

“Contagious Faith 1”

October 4, 2026

First Christian Church

Scripture Text: Luke 19:10, Matthew 28:19-20

As well as being World Communion Sunday and with that our Special Reconciliation Offering, today is the official kickoff of our “Contagious Faith” book study. With the exception of next Sunday when we have the gift of Fred Dorisee, we will be spending today and the next 5 weeks focused on how God can use us as individuals and us as a congregation to reach people who matter to God, but who God may not yet matter.

Before we go any further, I want to share with you what this study is not. This video was the opening of the 2012 Tony Awards. https://youtu.be/OKkLV1zE8M0?is=cgtQx_tG-K0TL2Qm

That is not what “Contagious Faith” is about. There is nothing wrong with sharing our faith door to door. Our book’s author did that and some of you may be led to do that which would be great. But that is not the goal of this study. This is about finding and developing your natural way of sharing Jesus with others who you already know. In your first group meeting, you will take a short survey designed to help you identify your personal strengths and your natural way of sharing. Meetings that follow will help develop and strengthen those natural abilities. It is good stuff. Since the small groups have that part covered, we will not be rehashing that in our sermon time. Instead, I have a book by the same author entitled “Becoming a Contagious Church” which I will be using to help guide our time together.

And I want to begin with an affirmation. We really are meant to live lives of greatness – lives simply filled with more. More than going to school. More than finding a meaningful career. More than the possibility of getting married, having a family, or someday settling down and retiring. We are meant for more than finding God’s forgiveness, more than worshipping, more than serving, more than experiencing the peace that passes understanding. These things are great, but we are meant for even more. We are made to not only know God, but also to introduce others to God. We are meant to not only touch and positively affect others’ lives, but also their eternities.

The problem is individuals as well as congregations, and all organizations for that matter, have a dangerous tendency to get so caught up in the day-to-day programs, pressures, and problems that we lose track of what we are all about. There is this natural, gravitational pull inward that says take care of ourselves first, make sure our wants and needs are satisfied. In church it is more Bible study, more visitation, more fellowship, more programs. A natural gravitation inward pull even though the first line of our congregation’s mission statement is outward, “to bring people to Christ”. Our whole mission statement is “to bring people to Christ, grow as

disciples, and together serve God” and in some ways, we are rocking it. We recently had “Service Sunday” and did a good job of focusing outward. We have plenty of projects that need to be done here at church, but we looked outward to our parks and our schools, to children who need a bed to sleep in, to supplying hygiene kits for wherever they are needed in the world. We reached out to the youth outlet center and individuals who just needed a hand. And it is more than just “Service Sunday”. When you look at the \$10,000 dollars we gave to Week of Compassion this year to respond to natural and human created disasters, refugee ministries and help with start-up money as people returned home. When you look at the \$10,000 we give through the denomination to support everything from church camp in Indiana to overseas missionaries. There is the \$6,000 for United Ministries food pantry and bill assistance. The \$1,300 to Compassionate Care so working people without adequate insurance can get medical help. When we look at the Blessing Box which gets refilled 3 times a day and Community Dinner coming up again this Wednesday. Together we serve God. We really do. In worship and in 5 different Sunday School classes and Bible studies and Women’s Luncheon and choir and praise team and committees and even Vacation Bible School; we grow as disciples. We are rocking the last 2/3’s of our mission statement “to grow as disciples, and together serve God.”

But one of the places we as a congregation are not rocking it is that first part – “to bring people to Christ”. That is evangelism. It is one of the highest values of the church, first in our mission statement, yet one of the least practiced. We believe in it. Today’s Scripture lessons remind us how important evangelism is to Jesus who ended His conversation with Zaccheus with the personal mission statement that He came to “to seek out and to save the lost.” That is evangelism. Jesus ended His time on earth saying, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” Jesus sends us to do evangelism. Evangelism is not only God’s idea, but Jesus’ command. God longs for our hearts to be broken for those who do not yet know Him. God needs us to hurt for the people who matter to God, but to whom God does not yet matter.

So what are we supposed to do? Where do we start? According to our author, Mark Mittelberg, we start by admitting the value of this calling has slipped. As individuals and a congregation, we have given into that gravitational, inward pull for an inward focus. We admit we have let evangelism slip and we no longer hurt for those whose eternity is not assured. Then, as we do as people of faith, our confession is followed by repentance. We change and get things back in line. Thus, this study.

Next according to Mittelberg, we live lives worthy of imitating. That sounds intimidating, but we got this. That is what we studied in our last congregational study by Adam Hamilton, “The Walk, Five Essentials Practices of the Christian Life”. Lives worthy of imitating include worship, study, service, giving and sharing Jesus. Lives worthy of imitating not only include doing those things, but also the outcome of doing those things: the holiness, the morality, the submission. One of the things that changed in me after our last study is how I pray, especially how I lead

prayers in worship. You might remember Hamilton not only encouraged us to pray 5 times a day, when we first get up, at our 3 meals, and before bed, but he outlined a prayer form for us. Of course that outline includes 5 steps: praise, thanksgiving, confession, petition and yielding. It is that last part about yielding and offering ourselves to God that I added to my prayers and our prayer time in worship. What that has done for me is it has really opened me up to those little nudges as times God is taking me up on my offer to yield. Like this week, I was setting up for Teaching Tuesday and just had a little nudge to check the iPad and see if it was charged. I don't normally do that. It always has plenty of charge and there was no reason it wouldn't, but I felt a nudge and checked it, and sure enough, it was at 9%. Quick plug in while I set other things up and got ready, 23% at go time. Plenty of juice. Sometimes I follow a nudge and there is nothing there – the door is already locked or the light is turned off – but sometimes when I responded, good things happened. I offer myself to God, then try and heighten my awareness of those little nudges and respond to them. Now in this study, I have to wonder, can I open that up a little more. Can I be open to that kind of nudge with people, as opposed to just iPads? With conversations as opposed to checking to see if a door is locked? Can I be open to following a nudge to share questions about how a person is doing spiritually as opposed to just physically? Can I yield to God's nudge and transition a conversation toward spiritual matters?

Mittelberg says we start with admitting evangelism has slipped down in our priorities, then develop a passion for the people who matter to God, but to whom God does not yet matter. Then live lives worthy of imitation which we as a congregation do well. Then get in the game – deliberately step out of our comfort zone and get around some people who matter to God, but who God may not yet matter to them. Then it is all about following those nudges.

As individuals as well as church, we have a dangerous tendency to get so caught up in the day-to-day programs, pressures, and problems that we lose track of what we are all about. There is this natural, gravitational pull inward that says take care of ourselves first. But we are made for more. We are made to share the hope we have in Jesus and thereby change another's eternity. Bringing people to Christ is the first line of this congregation's mission statement.

Mike Van Heyningen