

“SideLines”

Tracy L. Gorman – Southside Church of the Nazarene – June 16, 2008

Good afternoon my friends!

I hope that your Monday is off to a good start. Mine has been busy so far, but nothing to complain about. It’s a beautiful day in Muncie, so we cannot be too disappointed, can we?!

I wanted to just take a few minutes and share some things with you that are on my mind early this week, and I wanted to do this before the week gets too far gone.

For one thing, I want to share with you how very much I enjoyed the “Missions Weekend” of events. It was great having Ron and Dianna Gilbert with us on Saturday and Sunday. I appreciated the great messages they shared with us of what God is doing in South Asia. Thank you to all who participated in the International Dinner on Saturday evening (both those who fixed food, decorated areas, and those who attended). It was a great evening, and I am absolutely sure we’ll be featuring this event again in the future. As well, a special thank you goes to those who have made pledges towards FAITH PROMISE for the next year. So far, we’ve had \$30,000 towards our \$40,000 goal pledged, and we’ll be asking the church to close that gap again this Sunday morning. “World Evangelism” is not just some nice, cute way to involve ourselves as a church. Rather, it is the mandate and commission from the Lord. What a privilege it is to be a part of something that is so much bigger than us.

That makes me think of a question that was asked during the Q & A with the Gilberts on Saturday evening. Someone was wondering why the churches there (in S. Asia) are growing so rapidly, when churches in the USA are struggling to keep their ministries going. I loved the answer that Ron gave, and what he said was to the effect that “people there are willing to die for what they believe in.” They’re willing to give their lives, and all they have, to see the Gospel of Jesus Christ go forward.

Brothers and sisters, it is my feeling that we in this country, and even at Southside, have not exactly caught that vision (at least not to that level yet). We must look at the things that we spend our time focusing on (related to church, faith, our relationship with God, etc.), and see what those things are. Do they revolve around reaching lost people for Jesus, or are they more about our own individual likes and dislikes. See, in most of the world, the folks there do not have the luxury of focusing on their own likes, dislikes, and their own agenda. But here in this country, we’re used to getting our own way in most aspects of life, so we’re a little disappointed when that doesn’t happen from time to time (in various areas). Somehow, I pray that God helps us learn to be most interested in what it will take to help Southside “Exist to connect people to God and to each other.” What will help us accomplish that goal, which is our mission? What will that be?

For the past two years, it has been my desire as the pastor of this church, to facilitate finding what that will be. More than anything, I want us to focus on that. It is not for any personal reason that I have led us on this journey, but it is definitely because I know that the only way we will have any measure of success, is if we fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus Christ in everything that we say, do, and are as a church. There have been many successes along this voyage, and a few failures, I am sure. However, it is with “clean hands and a pure heart” that I continue to seek for this to be our main reason for existence as a church.

See, brothers and sisters, pastors come and go. People come and go. The church can only move forward and be successful if the Holy Spirit of God does not “come and go.” We need Him all the time, and the only way He will be any part of anything that we do, is if we spend every ounce of our energy as a church implementing this (the Great Commission) into all that we are. There can be no other thing that comes close to having our attention as this. Twenty years from now, our legacy as a congregation will not be in how many classes we had, how big our building was, how much money we raised, how many church services we offered, how large (or small) our staff was. Rather, our legacy and our success before Christ will be measured by how many people we reached for Jesus, and whether or not we then taught them, guided them, and equipped them to do the very same thing in someone else’s life.

This is done best through one-on-one discipleship, getting them involved in a small group, getting them interested and involved in Sunday school, and then teaching them how to participate in ministry. That's how it's done, and I will go to my grave someday with that core belief driving every aspect of my pastoral leadership.

So, when a missionary comes here and talks about why we need to be involved in world evangelism, I hope we understand that our participation in reaching around the globe is mandated by Scripture, and so is our personal involvement in ministry right here in Muncie, Indiana (right here in this church). I appreciated the way the Gilberts tied those two facts together so beautifully. That blessed my heart!

The future for this church is bright, but it is only bright when each person who is a part of it makes a personal determination that what we do is done because we want to see lives changed. It's not a "check list" on which to mark our boxes that we "participated." It's not about fulfilling a personal agenda or action plan. It's not about doing what we've done, because that's what we've always done. It's about offering people real, relevant, relational opportunities to have their lives changed forever by and through the power of the Holy Spirit of the Living God! It's about investing our life into someone else's. It's about asking people over to your house for a Bible study or a get-together (with the full knowledge that being around Christ followers, and hearing God's Word proclaimed, can change their life forever). It's about adapting new methods which will reach the world that we live in today. Perhaps those same methods wouldn't have worked a few years ago, or maybe they would have. But in any case, we must be willing to employ those things which we know (or even hope) will help us reach our community. So what if we try and fail. At least we will have tried! Isn't keeping someone out of Hell worth trying?

I've been reading a book called, "23 Minutes in Hell." Friends, it has really made me think. It's made me think of people who are going to go there, if we do not invest ourselves in reaching them before it's too late. It's made me think that a lot of people who think they're heading there might not be, and we must impact their lives, too. It's made me more cognizant of the fact that a lot of people need God; they need the church; and they need me. I must do what I can, with the precious time that I have, to reach as many of them as possible, and simply doing what I've always done just might not get the job done.

Now, that's a strong realization to come to. After all, I am a pastor! Haven't I been doing what's necessary? Well, each of us must look at our own lives and answer that question. Again, it's not about *just simply* doing what it's going to take to keep my own life in order; it's also stepping out and *measurably* making a difference in someone else's life. This is what "church" must become to all of us, somehow. O God, please help it be so!

When I get to Heaven, I am going to answer for what I've done here on this earth. I have a strong suspicion that a lot of what I am judged for will have to do with what I've done to impact others, a lot more than what I've done to make myself happy or more fulfilled (spiritually speaking). That's why the messages this weekend, and the book I've been reading, means so much more to me than they ever before have in my life. My unending prayer is that somehow, you the church that I love will catch this same vision and make it your own (if you have not already done so). Why do we do what we do? Answer that, and you've answered a lot!

Well, I didn't mean to talk you leg off. I just had this on my heart, and wanted to share it with you. As your pastor and leader, I just always want to make sure that I am helping you get focused, stay focused, and keep working towards helping Southside to be the kind of church I've described here today, and that I've talked about for two years. This is who I am, and this is why I do what I do. I just want to help people get to Heaven, because time is short, and Jesus is coming soon! I want all our ministries, classes, groups, services, programs, etc., to reflect that fact. He is coming soon! This is all about getting people ready, and building relationships with them so they'll trust you enough to do just that.

I love you, and I love Southside! May God continue to help us. I look forward to every person being involved in reaching our Faith Promise goal, and in the ministry God has called you to be a part of.

May God bless Southside Church of the Nazarene!
Pastor Tracy

Ps Campmeeting and Assembly are this week at Shiloh Park. There are no events here at the church on Wednesday, unless you've been otherwise instructed by your leader.