

## ***Waking Up from the American Dream***

“Missional Essentials” - #8

October 25, 2015

*Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water’s edge. <sup>2</sup> He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: <sup>3</sup> “Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. <sup>4</sup> As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. <sup>5</sup> Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. <sup>6</sup> But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. <sup>7</sup> Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. <sup>8</sup> Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times.”*

*<sup>9</sup> Then Jesus said, “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”*

*<sup>10</sup> When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. <sup>11</sup> He told them, “The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables <sup>12</sup> so that, “‘they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!’”*

*<sup>13</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “Don’t you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? <sup>14</sup> The farmer sows the word. <sup>15</sup> Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. <sup>16</sup> Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. <sup>17</sup> But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. <sup>18</sup> Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; <sup>19</sup> but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. <sup>20</sup> Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.”*

Mark 4:1-20 (NIV)

This morning we are continuing our series entitled “Therefore go into all the world” with the primary focus being on trying to become more missional in our own community. Last week we focused on getting prepared for being more missional, and we do that by abiding in Him. In fact it says in John 15, our primary passage from last week, that we cannot produce good fruit apart from Him. In fact it’s even more specific than that, Jesus said “we can do nothing apart from Him!” An important element of being missional is the recognition that at different times we just need to step back and hit the pause button, both in our own lives and in the life of the church. Frequently we need to evaluate ourselves and our own walk with God and see where we are at. This upcoming week I am planning on doing just that as I will be spending the week, Tuesday – Friday at the Laurelville Mennonite Retreat Center in Pennsylvania focusing on my own relationship with God and doing some long term sermon planning.

This morning can be said to be the second part of getting prepared to be more missional in our own community and that involves the recognition of what lies ahead of us. Jesus told his original disciples that if they truly wanted to follow Him, if they really wanted to be his

disciples, then they would need to first sit down and count the cost (Luke 14:25-33). Following Jesus is not easy and it's especially not easy if we go where He wants us to go – out there, out there into the world which doesn't look like His kingdom at all.

Jesus has given us the word. That which the parable of the sower is all about, that which Jesus tells us is the most important parable of all. If we don't get this one right, then we won't understand all the others.

Jesus said there are basically four types of people in this world:

1. One is those whom when the word is sown don't pay any attention to it whatsoever. For those the birds just come and snatch it up.
2. The second type of people are those who are somewhat ready to receive it, but they really don't recognize it, they don't really have any soil (there is no roots), and it just passes them over.
3. The third type are ready to receive it, in fact do receive it, but the soil is just not deep enough, and when all the hardships come, the trouble and the persecution, the worries of life, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desires for other things, the soil is just not enough to sustain them, and they produce very little fruit, if any fruit at all.
4. Then there is the fourth type - *those, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.*"

If we are going to go out and carry out God's mission in the world, then we need to know what the world has prepared for us. Once we realize what the world has in store for us, our human, natural reaction is to retreat and to stay inside the nice cozy confines of where we are mostly all alike. But that is not what God and Jesus call us to do. He tells us to go out into the world.

Jesus' great priestly prayer:

*<sup>14</sup> I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. <sup>15</sup> My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup> They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. <sup>17</sup> Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. <sup>18</sup> As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup> For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.*

John 17:14-19 (NIV)

This is how Jesus referred to his sending of his disciples out into the world:

*"I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves."*

Matthew 10:16 (NIV)

"Sheep among wolves," just doesn't sound very exciting to me. Wolves tear sheep apart! Wolves eat sheep!

One of my devotional books I occasionally read is writings from the early fathers of the church. This week I read from Augustine, who lived around the year 400 A.D. The devotion was entitled “Being Prepared to Suffer.”

“What sort of pastors are they who, for fear of offending their congregations, not only fail to prepare their sheep for temptations, but even promise them worldly happiness? God himself made no such promise to this world. On the contrary, God foretold hardship in this world until the end of time. And you expect the Christian to be exempt from these troubles? Precisely because of being a Christian, he or she is destined to suffer more in this world.”

Are you getting excited yet? I wonder if Joel Osteen ever reads devotions like this.

The apostle Paul wrote to his protégé Timothy, “all who desire to live a holy life in Christ will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). That is what the apostle Paul and the Bible says, while the world says, “if you live a holy life in Christ, all good things on earth will be yours in abundance.”

While God clearly calls us all who live a holy life in Christ to go out into the world, we need to be clear about what the world has to offer. We need to be clear about the marked difference between the Kingdom of this world and the Kingdom of God.

This is what the disciple John wrote about this world in one of his letters:

*<sup>15</sup> Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. <sup>16</sup> For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. <sup>17</sup> The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever. 1 John 2:15-17 (NIV)*

The title of the message this morning is “Waking up from the American Dream.” For far too long we in America have associated the American Dream with the Christian Dream and there are some very sharp differences. Differences like:

1. The American Dream says that we can accumulate as much wealth as possible, that we can have big houses, as nice of cars as we want, that we can have everything if we can afford it. The American dream says we can even have more than that, that we can even go into debt to have such things. The Christian dream says no such thing. *All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need (Acts 2:44-45).*
2. The American Dream says that each individual can do whatever he or she wants to do unless it harms someone else. The Christian dream says no such thing. Jesus tells the church, his bride, that we are to love others just as he loved us. He loved us so much that he gave his life for us. The Christian dream says that we need to love others as much as we love ourselves, and to be willing to die for them just as Christ died for us.

3. The American Dream says that we can have multiple allegiances, especially God and country. The Christian Dream says no such thing. *“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other”* (Matthew 6:24 a).
4. The American Dream says that democracy & voting is the best way to discern God’s will. The Christian Dream says no such thing. *“My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done”* (Matt. 26:42).
5. The American Dream says that we can do whatever we want and take whatever means necessary to defend ourselves. That’s not what the Christian Dream says. *“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person* (Matt. 5:38-39). *“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies”* (Matt. 5:43-44a).

I was meeting for coffee a week or so ago with a couple of pastors whom I meet with occasionally for accountability. Actually both of them, though they continue to serve on the staff at their church’s, are no longer the senior pastor, so they don’t get the opportunity to preach as much anymore. Neither of them are Mennonite. The one was saying that he has been working on a message for some time now describing how he sees the church today. He said his title is going to be something like: “Too institutionalized, too individualized, too materialized, too sexualized.” Or he could just shorten it to “too Americanized” because those are the values that American seems to hold to the highest value today. None of them are Christian values.

But I would like to offer a qualifier and say that we don’t live in a terrible country. We live in what is still probably one of the best countries in this world to live in today. But we need to recognize that it is still a kingdom of this world country and we need to carefully examine ourselves and see where we have assimilated those kingdom of this world values into kingdom of God values.

It is especially important if we are going to go out into the world and not be influenced by the world. The values of God’s kingdom clash with the values of this world on almost every front.

This is how Eugene Peterson in *The Message* translates that passage from 1 John 2:15-17:

*Don’t love the world’s ways. Don’t love the world’s goods. Love of the world squeezes out love for the Father. Practically everything that goes on in the world—wanting your own way, wanting everything for yourself, wanting to appear important—has nothing to do with the Father. It just isolates you from him. The world and all its wanting, wanting, wanting is on the way out—but whoever does what God wants is set for eternity.*

Brad Brisco and Lance Ford in the book *Missional Essentials* say that the importance of all this for the church today cannot be emphasized enough. “Tens of thousands of sermons are preached every weekend across America. Millions of Bible-based books are sold every year. And a multitude of Christians read the Scriptures daily. But our culture remains unchanged. Our

neighborhoods remain unchanged. Our cities remain unchanged. Why? How can this be? The truth is that we – the body of Christ – remain mostly unchanged. **To be change agents we must be *changed* agents...** For our lives to genuinely be fruitful for the kingdom of God, most of us must change our habits and lifestyles.

Brisco & Ford offer this wonderful quote from Scott Bessenecker in his book, *How to Inherit the Earth*,

“Those who are meek and those who are submitted to the government of God will seek for his kingdom to come before all else, because they treasure this kingdom more than they treasure personal wealth. They are attentive to those who are weak and who are trampled underfoot by the powerful. They turn into great centrifuges of wealth, spinning their possessions out to those in need and stretching their arms out to those on the margins of society. This isn’t trickle-down economics where a few at the top might slop some of what they have accumulated over the edge so that a drop or two trickles down to the masses at the bottom. Kingdom economics is pictured in the poor widow who was so insanely generous that she gave away the little she had to live on (Mark 12:41-44). In kingdom economics the followers of Jesus pool their resources and then dole them out to each one as they have need (Acts 4:32-34). Widows and orphans are taken care of in their distress. Homes are open for the homeless and clothing is given away to those who need it. The economic blueprint in God’s kingdom works against personal increase and selfish accumulation and works toward distribution out to the extremities. Perhaps that’s why Jesus said that it was impossible to serve both God and money; people can’t submit to the desire for personal accumulation and submit to the desire for God at the same time.”

While Brisco and Ford spend a good part of their chapter dealing with the clash between the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God’s values on wealth, I would say that people can’t submit to their desires for personal satisfaction and submit to the desire for God at the same time on anything.

Before we go out there into the world, it’s essential that we understand what God’s values are on just about everything.