

Easter Means...We Have Kingdom Focus!

A sermon based on Acts 1:1-11

This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it! Amen.

It's the hottest toy on the market right now. It's called a fidget spinner. Have you seen or heard of these. They're really simple to use...this bearing in the center of a small design of metal or plastic, where you just spin it...and it's supposed to relieve stress and help keep kids focused. This new craze, supposedly targeting kids who have some form or degree of ADD or ADHD, has become a hit for kids of all ages, ADD-stricken or not...popular to the point of being banned from schools because they were becoming too much of a distraction.

Do you have a hard time keeping your focus at times? I have to admit, before sitting down to write my sermon this week, I noticed I was stalling. Not that I couldn't think of what to write, but I noticed the lawn outside isn't greening as fast as I'm wanting it to, so I took my thatching rake outside and did a few minutes of raking before remembering I was supposed to be working on my sermon.

Are you like that? Where you can't focus on one chore but always seem to be hopping between this and that until you finally remember that first chore you were supposed to be doing. We typically call it multi-tasking.

Is that sometimes what your life as a light for Christ feels like? We know what we ought to be doing...we can clearly state what God's command for us is, but how easy can we lose focus? Because Easter means...Ascension means...we have Kingdom focus. We should. But is that always our focus?

Now, what exactly do I mean by Kingdom focus? Simply, it's what we pray for every time we pray the Lord's Prayer and petition God, "Thy kingdom come." Christ's kingdom is his ruling in our hearts by the Holy Spirit through his Word. We're asking Jesus to strengthen our faith in him through being in contact with his Word.

But that's not the only thing we're asking. Think about it...by the power and gift of the Holy Spirit, we're already part of Christ's kingdom. So why keep praying for it to come? Because there are others who are not part of it...who are outside of Christ's kingdom. We want Jesus to spread his rule to the hearts of others as well.

And so that's the focus we're talking about today...that Jesus would use us to see opportunities for the expansion of his Kingdom and then to move on those opportunities and be his witnesses. That's Kingdom focus – seeing people who need Jesus and then sharing Jesus with them.

Now, in that regard, you would have thought the disciples would have been more on point by this time...that their Kingdom focus would have been as razor sharp as ever...especially given the fact how, after Jesus' death and resurrection, he had spent over a month giving his disciples some final, intensive training. Luke tells us he ***"gave many convincing proofs that he was alive...over a period of forty days, he spoke to them about the kingdom of God."***

They had been witnesses of everything – from Jesus' teaching, his miracles...to his suffering, his death...and the best yet, they saw his resurrection. They had seen it all. But still, somehow, they still didn't completely understand it. Jesus spoke about the kingdom of God, and, like their fellow countrymen, they were hoping and looking for the deliverance of the people of Israel from foreign domination and for the establishment of an earthly kingdom. And Jesus referencing the Holy Spirit when he said, ***"In a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit,"*** that caused them to wonder if the new age was about to dawn...when Jesus was going to rule on earth.

They needed Jesus to plainly tell them, ***“You will be my witnesses...Go and make disciples of all nations...Go into all the world and preach the good news.”*** He wasn’t setting up an earthly kingdom. He wanted to rule in the hearts of all people. He wanted the disciples to be his messengers. He wanted them to have real Kingdom focus.

Same as he wants for us. He’s given us similar instructions: ***“You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belong to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light,” “You are the light of the world...let your light shine before men.”*** Like with his disciples, Jesus wants us to recognize the people and the opportunities that are right in front of us to share the good news of Jesus, the resurrection victory message...and not only to be cognizant of those occasions but to actually do something with them and act so that, through the gospel, he can work on their souls and establish his rule in their hearts. Jesus uses us as his outreach tools, and he gives us Kingdom focus.

How’s your Kingdom focus?

As an individual? To make things simple, when’s the last time you talked to someone, outside of our church family, about Jesus? And I don’t mean the casual, “Oh, I read on Facebook you’re going through a rough time; I’ll send prayers your way.” But, where you actually took the time to give them something of real value, the message of their Savior, who loves them, who cares about them, who saved them.

I bet, without even having to think that hard, you could come up with one, two, three, four, five names of people who don’t go to church, who don’t read their Bibles, who don’t have much, if any, of a relationship with Jesus. So, you know people who don’t know Jesus, or, at least, who don’t know the real Jesus, so that part of Kingdom focus is there, but what about the part about doing something about it...being a witness for Jesus and to Jesus?

I hate to admit it, but that’s been me as well....too many times my Kingdom focus hasn’t been there...I’ve lost my edge. Why is that?

Or, taking it one step further, is the Kingdom focus for us, as a group of believers here, any better? We call ourselves Light of the World Lutheran Church, but how are we collectively doing in being a light to our community?

Is our focus on Christ and getting him out there, or does our focus tend to be on us? Here’s an example: a few weeks ago, at a congregational meeting, we talked about we wanted to start looking at funding next. We had three, very God-pleasing choices – paint the church a new color, build a playground, put in handicap access. We wanted to know people’s preference of which one we should do next, and you know what happened when we asked? At least for me, I thought, “Which one do I want?” Is that what you thought as well? “What’s going to be best for me, or what’s going to be best for our congregation?” rather than “What’s going to help us best share Jesus with more people?”

Again, all three of those projects could better enable us to be able to carry out our mission and reach people with the good news of Jesus, but do you understand my point?

Our mission counselor was here a couple of weeks ago, and I admitted to him, “I put these questions at the top of every one of my reports...that when thinking about any decision we make, these three questions: 1) Is it scriptural, 2) Is it intended to build up or expand Christ’s Kingdom, 3) If so, how can I/we do it?”...I admitted to

him I put those questions on every report and then promptly gloss over them, treating them as nothing more than a heading, not giving any real thought to them. Is that what you do, too?

Have we forgotten what this life is all about...being lights for Jesus, being his witnesses, reaching people with the message of Christ crucified. Is our Kingdom focus where it should be?

Again, why not? It's not that we don't love Jesus; we do, more than anything. So, what is it?

These fidget spinners I was talking about earlier...you know why they're so popular? They provide instant gratification. We, as a society, are conditioning ourselves, with fidget toys, video games, electronics to the point where it's not ok to ever be bored or to have delayed gratification, like having to wait for dinner instead of being able to have something to snack on now.

Instant gratification. Isn't that what the disciples were looking for in wishing and hoping Jesus was going to set up an earthly kingdom...instead of waiting for his heavenly kingdom to come?

Isn't that what we're looking for in being lights for Jesus? Because Kingdom focus doesn't often bring instant gratification. Canvassing for six years and having two people come as a result, and each for only one Sunday...doesn't give instant gratification. Inviting a friend to church (maybe even multiple times) and then they don't come, or they did come and they didn't really care for it that much...doesn't bring instant gratification. Thinking about and then doing what I can to show the love of Jesus to someone so I might have the opportunity to share Jesus with them, but not feeling appreciated for what I'm doing or being reject for my efforts...that's not gratifying.

Focusing on me and doing what I want does bring instant gratification...to our sinful natures. And it's those sinful natures that try to, and often succeed, in doing what it takes to take our focus away from the Kingdom and what Jesus wants...us to be his witnesses.

Fellow lights, take a moment and thank Jesus someone had Kingdom focus when it came to you. Maybe it was simply your parents, who had the desire for you to know your Savior, so they brought you to be baptized and then to Sunday School and worship to hear more and more about Jesus. Maybe it was a friend, who, for no special reason or because they saw some need in your life, invited you to join them at church for a Sunday. Maybe it was someone who knocked on your door or called your phone and said, "Hey, do you have a couple minutes to hear some good news? Someone, being used by Jesus, had Kingdom focus for you, so by the grace of God, you are part of his Kingdom.

And so now, when you lose your eagerness to be a witness for Jesus, when your Kingdom focus is losing its sharp edge, it's time to refocus. And here's how you can. Focus on Christ's cross...then, focus on his mission field.

Why focus on Christ's cross? Because that's where we find forgiveness for our sins, which includes our self-serving motives and our indifference or apathy towards Jesus' command and Jesus' commission to go. Jesus, who tells us to go, went ahead of us and in love suffered and endured what we deserve. Jesus went to the cross and shouldered our sins and died our death and was punished with our hell...absolutely no gratification for him in that...except in knowing his death meant his perfect life is ours.

And, Easter and now Ascension means Jesus lives and he lives and rules in heaven, where we will join him one day. You see, our resurrection is certain because of the proofs Jesus gave in his life, death, and resurrection, and the approval shown by God the Father in taking his Son to be seated in heaven.

Why focus on Christ's cross? Because that's where we find motivation in living for Jesus. What better way can we possibly say thank you to Jesus for his life, his death, his resurrection, his Kingdom focus on us than with our very lives...using them to serve Jesus in any and every way we can? There's no better way!

Our resurrection is secure, but until then, there's work to do here. What do we do with our days here on earth? Jesus gives us the answer through his commissioning of the apostles. God has a purpose for us on earth. Our privilege is to be like soldiers for our King, winning souls for him. We are to spread the gospel, confident we have the Holy Spirit in us and Christ ruling for us, desiring for others to have that same certainty we do.

Now, we focus on Jesus' mission field. You notice what happened after Jesus ascended into heaven? The disciples kept staring up into the sky. I don't know why. But what matters is what the angels who appeared told them to do...basically, "Stop staring up. Start looking around. There's work to do until Jesus returns."

Now, in a couple of weeks – Pentecost – that's where the Holy Spirit brought their mission into focus. But we don't need to wait for that...we've already been given the Holy Spirit...we're part of Christ's Kingdom. We've seen his cross; now it's time to see his mission field...to see where potential Kingdom growth is. It's all around us.

That's why I gave out the "Friends Who Need Jesus" sheets a couple of Sunday ago. It gets you looking beyond yourself so you can start seeing what Jesus sees...people who need him...people who need the gospel. All the tragedies happening in the world, in our community, even within our church family today. You think people are longing for something more...something better?

What do we have? Maybe sharing Jesus doesn't bring instant gratification for you...maybe sharing him doesn't bring instant gratification for the person who hears. But, when Jesus works through us and the message we speak (which he does)...when he works on people's hearts and rules in them and brings more people into his Kingdom...the final result, heaven, will be more gratifying than anything we could ever experience here.

Easter means we have kingdom focus. And, what a blessing to be a part of that...to be Jesus' tool for Kingdom building. Spreading the Word and witnessing to unbelievers are war against the dominion of Satan and sin and the capture of unbelievers from their grasp. Through us and our message, Jesus can and does perform works more miraculous than the feats of Samson, David, and Elijah. Striking down a thousand men with the jawbone of a donkey is a small thing compared to the miracle the Spirit works when he turns a person's heart from sin and self-reliance to grace and trust in Christ.

Don't lose heart. Don't lose focus. Keep your eyes on Jesus for assurance of your forgiveness and your place in his Kingdom. And then look around at the mission fields and joyfully be the light Jesus has called and made you to be...his witness. And now, go and be. Amen.