

“Let’s just pray about it.” How many times have you heard that in a church? Let’s just pray about it. Don’t get me wrong, I’m all for prayer. Prayer is good! There is nothing wrong with communicating with God and listening to God. In fact, the foundation of the church is built on prayer. But sometimes the phrase “Let’s just pray about it.” sneaks into a church and slowly but surely suffocates the life out of the church. “Let’s just pray about it.” is sometimes another way of saying, “We don’t want to jump out there and risk anything. We don’t want to make any decisions and we don’t want to take any action. Let’s just pray about it.”

Have you ever been in a long meeting and then at the end of the meeting someone makes the motion that the committee tables the topic under consideration for the next meeting? That drives me crazy! We have just spent an hour talking about something, only at the end to say, “We don’t want to talk about it anymore. So let’s have another meeting to pick up where we left off – which is in the middle of nowhere!” Let’s table it! Let’s just pray about it! We need to increase the giving in the church – “Let’s just pray about it!” We need to get more young people involved in church – “Let’s just pray about it!” We need to be doing more mission work – “Let’s just pray about it.” The light bulb on the left hand side of the sanctuary towards the back is out – “Let’s form a committee and pray about it!” I believe in the power of prayer and that prayer changes things, but I also believe God has given us the ability to work and use the gifts that He has given us. In other words, it’s okay to pray about something, but it’s not okay to sit around on our rear ends and do little or nothing to accomplish what God wants us to accomplish.

I never met James, but if he were a member of our church I can guarantee you he wouldn’t be one to say “Let’s table it.” or “Let’s just pray about it.” James would be one to say, “Let’s go for it! Let’s do something!” James is one of my favorite persons in the Bible and I think it’s because of his “Let’s do something / throw caution to the wind” attitude. Tradition has it that the author of the book of James is none other than James – the brother of Jesus. James comes by his action-oriented personality honestly because his brother Jesus was action-oriented. Jesus got things done. When people came to him with a need he didn’t “table the discussion”. He took care of the need and the person.

Once Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath and as he was teaching a crippled woman appeared. She had not been able to stand up straight for eighteen years. When Jesus saw her, he called over and said, “Woman, you are set free from your ailment.” When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. Now what do you think the woman would have thought had Jesus said something like: “I’m so sorry you are unable to stand up straight. Have you been to see the doctor? Are you taking any medication? Do you want to pray about it?” I can hear her now, “Yes, I’ve been to the doctor. No, I’m not on any medications. And no, I don’t want to pray about it! I want you to fix my back! I want you to do something for me!”

I think you know me well enough by now to know that I like to be doing things as a church. The last thing I want to do is serve a church that is complacent and lazy. From what I’ve seen so far from you I believe you want to be doing things for God’s kingdom.

August 27, 2006

You want to make a difference. I'm a "Let's throw it up against the wall and see if it sticks" kind of person. I have a basic belief that the more things we try as a church the better and that some ministries and programs sound good on paper, but never have a chance to take flight because of our tendency to overanalyze and plan. Most of the time the problem is not the idea itself but our need to have all the details worked out beforehand. The honest truth is that most of the time the details work themselves out as we go and some things we just cannot and should not plan for.

James said, "But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act – they will be blessed in their doing." God blesses us in our doing! It is through the doing itself that God blesses us.

The other day I decided to play the piano. So I went to Barnes and Noble and bought a book about the piano. It was a nice book with lots of pictures and explanations about pianos. There was even a page with a picture of all the keys on a piano. I read the book and think that I can now play the piano. Next week I am going to buy a book on how to play the organ. I'm going to thumb through it and then I'll be able to play the piano and the organ. When Wynona is out of town I can fill in and play the prelude and hymns and accompany the choir with their anthem. In fact, I'm ready to give it a try right now. Let's see what it sounds like. Now you know as well as I do that it is ridiculous to think that someone can read a book in one day on how to play the piano or organ and then the next day play beautiful music. There is one way and one way only to learn how to play a musical instrument, and that is to play the instrument. It is through the actual process of playing the piano that we learn how to play the piano.

The same is true when it comes to applying our faith. If we wait until we think we are qualified or are "good enough" to do anything for God's kingdom, we will end up doing nothing. I am a firm believer in the fact that God equips us to do the things He has asked us to do. All God needs is a few willing souls.

The question now becomes, "So what should we be doing?" We say to ourselves, "Okay, I understand that God will equip me to do certain things, but what are those things? How do I know what I should be doing? I want to do good things, but how can I know that I am on the right track?" James said that we should be doers of the word of God. The word of God in this case means the gospel or the good news of Jesus Christ. In other words, if we need a clue as to what we should be doing with our lives we should look to the life of Jesus. This is not to say that we should strive to be "just like Jesus" because that's impossible. There's only one Savior in the world. However, it is to say that we can get direction for our lives from the life and stories of Jesus found in the gospels.

I'm a big fan of Jesus. I know that sounds a little simplified and redundant, but really, I'm a big believer in Jesus. Last Wednesday we kicked off our Wednesday evening programming for the fall. I know it doesn't feel like fall right now with all these 100 degree days, but when school starts back up we all get back into somewhat of a routine and the church is no different. I really enjoyed getting together with everyone

August 27, 2006

Wednesday evening. I was dragging Wednesday afternoon and quite frankly felt better after being at church. We shared a meal together at 5:00 p.m. and then had children's choir, choir practice, and a couple of Bible studies. I was extremely impressed at the participation in the women's Bible study class. They are beginning a study by Beth Moore on the fruits of the Spirit and seemed to really have a good feeling among the group.

In the next classroom I have begun a study called "Beginnings". It's a course in the basics of Christianity. I like it because it asks those difficult questions that everyone thinks about from time to time, but never talks about in a group setting. Here are some of the session titles and topics: "So, Is This All There Is?" "Who is Jesus and Why Should I Care?" "What Happens When I Die?" "Can I Trust God?" "How Does God Speak to Me?" "How Can I Make a Life and Not Just a Living?" and my favorite "Why Should I Join Any Group That Will Have Me as a Member?" This coming Wednesday we will be covering session two – "Who is Jesus and Why Should I Care?" I asked the group to think about what is their favorite story involving Jesus. I realize it's hard to narrow it down and "rank" Jesus stories, but at some level we all have those stories that just stick out and in one way or another shape us. They have a way of directing us in our "doing".

I have always been drawn to the story of Jesus and the man with the withered hand. One Sabbath day Jesus went to one of the synagogues, and since it was the Sabbath, Jewish law had it that no work was to be done. Oddly enough, even assisting someone who was injured in an accident would have been considered "work". So healing someone on the Sabbath would not be acceptable. Well, guess what happened. Jesus is in the synagogue with all the self-righteous "do-gooders" who think they got it all together when in walks a man with a withered hand. The man could not use his hand. The stage had been set. The Pharisees on one side, Jesus on the other, and the man in need in the middle. You can just feel the tension in the room.

Jesus said to the man, "Come forward." Then he said to the Pharisees, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?" They were silent. No one responded. That was their way of saying to Jesus, "You better not do what we think you are about to do, and in the synagogue of all places." Jesus looked around at the group with a piercing glare of anger. He was literally grieved at their hardness of heart and lack of compassion. So Jesus said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." I like how he said that – "Stretch out your hand so everyone in the room can see what I'm about to do." He stretched out his hand and immediately it was restored. The man had been made whole again.

I love that story because it says something about what is important to God – people like you and me. At the end of the day that is all that really matters to God – that you and I be made whole and be in relationship with one another and God Himself. Forget about the rules. Forget about the regulations. Forget about what the Pharisees think or anyone else for that matter, Jesus did what he thought was right and calls us to do the exact same thing.

August 27, 2006

I am an extremely laid back individual. It takes a lot to get me upset, but one day one the members in one of the churches I served got me upset. It was Sunday morning and the service was just about to begin. I was talking to people in the sanctuary asking how everyone's week had gone when a little girl came up to me with a plate full of cookies. She was probably only about 7 or 8 years old and it was clear that she had made the cookies herself. She extended the plate towards me and said, "I made these cookies last night. Would you like one?" I said, "Of course I would like one. Thank you so much for making me a cookie!" I ate the cookie and went on about my business. That little girl made my day.

The next day I hear a knock on my office door. It was a self-described "concerned" church member. "Concerned" is the code word for "I've got a problem and want to involve you since you're the pastor here." This individual walked into my office and handed me a copy of the Trustee guidelines and rules on food in the sanctuary. He pointed it out in black and white, "There is to be no food in the sanctuary!" He then asked me, "Why did you eat that cookie yesterday in the sanctuary? Do you realize you are setting a bad example?"

I responded sarcastically, "You're right. What was I thinking? Maybe I should have set a good example by sitting down the little girl and handing her a copy of the Trustee rules and regulations regarding the sanctuary. I should have grabbed that tray of cookies and thrown it in the trash. I'm so sorry for behaving so irresponsibly." I think he got my point. If he didn't get it then he got a few seconds later when I said, "Oh and by the way, have you read that passage out of Matthew lately? You know the one. It's in black and white just like your Trustee guidelines. Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.'"

I know that doesn't sound like a mature "pastoral" response, but quite frankly, I didn't know what else to do. Let that be a reminder to all of us. When we don't know what to do sometimes God does it for us and we suddenly become not only hearers of the word but doers as well. What have you been doing lately?