

WORSHIP, CONNECT, IMPACT 4-25-10

I John 1:1-3

(Matthew 28) Does anyone hear know what this day represents in my life? (pause) It was one year ago on this final Sunday in April that I made my appearance as the Sr. Pastor of North Park Church. I preached my first sermon as your pastor and do you remember what that sermon was about? It was about God and it was about 30 minutes. Someone once wrote in a newspaper editorial that he didn't think preaching did anyone any good. This fella noted that he had been to church for years and heard about 1,500 sermons but could remember only a few and so figured that sermons were a waste of time. Someone wrote a response to this editorial and said, "I have eaten nearly 50,000 meals in my fifty years on this planet. I can remember what I ate in only a few of them. I would give up eating but I have the distinct impression that I would soon be dead if I did." So, I am not bothered if you can't remember what I preached last week much less a year ago. Two weeks ago I was in John Ryce's Sunday School class with an old friend. He opened his Bible and showed me on the back flap of his Bible the notes he had taken from the first sermon I preached in Melbourne, FL in 1982. I thought that was pretty wild. Anyway, I hope that today's message is one that you will remember – at least that you will remember the general outline because that general outline is going to serve as the Mission Statement for North Park Church for years and maybe even decades to come.

The Mission Statement of our church for several years has been – *Making disciples with passion for God's glory*. How many of you knew that? I did know that and for me it was perfectly fine as a church motto. It was short enough to remember – which I like. It was about God – all good. My only objection was that it did not say anything definitive about the process, or the steps we intend to be taken by our members. It did not steer as clear a course as I would like. It spoke of a goal, but not the way to achieve it. And in that respect, I felt it could be improved and our board of elders, in the early part of this year, went to work on something better that would not only spell out the end in mind, but the means to the end and still be memorable. I think we have achieved it. The Mission statement of North Park Church, first revealed about two months ago is---- *To make disciples of Jesus who worship God passionately, connect with each other in caring community and impact the world by word and deed*. Our key words, the ones we most want you to remember are: worship,

connect, impact. Say it with me: worship, connect, impact. Now with the hand motions: worship, connect, impact.

We will get back to that later, but for now, let's begin to unpack what all of that means. And we begin, by way of introduction, with the phrase "make disciples." A disciple is someone who believes in and follows the teachings of a leader – in this case, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is perfectly appropriate that we should make this our mission because Jesus did. And Jesus is our King. He is the Head. He is the Boss. We really don't need to sit around trying to figure out what our mission is. He told us. In Matthew 29:**18b-20a** *All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.* ¹⁹*"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,* ²⁰*teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.* The verb in verse 19 that is in the imperative form is not the verb "go" but the verb "make disciples." That is precisely what we are to do. And if our goal is to make disciples, it is not to be just nice, or to be liked by our community, or to provide a social club for our members, or to increase our attendance and budget. Those things may contribute to our goal. They may. But the goal is to make disciples. And in the passage we just read Jesus says two things that will lead to that goal are: baptizing, and teaching obedience to the commandments. Okay. Baptism is the initiation rite into the church. It is the front door. It has to do with getting folks connected to the visible church. I Corinthians 12:13 says we are all baptized into one body. And, it is not so much baptism per se that makes the big difference in a person's life. It is the body of Christ. It is connection in the church. We are changed, turned into disciples, in relationship, in community. And we will say more about that in a few minutes. The other thing Jesus says turns people into disciples is teaching. We are to teach people not just to know the commandments of Christ but to obey them.

That leads us right into the body of our message for today, as we break down our mission statement according to those three memorable, critical verbs: worship, connect and impact. Those are the three verbs which set forth what it is that we, as members of North Park Church, are to be doing to fulfill our mission. The first of those is, "worship." Our mission is to worship God passionately. Can you embrace that? It is saying it all begins with a vertical relationship with our Maker and Redeemer. What is the starting point for that? May I suggest that the starting point is knowing God? That is what I preached on one year ago this Sunday. Knowing God, because that is where we have to begin. We cannot worship a God we don't know. And we won't. Worship

doesn't refer to a certain discipline or to a liturgy. It refers to a relationship that is marked by adoration and affection. Jesus said in John 4 that those who worship the Father must worship Him in Spirit and in truth. Truth is essential if we are going to worship. John Piper says that truth is the fuel of worship. Is North Park Church committed to the teaching and learning of the truth? You bet it is. This is probably a distinguishing mark of our church. North Park is committed to raising up disciples, young and old, who are knowledgeable in the faith. When I came here and met people who were driving a half-hour to come to this church I started asking, "why?" Why are you driving past dozens of other churches to come here? And the answer I got was that people wanted a church that was committed to the teaching of God's word in some depth. They were tired of devotional ditties and inspirational talks from their pulpits. They wanted the milk and meat of the word of God. And that value has not changed for us. I Timothy 4:**13** *give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching* Colossians 1:**28** *We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.* That's the goal, that we be complete in Christ and we get there, in part, through teaching. Dare I say, that more than most, our church is into learning, into doctrine, into theology, into knowing the word of God. Listen, the church must be more than a school. But a school it surely must be. We must come to understand who God is and what the gospel of Jesus Christ is all about. Our efforts as a church start right here because without the truth about God there is no relationship with God and therefore no worship.

So, our teaching ministry is a sub-part of this first practice of "worship." One thing that we discover as we study God's word is that the knowledge we are after is more than head knowledge and it is more than fact knowledge. It is a knowledge that is with the heart and in the context of relationship. In the apostle's prayer for the church in Ephesians 3, we find Him asking the Father 3:**17-19a** *that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ.* And when the Scriptures speak of knowing God and His love that speaks of heart knowledge, and relational knowledge. It has to do with intimacy of relationship. We cannot be content with stuffing our heads with Bible verses and theological goodies. Our goal is to know God intimately and therefore respond to Him in passionate worship. And listen, it is fitting that the church I pastor have this concept in its mission statement. This is my testimony, the core of who I am. It's a freaky,

bizarre thing, but this messed up puny man knows God as Friend and Father and therefore loves to worship Him.

Now, frankly, this first emphasis is something that I believe sets North Park apart. We are saying that our mission begins with a vertical connection with God. Men and women, boys and girls, can actually know the truth about God, be His servant and friend, and find peace and delight and joy in that relationship. For many, I think, church is a place to be with friends and to carry out some service projects. That is the Rotary Club. It's fine, but the core of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus is missing for them. We are saying that your first delightful duty as a disciple is to get to know your God, offering to Him the praise of your lips and your life.

Then on to the second verb in our mission statement - to connect with each other in caring community. And we choose this verb "connect" to convey that disciples of Jesus are not lone rangers. Our growth, our discipleship is not an I thing or a You thing, it is a We thing. Ephesians 4:**15** says *speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up*. The New Testament is full of this. It is Christ in us the hope of glory. We, the church, will overcome the gates of hell. I Corinthians 10:**16-17** *Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? 17 Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread*. There it speaks of the Lord's supper which is all about connection. The vertical connection we have with Christ, but then secondly the horizontal connection we have together. The very idea of the church stands over against the notion of private spirituality in which you have your own little thing going with God. Lots of people are out there trying to be spiritual, trying to connect with God, but, as they see it, other people have nothing to do with it. Oh no. Oh no. There are far too many trying to do the Christian life alone. Some do their religion by television or computer. Some actually show up at church but then they turn and go home at the last amen. No relationships. No sharing in the gospel. But dear friend, the love of God in Christ calls us together, draws us together. Jesus didn't gather around himself 12 individual disciples. He gathered twelve brothers into a team. Connecting with each other in caring community means you know the brethren – at least some reasonable portion of them. You are worshipping with them, growing with them and with them also impacting the world. Is your spirituality an experience shared with other believers?!

Here at North Park the primary – not the only, but the primary – way that we promote this value is through our small group ministry. Small group involvement puts you in a context where real relationships can happen, where you can develop meaningful friendships, where you can rejoice with each other and weep with each other. Similar things happen for those who work together in our ministries and that is just as well. The important thing is relationship, connections, being a real part of a church family. You know, we could have left the word “connect” out of the mission statement. It could have been *To worship God passionately and impact the world*. And most of us would have been fine with that, but the additional word “connect” says a lot. It means we must do these things together and in the context of mutual love and support for the other. We are family and so much of what we become is a result of the input of our families into our lives. The Bible makes it plain. I need you. ® And you need me and her and him. We don’t feel that need nearly as much as we might have in previous generations. We have so many gadgets to keep us company and we have this growing government to meet our needs. And yea, we can survive in isolation, but we won’t grow. To be disciples of Jesus, as He intended for us to be, we must not only connect with God, but also with each other in caring community. Your elders here at North Park are challenging you to do that. We are challenging our small groups to be better at caring for each other and we are praying for the Father to raise up new group leaders and participants. For your sake, for the sake of others who need you, for the sake of our mission as the Lord’s church, get to know and love and minister to and be cared for by a group of real brothers and real sisters.

Then there is the verb “impact.” Our mission includes impacting the world, that begins with McCandless township and goes to Zanzibar. You know what I want more than anything else I know? This right here. To see the grace of Christ impacting more and more people to the glory of God. That is why I entered the ministry of the gospel. This is why I pray. This is why I preach. Listen, this third verb says that we will not be content to sit back in our holy huddle and say, “Isn’t this great! It’s us four and no more!” Some times, many times, churches of our ilk are guilty of simply worshipping and connecting, preaching in our churches and fellershippin without ever bothering to impact our neighborhoods, our businesses, our government, our community, our nation, our planet. We intend to do better than that. We believe loyalty to our Savior demands it. When I was asked to consider coming as pastor, one of the things I was told was that North Park Church has not done well on this point of impact and wants very much to do better. That was a

desire that resonated with me. I told the search team that I wasn't sure what that would mean exactly but I was eager to pursue the goal with them. That's my heart. So, here we are. One year into this thing, which really isn't very long. We aren't rolling out something here today that is going to change in four months. I expect that in 18 years we will still be talking about worship, connect and impact. We will still be figuring out how God would have us go about it and we will still be growing into the effective body the Lord calls us to be.

Now, pertaining to this matter of impact. We see this happening internationally through our short-term missions teams and through our support of career missionaries. Locally, we see this happening through the missionaries that constitute the membership of our church, in three ways. Critical verb #3 has three sub-points. You are smart. You have the outline. Hang on with me. We want to make a difference in three ways. Proclamation, invitation, compassion. Remember PIC. Proclamation – that is the declaring of the gospel. Ephesians 6:15 says *Have your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace*. We want as many as possible equipped and capable of personally speaking or sharing the gospel with a friend. Acts 1:8 says *you shall be My witnesses*. II Corinthians 5:**19-20** *He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.* ²⁰*Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ*. During the Winter we had a dozen folks go through an evangelism training course. Obviously, we are preaching the word from this pulpit and in other venues, such as the senior centers into which our Sunshine ministry goes. We will soon be making available other tools for you to use in your witness to the unchurched. What is it that changes lives? What is it that turns unchurched charlies into fully devoted followers of Christ? Romans 10:**17** says *faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ*. And Romans 1:**16** *I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes*.

But secondarily we also want to reach out via invitation. Invitation. Being around the word of God changes people, but so does being around the people of God. I look out here on Sundays and see 400 people who have cable TV, who can afford to travel and yet here you are on Sunday mornings. You must find some value in the preaching of the word and the worship of Christ and the fellowship of the saints. You say, "Pastor, thanks for your preaching! The worship today was great! Oh, I really like our church." And yet, so few of us ever bring anyone new. But, you know what? I continue to meet people whose lives were changed because somebody invited them to church. Can you do that life-changing thing for someone? Hear God's word from I John 1. I love this passage. I

John 1:**1-3** *What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life-- 2 and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us--3 what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.* What I love there is the apostolic passion to not just enjoy fellowship with God, but to bring others in to it. John is saying, “Hey, we have something precious and rich and treasured, and we long for you to discover it too, to enter into fellowship with us because we know something that is mind-blowing and magnificent. We know the love of God in Christ. That love must **compel** us to invite others to experience it.

Now, I get it. I know that many of your unchurched friends are not really open to going to church. And they aren't for one of two reasons. One, they have already been and they found it boring and unhelpful, if not offensive. Or, two, they haven't been and they are just scared of putting themselves into an alien environment. In either case, we want, as a church, to provide alternative points of invitation. Instead of inviting to church, invite a friend to join the church's softball team. Invite a friend to men's ministry game night. Invite a friend to a Christmas Tea, to bring his daughter to a Daddy-Daughter dance. Invite a friend to participate in Compassion Day. Hey... are those some ideas? And once someone gets around the people of God and discovers that they are relatively normal, but unusually positive, some of the barriers to the gospel and to church are broken down. Invitation. We have something special here. Let's invite others to enjoy in with us.

Our third approach to having an impact is through compassion. And this is why we speak of impacting the world in word **and** deed. We will be committed to, we will pray for people to see God's love through our service. We will be there, helping out in that poor neighborhood on the northside, providing quality clothes for children and adults. We will be there at the Spina-Bifida House mending the facilities. We will be there at Light of Life serving meals to the needy. We will be there in New Orleans helping rebuild the city. We will be there at the Joni and Friends retreat caring for individuals and families with disabilities. On May 15 we are spending our Saturday in what we call, “Compassion Day.” We are seeking out places of need in our community where we can go and bless others. The primary point behind it is not so much the work we do, but the connections we can make in our community, in hopes that you can find new avenues to express the

mercy of Christ in a practical way. There are ways to do it here, within the body of Christ. We are needy people too. But, as a missional church, we are committed to doing it out there as well. P-I-C – Proclamation, Invitation, Compassion makeup the impact elements of our mission which is to worship, connect and impact the world through word and deed. (hand motions) Can I hear an amen?

Now practically speaking what this means is that you are to have a role in making this impact. The Bible tells us that our roles differ. Just as in an army, there are very different jobs contributing to the success of the mission, the church is just like that. You have one role, I have another, but who is supposed to be about the work? Huh?! You are! We all are. Each one of us is to have a ministry that is making a difference, that is helping people see or hear the love of God in Christ. Does that make sense? Our mission statement really boils down what we want for our members to three things. We desire you to personally and intimately know the Lord. The vertical connection. We want you to connect with others, sharing love in meaningful relationships – the horizontal connection; and we want you to get involved in meeting needs out there. At point one we are converted, at point two we are connected and at point three we are contributing.

Now notice something here. Notice that our mission statement says nothing about a choir, or a youth group, or a Summer Camp or a men's program or Sunday School. It doesn't describe our musical style or our buildings or our denominational ties. Those things are all negotiable. Those things can come and they can go. You can like them or not like them. They are means to an end. But this. This making disciples of Jesus who worship God passionately, connect with each other in caring community, and impact the world in word and deed, this is what we are all about. If you can support this, then I believe you can support North Park's ministry. We will have our differences over how to best carry out our mission, but there is enough here, when we keep the main thing the main thing to keep us hanging together and working hard, in dependence on the grace of the Spirit and in submission to the King and Head of the church, in whose marvelous name, and for whose glory, we do it all.