who ignore the hinges which swing the doors through which they come and go.

This morning we pause to consider the many to whom we are indebted--those who called us or helped us hear the call to follow Jesus.

In my Faith Lift article this week I talked about some of my passions. What is your passion? Maybe it's playing bridge. Maybe it's designing bridges. Maybe it's building bridges between communities.

Yesterday morning we had a guest speaker at our Men's Breakfast who has heard the call to build bridges between divided people. Detective Luzette Watkins has been with the Baytown Police department since 2012. I first met her when I attended a forum at the Civic Center in McNair that the Police and Sherriff's departments agreed to meet with residents to address common concerns. The first call Luzette answered was the call to protect and serve.

Born in Brooklyn she was on the New York Police department on September 11, 2001. That morning she was on duty talking to the Chief of Police in his office the moment the first plane flew into the first tower. She was facing the window looking over his shoulder when she saw that first plane hit. She said to the chief, "You need to turn around."

With that first impact the call began to go out to First Responders. First responders are those who are called out when the rest are told to stay at home. When that call goes out only certain people should risk the dangers involved. These are Police, Fire Fighters, Maintenance people, Road crews, Ambulance Drivers, Electric and Gas company workers, Truck drivers and a whole host of service people who are taken for granted when things are running smoothly. We call them "essential personnel."

Think about that phrase. Think about what it means to be essential personnel. Then, if you want to be humbled, think about what it is like to be non-essential personnel. Consider the fact that the world can go on without some of us.

Yesterday when I was visiting with Detective Watkins I told her about the Open Mic we had on Thursday. She said, "You wouldn't believe how much talent we have in the Baytown Police. We have singers, guitarists, comedians, and one huge guy that makes balloon animals. She asked if she could have a flyer to put in the break room for this next Thursday night. Then, on her own she asked me if she could put the flyer on the Police Department's Website. I told her no. NO I Didn't! I said, Of course you can. I said that because I believe in networking. That's one of the reasons that I joined the Rotary. That's why one of my Rotary friends is coming to play this Thursday at our Open Mic.

Last night Anne and I saw the movie Hidden Figures. It is a movie about the women who were instrumental in making the calculations that made space flight possible. They were called Colored Calculators. Because of their race and maybe because of their gender they were not allowed to study to be engineers. Yet they were the human calculators that did the job before the arrival of the first

IBM punch card calculators. They worked hard and essentially made themselves essential personnel, so much so that John Glenn would not consider taking off to be the first American to orbit the earth until one of them, Katherine G. Johnson, verified the coordinates for his landing.

The good news is that to Jesus, all were essential personnel—former fishermen, tax collectors, and even day dreamers who he called to be a part of his network. He networked with all kinds of people, saints and scoundrels, children and foreigners, scholars and shepherds. Each of us has a network of folks with which we interact every day. Each of us has an opportunity to share God's love every day. How many of you have fishing buddies? How many of you have someone who does your taxes? How many of you know someone who spends his time day dreaming? Each of us has a message, a ministry and a message. Each of us is has a network of folks God has placed us in. Each of us has something we can invite someone to do with us. Every one of us is called to have a part to play in God's design for our world. We do need to work our nets. We need to drop our nets and start on our networking. We need to work on our presentation so we can discover that, as it turns out, like the dog who's struggled against being forced to take a tablespoon of Cod Liver Oil, people LOVE "God Liver Oil." Each of us has the gift and the opportunity and the motive to grow God's Family circle like Jesus and his disciples did through ....networking.

Let's pray.

Dear Lord, from our darkness we have seen your great light. When we seek to live in the shadows of doubt, you reveal the folly of our ways. If the darkness of gloom threatens to overtake us, you dazzle us with your light. Our flickering faith is matched with the brilliance of your plan for creation. We bow before you, bathed in the light of your love and aglow with the gifts of your Spirit.

In your light may we see light and so lead others to greater clarity of vision. Where perceptions are distorted through mistrust of Christ's message, may our lives make clear what he taught. When others are captive to seeing things only one way, let our openness provide them a choice. If because of our silence others know not what we think, give us courage of conviction and a willingness to share. When leaders make decisions with which we do not agree, make us bold in dissent and reconciling in spirit.

Deliver us from pretension in the truth we hold; open our eyes to what others may reveal. Keep us attuned to the diversity of voices in the church, as they reflect upon your message in varied tones and accents. Lift our horizons so that we may glimpse the full scope of your covenant love. Let us dare to be astonished by the grandeur of your providence and grace.

We pray for those in our networks who are in need, especially those in need of healing and comfort and care. We pray for a safe journey for Bill Lucas to attend the funeral of his sister-in-law. We pray for Lowell Westerman and Clyde Casey and Nona Rushing. We give thanks for Josh Higginbotham's healing and for

Ivan Oakes successful stent implant in his artery. We pray for Anna Bond and Louise Williams and Tina Catlett.

Lord, we love you. We thank you that you care for us and that you care enough to get to know us and let us get to know you. We thank you that you don't leave it at that, that you call us out of our boats to venture forth to use our nets and our networks to gather others to you....so you can get to know them and they can get to know you and they too can experience the joys of networking for your kingdom. Open our eyes to see those around us who you want to love through us and to use us as instruments to grow your kingdom and spread your joy!

1ChristianGlobe Networks, Inc., ChristianGlobe Illustrations, by Leonard Sweet