

October 22 – Mark Ashton

Reach One More – Acts 2:42-47

About 2 years ago, the elders came to me and said “the vision is getting fuzzy mark, kinda mushy.” We had just come out of the COVID adjustment and the truth is – we were all in a kind of recovery. But the elders wisely commissioned a new chapter for CCC. But none of us knew what it was. WE wanted it to be directly in line with our DNA and history, and yet a new chapter. And we are in an enviable position. Great buildings. Good space. Debt free. Growing. Great staff. Great elders. To be honest, it is a pretty great no-pain position.

So we considered two options. Option 1. Enjoy the ride. Say that ‘this far is good enough.’ Live off of the sacrifice of past generations and just kinda coast. We could raise nice kids, sing around the campfire, have nice services with nice people and go the way of the rest of the American church – slowly slipping into decline one life at a time. I actually brought that idea to the elders – All in favor say Aye?

So our next option – Option 2. Listen to the Holy Spirit and do whatever he says. Give our lives wholeheartedly for that which matters most. Consider our one precious life and maximize our redemptive potential. Call the church to surrender to Jesus, reach one more person for the sake of the gospel, live a life of alignment with God and sacrifice for the cause. Remember the mission – that two billion people have never even heard the name of Jesus! And give ourselves unreservedly to the mission. All in favor say AYE! Yup, that’s what the elders said too...

I lived in the Chicago suburbs when my kids were little. And after a couple of years on Candlewood court, reaching our neighbors, a couple moved in two doors down. They were a little downhill and I was uphill which meant I was better than them. JK... before they moved in, we invited Tim and Gretchen to come over for a Christmas party. We soon found out that Gretchen followed Jesus and even attended our very large church, but Tim was not a follower of Jesus – in fact, he almost didn’t come to the Christmas party because he knew we were.

But it wasn’t long before we became friends. Tim is smart with a capital S. He owned his own business, cracked a lot of jokes and could build, repair or rebuild anything. I don’t know if he liked me much, but he loved my kids. We had tons of parties at our house and Tim was always invited. He taught me how to do more home and auto repairs than I can remember – laying floors, renovating my basement and more... and then he showed up to help me actually do it. I prayed for Tim every day. There was no way I could repay him, but I asked God to redeem him.

And in time, Tim showed spiritual curiosity. He asked questions. We talked long into the night about the deepest parts of life. He came to a seeker small group that I led – a Bible Study for non-Christians only. He read the Bible cover to cover. He went on a missions trip with me to Costa Rica. But years rolled by and he never trusted Jesus. He was my “One More” and I was doing all I could to reach him.

We are opening a new chapter here at CCC called “Reach One More.” It is a vision that has been key to the DNA of CCC for 102 years, but has its expression in the 2020s. And as the elders have thought and prayed for 2 years on this, today, October 22 is the ramp up to a five week period of reexamining ourselves, resubmitting to Jesus and realigning our lives and our church around his promises.

But the philosophy goes back a lot longer than 102 years or 1002 years to more like 2002 years. We will be examining the book of ACTS for the next five weeks. And in order to help us tackle both the book of ACTS and the vision God has called us to, we have put together a resource for you.

Ushers bring guides forward!

This is your reach one more manual. It has in it 5 pages for messages for notes and five pages of devotions to do on your own and a QR code that links you to five community group studies. Now, I know what is going to happen when we pass out these guides. You will want to read it cover to cover. Good! Just do it after you go home. For now, let me give you a little tour of your guide.

Turn to p.38-9. It isn't a map, but it is the next best thing – a CHART! It is a chapter by chapter outline of the books of Acts... and... it adds in where each chapter took place AND it puts it all on a timeline for you! So that's cool!

Turn the page to 40-41. There is what you were waiting for! A map! There is a lot of flow in the book of Acts. A lot of geography. And this gives you the WHERE... especially if you match it up with the timeline on the previous pages. Right after that, on pages 42-3 are five devotions that I wrote that connect the theological foundations of Acts to the mission of Reach One More. You can do all five in one week or one per week, whatever pace fits you best.

More later, but for now, go back to page 32 – which is where you can take notes for this message. And bring your guides back every week... because we want you to track what you are learning during these times in one spot.

So, here is how Acts starts: Jesus has risen from the dead. He meets with his disciples over a period of 40 days to expand their discipleship, help them to see life in the perspective of the cross and the resurrection, and answer their dumb questions. This is one of the dumbest – Acts 1:6

⁶Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

You see what is happening here? They are STILL stuck in the old paradigm. Israel will be a kingdom – not a territory of Rome. It will overthrow Rome and establish political power. That's not the plan. Jesus has been telling them about the kingdom for three years. It is like a treasure in a field, like a seed sown, like wheat and weeds, it is among you, it is found in me. But they are still thinking politics. So Jesus resets their thinking and simultaneously gives them an outline of how they would do ministry that month... and for 2000 years afterwards.

⁷He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Jesus deflects. It is not yours to know WHEN.... But here is what you can know. You will receive Holy Spirit power... and that will make all of the difference. That happens on Pentecost Sunday, 10 days later. You remember? Rushing wind, tongues of fire, speaking foreign languages etc. And then, I have a three part plan... and Jesus draws a verbal MAP for them. You see, I knew I was trying to be like Jesus!

Acts 1:8 is Jesus' big plan to reach the world.

- Start right here. They were on the mount of olives at this point, overlooking Jerusalem. I imagine Jesus pointing across the valley. Start in Jerusalem. Where you have credibility, buzz, relationships, prophecy and everything working in your favor. Then expand and I see him pointing south to Judea and North to Samaria. Places that are close by, possible ethnically different, but you don't know people there. Then- aww heck... ends of the earth. Just go everywhere and tell everyone about me! When you finish that, you are done.
- **Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, Ends of the earth – concentric circles.** This is the master plan! It is Here, There, and Everywhere.
- By the way, did you know the **CCC Logo**(Superimpose the CCC logo over the concentric circles on the Map.) is based on this? It is not a copy of the Comedy Central Logo... nay! We had ours first and THEY copied! It is a reflection of the Mission that Jesus gave us and everytime you see it, I want you to think Acts 1:8
- I want you to think: Here, There and Everywhere
- **Acts 1:8 is also the Outline of the book of Acts – Jerusalem ch 1-7, Judea and Samaria – 8-9, Ends of the earth 10-28.**

Now, as God spoke to the elders about this vision. It was very clear that we were to include Here, There and Everywhere. In fact in one of our board meetings, I remember that we were kind of thin in the "There" arena. And one of our board members, led by the spirit, gave us all the "What are we thinking?" speech about neglecting our neighbors and matters of justice here in the city. You'll here more about all of this in time, but the vision of reach one more is all about people. Someone say people!

The church is this crazy organization in that it not only exists for its own members, but it also exists for people who are not here. People who are lost, people who don't know Jesus, people who are anxious, and trapped and disconnected, and looking for something bigger, better, more. And we get to be here for them. Because **PEOPLE THERE MATTER HERE.** This is a weird idea. Most organizations exist solely for the benefit of their members. But Christians are weird. We exist for us, but even moreso for the lost ones... for the ones headed to a Christless eternity, for the hopeless and the anxious and the people disconnected from God. People THERE Matter HERE. This is why we have these tshirts. WE want to remember the idea that every person you lock eyes with matter. And when someone asks "What is that?" you can say, yeah... my church is kind of crazy in that we really believe that other people matter to God and matter to us. We want to be the most loving and welcoming in the world because people matter.

And I want you to begin asking yourself a very powerful question. If our vision is to reach one more, who is your ONE MORE? Who is your one more? Our top challenge for this thirteen month period is that every person identify one person to be reaching. One person to be loving. One person to witness to. Write the name down. Tell your community group. Pray every day.

You know what? There is a strong correlation between those who pray every day for opportunities to witness and those who get opportunities to witness. Between those who pray for someone to come to faith and those who lead someone to faith. God is eager to answer that prayer. WE just are not praying it. Not consistently at least.

You know, we have the best deaf ministry in Omaha. And Omaha is a destination city for deaf people – Iowa school for the deaf, deaf missions, stuff at boystown... they are all magnets.

- *But across the globe, deaf people are less than 2% followers of Jesus they are by definition an 'unreached people group' in our own backyard. And we are strategically positioned to reach them. I think we can do a better job of being friendly, providing translation, and hiring a part time staff to grow this ministry among us! Deaf people we never have met matter to God...people there matter here.*
- *Students who we have never met matter to God. And while our student center has served us well for 18 years, (think, our High School Seniors were not born the last time it was remodeled!) it is time for a facelift – especially the bathrooms – so we can be ready to reach students for another 18 years.*
- *And wow, I don't know if you have heard, but our soccer and flag football ministries for kids are growing. One coach told me the story of how he was telling the kids about David and Goliath during practice. He asked "how many have never heard this story?" Three kids raised their hands. Never. Heard. The. Story. And, what an opportunity! We get to tell kids the David and Goliath and Daniel, and Moses and most importantly Jesus story week in and week out because they are here for Soccer!*

That is our "One More Here" – except one really important piece that I will address after we check out Acts 2. By this point, the Holy Spirit has come, Peter has preached and the church in Jerusalem has grown to about 3000.

⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Acts 2:42-7 drills down to what the people did every day to make this happen. Friends, this Jesus movement is simply the most effective, spectacular, world shaping, love bringing, God honoring, justice making movement ever invented in history. It only happened by the power of God working in a small community of 3000 believers. And here in Omaha we have a small community of 3000 believers. Do it again Lord!

Much has been made about the simplicity of Acts 2:42 and the way we as a church imitate that to this day. Apostles teaching = Bible Reading and Prayer. Fellowship = this is my family, my community. Breaking of bread = some say communion, I just say eating together. Prayer = Prayer.

And before I wave my hand and move on, let me point out that this is what we all need to this day. A steady diet of God's word – every day. Good friends who follow Jesus. Time with God in prayer. If this isn't real for you, then CCC is a great place to enjoy all of those things! To be honest, Acts 2:42 also looks a lot like CCC. But there is more.

“Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the Apostles.” The Holy Spirit was vibrant and working miracles on a regular basis as the church was established. It was an amazing accelerated time of supernatural power. And I'd love it if we would pray that this happens in our day. As the time of Jesus gets closer, let's pray that God's spirit is poured out in new and fresh ways!

Challenge: Read it one chapter a day for 28 days. Pray the simple prayer “Do it again, Lord.”

- A lame man gets healed – “Do it again, Lord”
- People being saved in small groups and in whole cities “Do it again Lord.”
- Church leaders being thrown in Jail and persecuted for faith “Do it again, Lord.”
- You know, recently, we have been in awe that God is healing more people than ever. More people are getting counseling for deep wounds than ever. More people are being freed from spiritual forces of evil than ever. That stuff that happened in Acts is still happening in Omaha today.

v. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.

Whoa. Did you read that? They held possessions in common. Mi Casa es Su Casa. My computer is your computer. My vacation home is your vacation home. My tesla is your tesla. And, then they sold it. Property, possessions, land, houses... seriously. All for the sake of the gospel.

Uh. Oh. You can read this verse and know that now, I am going to move from preaching to meddling. Now we are talking about stuff. About money. About selling stuff to give the money away. Yow.

I think that there are times that God invites people to give sacrificially. For CCC, we always invite people to give faithfully, but we are entering into a chapter for 13 months where we will ask everyone to give sacrificially. Every 7 years or so we invite this accelerated level giving based on the book of Acts.

Now some people are not comfortable talking about money in church. If this is your first week, you need to know that we do this occasionally, a series every year or two. And I am utterly unashamed to talk about money... and about giving your money to the cause of Jesus. I don't have any personal win in this... my salary does not go up, no bonuses for staff based on giving. But here is why I am excited to talk about money.

- Jesus did – more than heaven, hell or salvation, Jesus talked about money. We are trying to do like Jesus did around here, so if Jesus talked about money...
- Discipleship – one of the key tools God uses to form your soul is the priority of the wallet. What comes first, God or something else? What do you worship? What would your bank account say you worship? One of the last things to fall under the Lordship of Jesus for many Christians is their money. “My hard earned dollars.” I hear people say. But the truth is, it's all God's anyway! He gave you the location, the job, the education, the smarts, the family. You are managing his money and it is my job to inspire you to manage God's money well.

- There really are rewards in heaven for faithful stewardship. I want that for you. You can't take it with you, but you can send it on ahead. When you spend on God's priorities here, you rack up a heavenly bank account that lasts forever. We need to keep that always in mind.
- Finances help ministry to happen. Here, There and Everywhere. It is this crazy thing where God turns something that will one day burn and disappear – MONEY – into something that will last forever – PEOPLE who are redeemed. It is just the best investment we can make.

I want you to know that in five weeks, I'll be asking you to give sacrificially toward this Reach ONE More initiative. I am going to ask for 100% involvement. Every single person who calls CCC home. I will ask you to resubmit your life to Jesus. Ask him what he would have you give and do whatever he says. Whenever I do this, I find that Jesus talks to me. He knows what I have and what I should give. He is eager to partner with us in this. It is actually not primarily about the Reach One More initiative.

It is really about who is number one in your life. It is about God's placement as the one who is in charge of all of your income and all of your savings because all of you exists for him. If God is first, we should give to him first, right off the top – like the disciples did. They sold possessions to give to the LORD. Why? Because God was first in their life. And disciples of Jesus rearrange their lives around God being first. Is God first in your life? Is he first in your spending? Do you give to the LORD what is due him and figure out how to live off of the rest or live off of your salary and throw God leftovers. It shows a lot of what you think about God – whether you give to him first or leftovers.

- Over the course of this initiative, I expect you will fall in one of three categories:
- You call CCC home, but you are not giving. You will move from giving zero to giving something. That is a big step! It starts to say to the LORD "LORD, you and your mission are important to me!"
- You are already a giver at CCC – maybe modest or maybe generous and God will call you to the next level of giving. For 13 months, you will ask the question "What can I release to the LORD of my revenue that will show him to be in the position of honor in my life?"
- The third bucket is what are considered 'stored resources' – those resources that are not from your future income, but the LORDs provision for you in the past. It may be that you have stocks that have rebounded from COVID time, or that you have savings, or you received an inheritance or sold a business and you are saying "Lord, why are you blessing me so much?" "Why is it that I have so much while other's don't?" And the answer is that you are blessed to be a blessing. God didn't give you extra for YOU! He gave you extra to distribute to those in need. Maybe, like the people in the Bible, you have a property and you may sell it in order to reach one more here, there and everywhere. This is what it looks like to be Biblical community. And the result is in v. 46

And the LORD added to their number daily those who are being saved. V. 46

Oh! How I yearn for that day! The day that the LORD adds to our number daily those who are being saved. Someone say "Daily". How often do you think they prayed for their lost friends? (DAILY). How often do you think they loved on people who needed love? (DAILY) How often do you think they told people about Jesus and invited them to the community? (DAILY) and how often did God save people? (DAILY)

CCC... this could be us. And this is why I am asking everyone. 100% of CCC people to identify one person. Your ONE MORE. One person you could pray for every day. Listen to, witness to, love on daily. ONE more to bring into the community of love and faith that God wants. And on that same day we make our financial commitment, we will write down ONE name of ONE person we will pray for DAILY. Our one more.

You may wonder about my One more from Chicago. Right about the time God called me to Nebraska, God got ahold of his life. Tim became a follower of Jesus over Omelettes in our favorite breakfast place through many tears. Crazy thing is he felt like God called him to Omaha that same week. He shut down his business, moved here, set up a new business and four years later, brought his real world expertise to CCC as our director of operations.

Friends, that is just one person who matters to God whose life has had repercussions that will last for generations. You know, we have seen over 2,500 people baptized at CCC since 2006. I love that. I love when people move from darkness to light. From hell bound to heaven bound. From alienation to adoption. And God lets us do that. It is the highest stakes most rewarding thing in history and we GET to do it!

You know, if each of us reach one person in the next five years. Just one in five years. And there are 3,000 of us, well, the math is easy. How many can we reach in five years? (3000) Yeah. And I want you to know that I believe in you. More importantly, God believes in you.

So are you in? Will you join me in reaching ONE MORE? Who is your one more? Some of you know right now and some of you need some time to think on it. I want you to know that on page 14-15, there is a worksheet that is designed to help you identify people who might live in your neighborhood, share your interests, be in your family or play with your kids. These are the people God has put in your life.

So, if you are in, just say "I am in!"

Stand with me to pray. And as you do, I am going to introduce a new idea. It is the "ONE MORE" prayer. Lift one finger in the air. If you know your one, that is a person to lift before the lord. If you don't, make it your prayer that God would tell you who your ONE might be! So lets lift our fingers in the air – not in the pride of "we're number One" because after all, we live in Nebraska... but with the humility that we lift one person up before the Father and pray for them in this moment.

PRAY