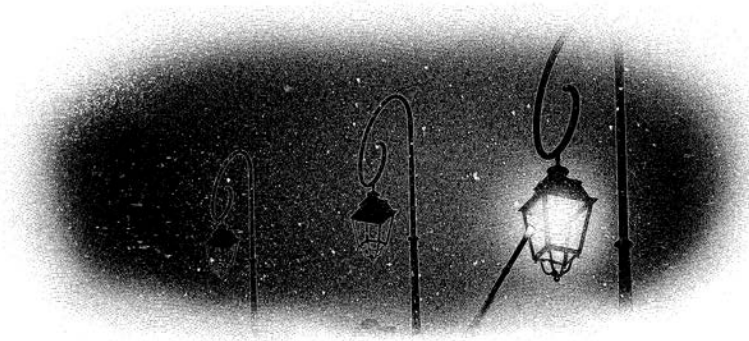


Jesus on Community¹ Outreach



SABBATH—JULY 23

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Luke 4:16–19; Luke 10:25–37; Matthew 5:13; Isaiah 2:8; John 4:35–38; Matthew 13:3–9.

MEMORY VERSE: “Jesus went all over Galilee. There [He] taught in the synagogues [Jewish places of worship]. He preached the good news of God’s kingdom. He healed every illness and sickness the people had” (Matthew 4:23, NIV).

DEFINITIONS

1. community—a group of people who live in the same area (such as a city, town, or neighborhood). A group of people who have the same interests, religion, race, and so on.

2. Robert Louis Stevenson—1850–1894, Scottish writer. He wrote essays, novels, and poetry.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON² is best known for his adventure story *Treasure Island*. What may not be so well known is the fact that he had been a sickly boy who could not go to school regularly. Finally his parents hired a teacher for him and a nanny to help with his personal needs. One night his nanny came to check on him. Instead of sleeping, Robert was out of bed. His nanny told him firmly to get back in bed before he caught a cold.

Robert told 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 [making] holes in the darkness!”—Margaret Davis, *Fear Not! Is There Anything Too Hard for God?* (Aspect Books, 2011), page 332.

Jesus used examples of light in His own earthly ministry (work done for God) and gave powerful instructions about how we, through Him, can “poke” holes in the darkness.

JESUS' MISSION (JOB; TASK) STATEMENT (Luke 4:16–19)

Jesus, the young rabbi from Nazareth, had become very popular in the area of Galilee (Luke 4:15). When He spoke, “the crowds were amazed [surprised] at his teaching. He taught like one who had authority. He did not speak like their teachers of the law” (Matthew 7:28, 29, NIV). One Sabbath, Jesus picked up the scroll of Isaiah. He read the first two verses of Isaiah 61. He stopped in mid-sentence just before the words “and the day of vengeance [revenge] of our God” (Isaiah 61:2, NIV).

Read Luke 4:16–19. Where have we heard these words before? (Read Isaiah 61:1, 2.) What was Jesus announcing by reading those verses?

As we already have learned, the wording “the year of the LORD’s favor” means the year of jubilee³ (read Leviticus 25). In this visit to Nazareth, Jesus quotes a prophecy⁴ from the Bible. Then He encourages His hearers to believe: “Today this scripture [verse] is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21, NIV). In this sermon He announces Himself as the Anointed (Chosen) One who preaches good news to the poor, freedom for prisoners, sight for the blind, release (freedom) for the oppressed,⁵ and restoration⁶ during the jubilee.

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

Jesus stopped short of reading the wording “the day of vengeance of our God.” Maybe Jesus did not read these words because He did not want His ministry to be connected with the popular idea that the Messiah (Chosen One; the Christ) would come to lead armies to conquer the enemies of Israel and bring them under Israel’s power. That was a false idea that would keep many of His fellow countrymen from understanding the true purpose of His ministry. Instead, Jesus focused on what He would do for those who needed His merciful ministry, no matter what the political situation was at that time.

Jesus announces that His ministry is a ministry of mercy and service to others. What should that say to us about the useful and merciful work that we should be doing for others in His name?



Jesus announced Himself as the Chosen One who preaches good news to the poor.

DEFINITIONS

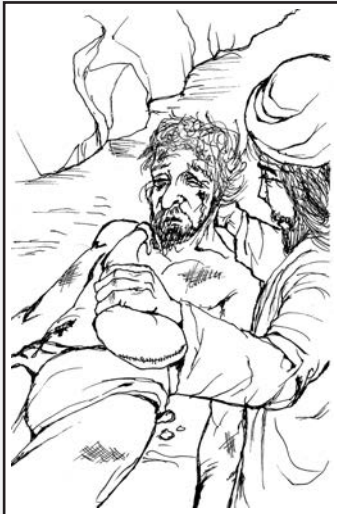
3. jubilee—a special anniversary.

4. prophecy—a special message from God to His people. It may be a warning or a message about what will happen in the future.

5. oppressed—a group of people who are treated cruelly or unfairly.

6. restoration—the act or process of returning something to its original condition by repairing it, cleansing it, and so on.

LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOR (Luke 10:27)



The answer to the question “Who is my neighbor?” is anyone who is in need.

DEFINITIONS

7. parable—a short story that teaches a moral (what is right or wrong) or a spiritual lesson.

8. prejudices—unfair feelings of dislike for a person or a group because of race, sex, religion, and so on.

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

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

The popular thought among the people of Israel in Christ’s time was to favor their own kind as neighbors and recognize all others as outsiders. But the lawyer in Luke 10 wanted Jesus to make the issue clearer. The parable⁷ that Jesus tells shows a totally different idea. Our neighbor is *anyone* we meet who is in need. Being a neighbor means meeting the needs of another. The priest and the Levite were more interested in protecting themselves and their holy work from being defiled (stained; made dirty) by sin. What an easy way to use religion as an excuse not to help someone who could never pay back the kindness.

But the Samaritan saw this wounded “outsider” and “enemy” as his neighbor. He mercifully met the outsider’s 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 poor and needy?” It does not matter who the needy person is. The one in need is the one we should help.

“No difference in nationality, race, or tribe is recognized by God. He is the Maker of all people. All people are one family by creation. And all are one through salvation. Christ came to take down every wall of separation. He threw open every room of the temple so that every soul may be free to reach God. His love is so broad, so deep, so full, that it spreads everywhere.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, page 386.

What prejudices⁸ might be stopping you from being the neighbor you must be?

THE WHOLE RECIPE (MATTHEW 5:13)

In Matthew 5:13, Jesus calls His followers to be “salt.” Salt is an agent (cause) of change. The church is a “saltshaker,” and it includes the “salt of the earth [His followers].” With what or whom should we, this “salt,” mix? Only with ourselves, or with people different from us?

You can understand the answer to this question better if you fill one loaf pan with only salt and another loaf pan with bread that has salt as one of its ingredients.⁹ In the first pan, salt is the whole recipe. It would not taste good. You could not eat it. In the second pan, salt is part of the recipe and is mixed with things different from itself. And it changes the taste of a loaf of bread from dull to delicious. Salt does more good when it mixes with things or ingredients that are unlike itself. The same is true of Christians. This will not happen if we stay comfortably in the church “saltshaker.”

So, there is a point here we should not miss. We can be righteous (holy) when we do not smoke or drink or carouse¹⁰ or gamble or get involved in crime. Not doing all those things is important. But the question is not just *What do we not do?* Rather, it is *What do we do?*

Read Matthew 5:13 again, paying attention to the rest of the verse. How can the salt lose its savor (flavor)?

“Suppose the salt has lost its savor [flavor]. Suppose there is just a claim of godliness without the love of Christ. Then there is no power for good. The life can exert¹¹ no saving influence upon the world.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 439.

Go back to the recipe example. As we saw, if all we have is salt, the bread is no good. In fact, too much salt in the diet can be poisonous. Salt has to be mixed with what is different from it. So, if we are just like the world, or even too much like the world, we will not make a difference in it.

But with the love of Christ, we will want to become “insiders” with the “outsiders.” We will want to mix with others in order to be agents of change. Mixing with others will help us to make a positive difference in their lives. Then, by our influence, we can lead others to what really is important: salvation in Jesus.

Read Deuteronomy 12:30; Deuteronomy 31:20; and Isaiah 2:8. What danger do these verses warn about? How can we be careful not to fall into that trap?



Salt does more good when it mixes with things unlike itself. The same is true of Christians. This will not happen if we stay inside the church “saltshaker.”

DEFINITIONS

9. ingredients—one of the things listed in a recipe.

10. carouse—to drink alcohol, make noise, and have fun with other people.

11. exert—to cause to have an effect or to be felt.

ON BEING A FARMER (JOHN 4:35–38)

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.¹² Other kinds of farming work must be done before a harvest can be plentiful (Matthew 9:35–38). Not only reapers (harvesters) 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 (harvesting) is best done after you have been farming all along.

Farming includes preparing the soil, because not all ground is good ground at first. (Read Matthew 13:3–9.) What can your church do in your community to soften “hard ground” and remove “rocks” and “thorns”?

DEFINITIONS

12. multifaceted—having many different parts.

13. benefits—good or helpful results or effects.

14. evangelistic—having to do with spreading the good news about Jesus to many people.

15. evangelist—a preacher who travels from place to place preaching the good news of Jesus Christ.

16. demographics—the qualities (such as age, sex, and income) of a specific group of people.

17. compared—to show how two or more things are the same or different.

Workers have done the hard farming work before the harvest. And other workers reap (harvest) the benefits¹³ of their labor. Sometimes evangelistic¹⁴ outreach planning puts too much importance on “reaping” than it does on “preparing to farm.” This is not how it should be done. The soil should be made ready long before the evangelist¹⁵ shows up and starts preaching in hopes of reaping a harvest.

Working in the harvest field is part of the work: testing the soil, preparing/plowing the soil, planting, watering, fertilizing, fighting pests, waiting, reaping, and saving the harvest.

Reaping the harvest is only one part of the work. In the church, the “farming” work could include soil-testing activities, such as surveys to discover the needs of the community. It could also include demographics¹⁶ and interviews with community leaders. There can be soil preparing/cultivating activities. These may include meeting needs in the community that are revealed by the community survey. They also can include seed-planting activities, such as seminars, Bible studies, small groups, and praying for the rain—the Holy Spirit. Few people are won to Christ with only one exposure (experience). We need to make them grow with a method of many exposures. In this way we can make sure that they will be ready for harvesting. If we depend only on a small number of events, it is doubtful that the “new plants” will survive until the harvest.

What part should you be playing in winning souls, compared¹⁷ to the part that you are now playing?

CHURCH PLANTING (Matthew 10:5–10)

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

It seems strange that Jesus' disciples would have direct orders to enter their ministry¹⁸ territory with little to support themselves. Clearly, Jesus put His disciples in this situation to teach them dependence on God, and also to teach them the importance of creating friendships through service to the local residents. These local townspeople would then value their service enough to support their ministry.

Pastor Frank's local conference asked him to plant a church in one part of a large city where there were no Adventists. At first, he had no budget to do so. So, he studied a map and found out what the boundaries (limits) of that part of the city were. Next, he studied the lifestyles of the people there. Then he parked his car in the busiest part of the neighborhood and went from business to business, asking questions about life in that area. He visited with political, business, and social leaders. He asked them questions about the greatest needs in that community. He made friends with some of the local residents, who invited him to join a local civic¹⁹ club. In that setting he discovered other leaders who opened the way for him to rent the annex²⁰ of a local Presbyterian church. The civic club members gave "seed" money to buy paint and cleaning supplies to repair and improve the annex so he could use it for community services. Interviews with community leaders showed that health care was an important need in the community. So, Pastor Frank brought volunteers to run different health-screening programs and to lead follow-up meetings in the annex for community people. Those who were helped by the screenings and programs paid a small 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 started a Seventh-day Adventist church of more than 140 members.

Pastor Frank's story shows what can happen when we follow Jesus' teachings about reaching our communities. How did Jesus live out His own teachings about ministry? Next week we will begin studying Christ's ministry method, which "will give true success in reaching the people."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, page 143.



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.

DEFINITIONS

18. ministry—having to do with work done for God.

19. civic—of or relating to a city or town or the people who live there.

20. annex—a building that is attached to or near a larger building and usually used as part of it.

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

“The church is the light of the world. If the church is not the light of the world, then it is darkness.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, in *Signs of the Times*, September 11, 1893. That is a powerful thought. It reminds us of Jesus’ words, “‘Anyone who is not with me is against me. Anyone who does not gather sheep with me scatters them’ ” (Matthew 12:30, NIV). Jesus makes it plain: there is no neutral²¹ territory in the great controversy (war). We are either on Jesus’ side or the devil’s. To have been given great light and to do nothing with it is, really, to be working against it. We have been called to be lights in the world. If we are not light, then we are darkness. The situation may be different, but the principle (important rule) is still the same: “‘If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!’ ” (Matthew 6:23, NIV).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① How do we mix with the world so that we can reach out to others? How do we keep the right balance? How do we mix with the world in a way that we can do others some good without getting so caught up in it that we become part of the problem, not the answer?

② Often, if we are involved in our community, the question of politics arises. After all, many issues that we want to help with—serving the poor and needy, education, health care—are part of the political debate. How can we be careful not to let politics spoil what we want to do? Some political involvement seems unavoidable. How can we serve others and minister to them in a way that keeps us out of political debates and struggles?

③ Are there situations in which we need to get involved in politics in order to best minister to the community? If so, what are they? How can we work in ways so that we do not sacrifice our Christian principles and responsibilities?

DEFINITIONS

21. neutral—not supporting either side of an argument, fight, war, and so on.