

Good morning everyone, my name is Mark and I'm one of the pastors at North Shore Alliance. Welcome back to all of you who are just getting back from vacation, and a big welcome to those of you who have just moved to the North Shore and are new to our church.

For many of us, the Labour Day weekend marked the end of the Summer and the beginning of the Fall. It's a time when we are getting back into school, going back to work, signing up for sports teams, re-starting our book clubs...September is a time when we re-engage or start something new.

In the next few weeks around here, nearly every day there will be something going on. We've got a host of small groups that could be joined, and age-level ministries to check out from kids all the way to Single Adults. We will be teaching classes on Sunday nights, there will be retreats, Alpha, and Celebrate Recovery will be in full-swing...there is lots going on.

But with all that is going on in our building, I want to make sure that none of us get the wrong impression. "*What impression?*," you might ask. The impression that the goal is to get people to a church meeting as often as possible. I wouldn't want any of you to have the wrong impression, either about why we are gathering, or what the intended outcome is.

I want to offer to you an analogy I came across while reading a book by Reggie McNeal. He likened the gathering of the church to the activity at an airport.

An airport is not a destination, says McNeal, it's a place of connection. An airport provides a place to connect, on route to our destination.¹ When's the last time anyone showed you a slideshow featuring their week-long stay at Charles de Gaulle airport? Have you ever heard of anyone buying a timeshare for the Heathrow airport or JFK in New York? An airport provides a place to connect, on route to our destination.

The activity of of the church is similar: (a) we gather; and then (b) we scatter.² When we gather, we join together in our common desire to praise and thank the Father for all that He has done for us through Jesus. We gather to receive from the Father, to ask Him to meet us at our place of need, to transform us. We gather together because much of our learning about God, our healing, and our encouragement comes by way of the Holy Spirit's work through fellow Christians.

We gather, but what keeps our gathering from being a destination is the fact that our gathering is meant to fuel our scattering. When we talk about *Missional Living*, we are simply recognizing that we are called to scatter, bringing with us the good news of Jesus Christ.

¹ Reggie McNeal, *Missional Renaissance* "Changing the Scorecard for the Church, ?

² I first heard this phrase used by Hugh Halter, author of *The Gathered and Scattered Church*.

Last Spring, our elders and pastoral staff prayed into our ministry focus for this coming year, asking Holy Spirit to guide our thinking and shape our planning. After much listening to God, and one another, we believe the Spirit has spoken to us.

We believe that He is leading us to be more intentional in our “scattering.” Over the course of this year, we are going to be preaching on Missional Living, we’re going to be calling the church to pray, we’re going to run a class or two on how to share about Jesus with your family/friends/neighbours, and we’re even going to provide some hands on opportunities to build bridges into our city.

This Fall, as the “gathering” elements of our life together begin to ramp up, we want to take a fresh look at what “scattering” might look in our city, through our lives. A few months ago, I asked Dave Sattler if he would outline a Fall sermon series focussed on missional living; this morning I have the privilege of kicking a series we’ve entitled *Reaching The Heart Of Our City*.

I want to begin this series with a question. *When’s the last time you thought of Jesus as a disturber of the peace?* Has it been awhile? Have you ever thought of Him in this way? There **is** a reason why they killed Him. Maybe you’ve thought of Him as a good, moral teacher. Or perhaps you’ve always admired how kind and loving He seemed to be. But a disturber of the peace?

Martin Luther once wrote, “Where Christ is, there He always goes against the flow.” Jesus wasn’t offensive, except for all those times when He was: naming the sin He saw in other people, calling people

to repent and change their thoughts, desires, and actions. And then Jesus was always inviting people to follow Him: to go where He went and to do what He said. Jesus wasn’t a “*beating around the bush*” kind of guy. Jesus said things like: *Don’t call me ‘Lord,’ unless you’re actually going to do what I say. Don’t say you’re following Me, when you’re not.* Jesus wasn’t afraid to speak His mind because He was after followers, not fans.

Everywhere Jesus went, He encountered one of two responses: either people embraced Him and began to follow, or people opposed Him and tried to run Him out of town (or worse). Jesus said, “I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”³ Jesus knew that saying “yes” to Him, would mean saying “no” to other people, other paths, and other pursuits. And saying “yes” to Jesus, and “no” other paths often evoked hostility and opposition in others.

It’s not too hard to imagine our city in an uproar; it wasn’t too long ago that the city of Vancouver was burning. But perhaps we have forgotten that wherever the message of Jesus was first preached, and embraced, a similar kind of uproar would take hold in a city.

This morning I want to direct your attention to two different texts in the book of Acts: Acts 16 and Acts 19 (page _____ in the Blue Bibles). In these two texts, Luke gives us an account of what happened when the message of Jesus penetrated two different cities. Many people were saved, delivered, and healed, and yet the rest of the city erupted in anger; lets read what happened.

³ Matthew 10:34. Ironically, Jesus is both the Prince of Peace, and the disturber of the peace.

Luke writes, “we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days [Philippi is in modern day Greece]. 13 On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. 14 One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message. 15 When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. “If you consider me a believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my house.” And she persuaded us.

16 Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. 17 She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.” 18 She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, “In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!” At that moment the spirit left her.

19 When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. 20 They brought them before the magistrates and said, “These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar 21 by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.”

22 The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. 23 After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. 24 When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone’s chains came loose. 27 The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!”

29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” 31 They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. 33 At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. 34 The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.⁴

Luke tells the story of three different people who encounter Jesus:

- a businesswoman, named Lydia
- a spirit-afflicted slave girl; and
- an ex-soldier, turned jailer.

⁴ Acts 16:12-34.

We're told that the Lord opened Lydia's heart to Paul's message: she believed, was baptized, and became a follower of Jesus. We've been given the privilege of speaking the message of Jesus, but it is always God's action that opens hearts and removes blinders from people's eyes.⁵ Lydia's encounter with Jesus was powerful, but not dramatic. Many of us could tell similar stories of how Jesus worked within us to open our hearts to God.

The second encounter highlights a tormented slave. We're told that this slave girl was afflicted by a spirit, by which she had power to foretell the future. And while she was in anguish, her owners were getting rich; people paid large sums of money to find out what their future held.

In our scientific day, we might right this off but consider how many people in our own day read their horoscope, consult with a psychic, have their palms read, or practice New Age. We can be sure that some who advertise an ability to consult with the spiritual realm are little more than swindlers and charlatans, but friends, just as certainly as there is a God, there are evil spirits who promise power but seek to destroy.

Jesus came to release people from affliction: sin, sickness, addiction, and the affliction of evil spirits. As you read the Gospels, you will see that whenever Jesus came near, evil spirits recognized His authority, revealed His identity, and trembled before Him. Jesus commanded, and they obeyed.

Paul was walking down the street one day and this slave girl saw him. The evil spirit that controlled her recognized the power and authority of Jesus over Paul's life, and involuntarily this girl began to shout, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." Incredible! An evil spirit testified to the greatness of God? For days, everywhere Paul went, this girl followed behind declaring who it was that Paul served.

At some point Paul had had enough. If you read vs. 18, your translation might read that Paul was troubled, or became exasperated, or was annoyed. The original Greek word is **diaponetheis** (διαπονέομαι), it means to be 'to be irked, to become angry, to be provoked.' This evil spirit was speaking the truth, but Paul grew tired of hearing this spirit speak.

It *pained* Paul to see this girl being twisted by an evil spirit; it *provoked* him to action. In Jesus' earthly ministry, He demonstrated His authority over the demonic realm. Here, we see Paul standing in the power and authority of Jesus and commanding the evil spirit to release the girl; the spirit obeyed. This was not a classic "gospel presentation" but make no mistake, the message of Jesus is about His power over sin, death, and the devil. This slave girl's encounter with Jesus was both powerful and dramatic, and like Lydia, she was saved and set free to follow Jesus.

But while the slave girl, Paul, and his companions were celebrating, the girl's owners became instantly hostile to the gospel of Jesus Christ; they were fuming because followers of Jesus had choked out

⁵ C.f. 2 Corinthians 4:4.

their revenue stream. What was true in Philippi is true today: *if you mess with the almighty dollar, there will be hell to pay.*

Jesus is a disturber of the peace. The kingdom of God clashes with every other kingdom in the world. If we follow where Jesus leads, we'll find that life, relationships, morality, money, politics...all of it will be affected. Paul and Silas were dragged off to the magistrate, who had them beaten and then thrown into prison. It was here, in prison, that a third encounter takes place between an ex-soldier and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Bound in stocks that prevented them from sleeping, Paul and Silas weren't asking why bad things happen to good people. Instead, they passed the hours by praying, and singing praises to God, and we're told that the rest of the prisoners were listening in. Paul and Silas were encountering and demonstrating the power of God: joy in suffering, praise through pain, this is the power of God.

Around midnight, God sent an earthquake to rock the prison and every prison door was thrown open. The jailer knew the drill: if the prisoners escape on your watch, you pay with your life.⁶ And so he drew his sword to take his life, when Paul called out to tell him that every prisoner had elected to remain behind in prison. The tough ex-soldier fell before Paul asking, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul answered, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved".

⁶ C.f. Acts 12:19.

⁷ F.F. Bruce, *New International Commentary of the New Testament*, 312.

The Lord opened Lydia's heart. The Lord released a slave girl from a demonic spirit. The Lord shook a jail by way of earthquake, and in the process a jailor's heart was shaken too. The jailor encountered Jesus and began to follow Him. These three people had absolutely nothing in common, and that's why Luke tells their stories. Irrespective of age, gender, or status, Jesus meets people where they are with the power to save, deliver, and set free.⁷

When Paul and Silas were released the next day, the authorities asked them to leave the city and take their Jesus message with them. Everywhere Jesus goes, He threatens the status quo.

Our second text, Acts 19, takes place in the city of Ephesus, another city that was thrown into an uproar by the message of Jesus. For two years Paul set up shop in a city known for its religious pluralism. It was known for its passion for magic, not David Copperfield magic, but spells, sorcery, and evil spirits. But Jesus demonstrated His power in Ephesus through Paul: people were released from evil spirits and healed of their diseases. And when people saw the power of Jesus at work in their city they turned from their sorcery to follow Him.

Jesus' presence was so palpable that the economics in the entire city were affected. Ephesus was the city that housed the Temple of Artemis; one of the seven ancient wonders of the world. As you can imagine, the temple was a driving economic force in the city; all that began to change as people began to turn to Jesus.

Let me begin reading at vs. 24. “A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in a lot of business for the craftsmen there. **25** He called them together, along with the workers in related trades, and said: “You know, my friends, that we receive a good income from this business. **26** And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all. **27** There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited; and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty.”

Paul is saying that our idols aren't gods at all, he keeps talking about Jesus, saying that there is only One God. Paul is ruining our business, and contradicting our worldview. Are we going to let him steal our money, defame our gods, and change our ideas about reality? Let's get him! Acts 19 tells us that there was such uproar in the city that a riot in the streets. The other Christians hid Paul to keep him from being torn to shreds.

The craftsmen were angered on two accounts: (a) they were angered by their loss of income; and (b) there were angered by the exclusivity of Jesus' claims.⁸ The combination of economic threat and the exclusive claims of Jesus created the perfect storm for a riot.

I was at a conference last January, where the speaker quipped, “Why is it that everywhere Paul went there was a riot, and everywhere I go they serve me tea?” It's a good question. Has the gospel lost it's

edge, or its power? When's the last time any of us found ourselves in a city-wide disturbance that wasn't Canucks related?

We live in a multicultural, pluralistic society. We live in a society that champions not only the freedom to see life from one's “own” perspective, but insists that every perspective is equally good, helpful, and valid. “Tolerance” used to mean allowing others the freedom to believe differently than we do: where we differ, *we agree to disagree*. These days when people speak of “tolerance,” often, they mean something very different: *if you don't affirm my thoughts, opinions, and choices, then you are intolerant*.

Jesus is so often a disturber of the “peace”: the message He brings is a sword that cuts across the malaise of plurality and political correctness. Jesus made exclusive truth claims about Himself, about His Father, about right and wrong, about living and dying.

In Ephesus, Demetrius rightly understood that the “greatness” of Artemis was under attack. The message of Jesus is just as exclusive as it ever was. It confronts us in our independence, shattering the myth that we are “masters” of our fate. The message of Jesus confronts the pluralism of our day, He confronts our tendency to pick and choose truth according to our convenience; He reminds us that there is right and wrong. Jesus continues to remind us that there is only One God, and One Way to Him.

For too long we haven't taken seriously the gospel's power to transform society around us. We've been content to gather in churches, recite our creeds, and play it safe. Have you ever asked

⁸ Bruce, 374.

yourself, where is the power of Jesus in society? Why aren't people being released from spirits and healed of sickness? Has Jesus grown weary? Has He lost His nerve? Or have we?

In the book of Acts, we regularly see the miraculous in connection with the spread of the gospel. Maybe the reason we don't see the power of God more often is that we spend so little time scattering to places where He wants to make His power known.

So what am I trying to say? I believe that the message of Jesus can transform a life, a family, and even our city. I believe Jesus is saying to us, *Now is the time for the gospel. Now is the time for holy living and faithful witness.* Jesus wants to bless us, to enlarge our experience of Him, and then send us out in His name and in His power: to love, to serve, to speak, to befriend, to heal...

Over the next eight weeks we're going to be calling you to take Jesus at His word, to receive from Him all that He has, and then...scatter. Let's be loving, and bold, in our scattering. There is a lot more to say, but I will leave it for the coming weeks.

Our city could be transformed. It won't happen without God's power, or without our praying, going, and speaking; nor will it happen without opposition. Friends, *now is the time for the gospel. Now is the time for holy living and faithful witness.* May His kingdom come, and His will be done on the North Shore as it is in heaven.

Prayer: Linda and the worship team are going to come, and I've asked them to play and sing quietly to give us an opportunity to pray. Friends, who do you know and love that needs an encounter with

Jesus? Is there a situation you want to invite Jesus into? Let's take some moments to pray.