

SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT “OFFER THEM CHRIST”

A. Basic Premise

The theme “Offer Them Christ” speaks to the needs of our churches and to the needs of those outside the church. Our local churches need the Christ of the Gospels in all of His startling power and grace. While our very diverse church makes it hard to nail down an indictment which fits all, it is clear that, in many places at many times, we have offered pious platitudes, feel-good slogans, moralisms, the gospel of prosperity, pop psychology and theology-lite, works righteousness, the American way of life, hot button social issues of the left or right, the secular calendar, denominationalism, etc., rather than the Christ who lived and died and lives again to reveal the whole truth about God and human beings. Stated positively, we celebrate those churches which have grown through teaching and preaching and reaching out with a Christ-centered message which has captured the hearts of people. We have many churches which are very busy in reaching out to human needs by human means. That is great as far as it goes, but the problem is that we have all too often offered them everything except Christ. We need to learn how to serve in the soup kitchen without leaving out the Bread of Life.

Similarly, many people outside in the world have tried everything but Christ. Some have tried our churches and have found everything but Christ. They have turned to drugs, alcohol, various religions, materialism, promiscuity, hedonism, etc., but they feel an emptiness where Christ should be – at the very core of their being. There has never been a better time to “Offer Them Christ.” This is about a bold new initiative of getting down to the basics of Christ-centered preaching, teaching, and living. It is not about doing the same thing we have been doing; it is about digging into the Four Gospels to find anew the Christ who reveals the heart of God and the meaning of life.

B. The Vision

We are looking for something bold, passionate, and joyful to help us make disciples of Jesus Christ. The proposal is a year of living and learning, preaching and teaching on Christ as found in the Four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The proposal is to be a conference-wide, comprehensive effort impacting laity and clergy in the local church, all district and conference planning groups, and all institutions of the conference. The theme would be “Offer Them Christ.” The term “them” should be understood to include: our teachers and preachers; our members in the pews; the unchurched; college students; residents of our nursing and retirement homes and children’s home; children and youth in our summer camps, youth at Assembly, Resurrection, Discovery; young adults at Divine Rhythm, seniors at Jubilation; short-term missionaries and the people where they visit; our workers in neighborhood centers and the people they serve; our clergy at Minister’s Convocation and the Gathering; candidates seeking certification, licensing, ordination; the staff in the Conference, District, local church, and institutional offices; etc. In other words, all of us in Holston are “them” as well as folks living around and among us who have not yet felt the love or tasted the grace which comes when someone offers them Christ!

C. Initial Strategies

1. All sermons for a year are encouraged to be an effort to "Offer Them Christ" through preaching from texts chosen from the Four Gospels. Lectionary preachers could use the Gospel Lesson each Sunday. They could consider preaching a series of sermons on Christ, departing from the lectionary at times. Non-lectionary preachers could select texts for 52 weeks of preaching and could consider preaching through a Gospel, or a series on The Parables of Jesus, The Miracles of Jesus, The Beatitudes, Jesus and the Outsiders, Men and Women Who Met Jesus, etc. The great days of the Church Year could cover the Birth, Epiphany, Baptism, Temptation, Last Supper, Cross, Resurrection, etc.
2. Local churches could form new Disciple Bible Studies on one or more of the Four Gospels. Other curriculum resources are available to help the church take a fresh look at the Christ of the Gospels. Make the goal of the Bible Study not just the completion of another study, but the discipling of witnesses who will share Christ.
3. Plan for children, youth, and adult Sunday School classes devoted to studies of the life and teachings of Jesus. Summer camps could offer a special curriculum on Jesus. Our Wesley Foundations and conference colleges could offer special classes on Jesus in the Gospels.
4. Have Continuing Education opportunities for clergy for six months leading into the year and throughout the year focused on preaching from the Gospels. Devote Minister's Convocation, the Gathering, special courses at our three conference colleges, Lectionary study groups, special seminars with Bible scholars, etc., to help preachers give a fresh look at the Jesus we meet in the Four Gospels.
5. Invite traditional youth events like Resurrection to utilize the theme and give youth some "hands-on" experience of offering Christ to each other and to other youth.
6. At every level (local, district, conference) all programs and emphases of the church must ask, "How does this serve our effort to 'Offer Them Christ?'" The second question is: "What are we not doing that we should be doing to 'Offer Them Christ?'"

D. Practical Suggestions

1. The timing of this or any conference-wide emphasis is critical. There needs to be lead time to do some training, promotion, and publicity. There must be time for local churches to respond and do their own advance planning to buy into the concept. It would be a mistake to try to displace plans already made locally. The "year" could be the Conference Year, the Church Year, or the Calendar Year. Whichever "year" is chosen, there must be sufficient lead time.
2. Millie Meese could provide small cards to be placed on each pulpit in Holston for the preacher to see as she or he faces the congregation. It could bear some artwork and the words, "Preacher, we would see Jesus" and/or the words "Offer Them Christ."
3. Annual Conference agenda just prior to the launching of this theme and during the year of the theme should have sermons and worship and perhaps Bible Study on the theme.
4. Develop our own logo for "Offer Them Christ." Encourage churches to make banners with the logo.

5. The last item is put here for emphasis. The laity of the local church must be involved early in the planning stages. They must have an opportunity to examine the Basic Premise (See “A” above) and the general concept and to give feedback. They should be able to share in the decision about their church taking up this emphasis; it should not be left to the pastor alone to decide to participate or not to participate. The more “local” we can make this, the better. We should not put all of our energy into big conference-wide events, but on getting into the Gospels in the churches and into the communities where folks are perishing for lack of the same.

Respectfully submitted,

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