

Proper 23A
October 9, 2011
Family of Christ Lutheran Church, Chanhasen, Minnesota
Pastor Kristie Hennig

Matthew 5:1-16

Light the Fire in Our Community...in Iowa...in North Carolina...

“Light the Fire...in El Salvador...”

If Jesus were walking the earth today,
I think he'd be using social media.
I mean, he'd use anything and everything at his disposal
to get through to us, wouldn't he?
If Jesus were on twitter, I bet he'd tweet:
“It's a big world out there. Get out of your bubble and go.”

Or words to that effect.

Getting out of their bubble
is what the children of this congregation did
when they went out into the community
to learn and serve during Mission Day Camp in June.

It's what the middle schoolers did with YouthWorks in Iowa
and it's what the high schoolers did on their trip to Kure Beach in North
Carolina.

Getting out of our bubble
to experience a corner of the big world out there
is what another 19 of us did this summer
when we set aside the comforts of suburban life,
and headed off to light the fire in El Salvador.

We went with some anxiety, a little skepticism, lots of anticipation.

For the next 11 days we listened and we learned,

we worked and we played,
we served and we prayed,
we laughed and we danced,
and we made lots of new friends.

We discovered new dimensions of ourselves and our world:
the needs that run deep and wide,
and the deep resources of compassion and strength and creativity
that nourish hope.

Our experience in El Salvador lit a fire in our souls.

Katie Anderson is a senior this year at Chan H.S.
She is a confirmation Lifeguide,
attends SNL,
and is a member of the high school worship band 40:3.
Katie was a member of our 2011 mission team to El Salvador.
I've asked her to share some of her experiences from the trip with us this
morning.

[Katie Anderson + her slides]

“Light the Fire...in My Soul”

Mission trips are an important part of faith formation here at Family of
Christ,
and they are a piece of a much bigger picture.

In the rite of baptism,
a candle lighted from the Christ candle is presented to a parent or
sponsor of the newly baptized
with Jesus' words from the Sermon on the Mount,
“Let your light so shine before others
that they may see your good works

and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

Your pastors and staff take seriously the promise *we all* make as we witness a baptism together...
to support parents and children in the promises *they* make before God.
One of those promises is to help children
“grow as servants of God and members of God’s family.”
Together as a congregation,
we offer many opportunities for nurturing young believers as they grow,
following their own faith paths.

Preschool, church school, Christos, VBS, and confirmation are some of the educational ministries here that form faith and grow servants.
Learning grows the deep roots that give kids the foundation to take their faith to the next level,
serving others.
Outreach activities like food drives,
FMSC, cooking for the Gathering Place in Chaska,
Operation Christmas Child, FACIC Christmas gifts,
and so many more make a positive difference in the lives of the neighbors Jesus calls us to care for
AND these activities turn learners into disciples...
we hope, for a lifetime.

Mission trips are part of that disciple-making process.
These group experiences have an immediacy and an intensity that really do re-orient people and change lives.

Katie did a solid job of describing that for us today.

But mission trips are not only for young people.
They’re for adults as well.
There is a place for you on any of the mission trips in the works for next summer.
Ask questions,

pray about your involvement,
check in with family,
and sign up.

Know that new kinds of mission trips designed specifically for adults are under development, as well.

And we are very interested in your input on these.

There's a pilgrimage to Bible lands being planned for next fall, and we're testing the appetite for servant projects in areas affected by natural disaster.

We're proud of our growing ministry of popular, high quality mission trips that are Making Disciples, Making a Difference.

We think this ministry so important

we devote a Sunday morning of worship every fall to celebrate it.

But don't misunderstand:

This is not about congratulating one another

for achieving ministry excellence,

or for earning a reputation for being the church with the great mission trips.

This isn't just a great big ad for mission trips at FOC, either.

Today we celebrate the many and diverse opportunities God has given us to serve and learn and teach and grow

as the family of Christ in this place...

And we recognize and give thanks for the spiritual and personal growth that the Spirit of God is accomplishing in all of us –

not just those who go on the trips themselves,

but the rest of us who support this important ministry in our church with prayers and offerings,

and receive the testimonies of the ones who return with stories of changed lives.

Mission trips are not ends in themselves, of course.
They give us, like the Beatitudes in Matthew's gospel,
a glimpse of what Jesus has in mind when he says,
"Come and follow me.
It's a big world out there.
Get out of your bubble and go."

Mission trips -- like the Beatitudes -- show us what is possible
when God's kingdom comes on earth.
They show us what we are capable of
when we team up with God to change this world for good.

As people of faith and followers of Jesus,
each of us is called to mission adventures throughout our life.
Some are geographically far from home;
others are right under our noses.
Fed and strengthened by the deep roots forming in us
by weekly worship, Bible study, fellowship, generosity, and service,
together we are growing into a substantial tree with a wide reach
into our community and well beyond.

As Jesus' words in his Sermon on the Mount suggest,
and as we are learning here at FOC when we leave our bubble
and enter the wounded and beautiful world God loves,
Jesus invites us to work with him to make God's dream a reality.
"I have a dream..." says Jesus. "And you are part of it."

In this Family of faith, we have our own version of this dream.
We have the gifts, the capacity...
to bring God's kingdom nearer for ourselves and our neighbors,
as well as people who live far from here.
God wants to partner with us.
The question is,
Do we have the will to work together with God
to make God's dream come true?

It starts with our commitment, our investment –
as individuals, as families, as a church Family.

Who are we...?

Join me in saying together the words of our mission statement...



*We are a family of Christ
dedicated to making disci-
ples making a difference —
nurturing, strengthening, and affirm-
ing one another in Christian faith.
God calls us to serve others who
touch our daily lives in our neigh-
borhoods and communities, in
school, at work, and beyond...*

Thanks be to God. Amen.