

The Mission Field Next Door: Part 1- The Landscape

This evening we begin a three part series on the Mission Field Next Door. In 2023, we as Canadian Christians face some difficult challenges right here in Canada - in our homes, in our churches, and in our communities at large. My three big questions for this series are:

1. What is the current landscape and what problems are we facing?
2. What does God's word tell us our responsibilities are?
3. How can we begin to do or do things better right here at home?

We will cover these and more over these three Sunday evenings. While I have no intention of upsetting you, I do expect that some may feel uncomfortable with some of what I have to say. I know I am. And I certain am under no illusions that I have all the answers; far from it! I do pray, however, that this will get some discussion started which is helpful and leads to some new endeavours. From a very personal point of view, this has been something I've been convicted about for some time now.

I am thrilled to be a part of a church here at Cedarview that has a heart for global missions and does something about it. That Cedarview Community Church raises more money for global missions than any other PAOC church in Canada is a godly and worthy thing. And we can be grateful that through this giving we are, at least in part, fulfilling the Great Commission – a pivotal part of our Christian faith. Let's read what Jesus said in The Great Commission: **Matthew 28:16-20 -**

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all

nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Point 1: We are **all called to spread the gospel.**

This is, of course, a very familiar text for most of us. Some of us have heard it since we were children. In this passage of scripture, Jesus is reminding us of **his authority** on heaven and earth, and he is instructing his followers— out of his **total authority**- to go into all the world and spread the good news – the gospel.

We accurately assume , that Jesus isn't just instructing his 11 remaining disciples; he's also speaking to you and me, 21st Century Christians. The phrase “teaching them to observe ALL that I have commanded you.” is a reminder: ***We are being deputized!*** Being deputized by our Saviour isn't something we should ever take lightly. This requires that we feel some urgency when we think of this!

So what does any of this have to do with the Mission Field Next Door? Many of you are generous givers of funds to our global missions; some of you are loyal volunteers to various ministries here at Cedarview and in the community. While all of this is laudable, important and godly, it seems to me that sometimes we forget the huge mission field right in our own back yard! To paraphrase a friend, “it's sometimes easier to just give \$100 than to give 100 minutes.”

What else then, did Jesus command his disciples to do, and therefore, us?

In **Matthew 6:33** he told us to “**seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness** “. We are to put first things first. Everything else we do as Christians is built on that strong foundation.

He also told us to love our enemies, Matthew 5:44. Some of those nasty folks live nearby, don't they? That's another teaching however!

Point 2: The first mission field is where we live.

That's scriptural, by the way if we take Jesus' example. Jesus preached primarily to his own people and instructed the disciples to do so as well.

In Matthew 10, Jesus sends out the 12 apostles to the local communities and he instructs them, “**Go to the lost sheep of Israel and proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand’. Heal the sick raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without paying.**” **Matthew 10:6-8**. They were taking this to their own people in their own extended community. They were starting where they lived. With them, Jesus was setting a precedent.

This is fairly early in Jesus' ministry and a real test to his novice disciples. These ordinary men had heard and seen Jesus at work teaching and preaching, they'd seen him heal the blind, cast out demons, raise the ruler's daughter from the dead, make the mute man speak. I can imagine this assignment would have been overwhelming and daunting to these men, more used to manual labour, fishing, collecting taxes. But now Jesus was instructing them to do what he did! He even warned them that this would be a difficult task; there would be persecution down the road, they are to trust that the “Spirit of your Father” – the Holy Spirit – would

speaking through them! (Matt. 10:20) The disciples, like you and I feel sometimes, must have been frightened and would have recognized how they certainly couldn't do this under their own power.

The Lord reminds you and me of the same thing; we are to make disciples of all; we are to teach and preach and baptize new believers. You and I are to be Jesus' representatives in the world.

In our own community - this church included - we see broken marriages, broken lives, hopelessness and despair. Walk down Main Street in Newmarket or Holland Street in Bradford; you don't have to go far away to see homeless folks, addicts, the mentally ill, the poor, the downtrodden. Or watch the news; woke-ism, LGBTQ activists, transgender issues, abortion on demand -the list goes on- seem to be the latest trends and anyone who disagrees is a "hater" or "intolerant". We live in a broken and evil world.

For the next few minutes I want to share with you some thoughts about the landscape we live in here in Canada. Those of us over 30 certainly can see how this country has changed. And while you may not be called to go abroad to be a missionary or global worker, you are required as a disciple of Christ to "make disciples" where you live and work and worship.

According to the last Canadian census and Statistics Canada, in 2019, 68% of Canadians claimed to have some religious affiliation. This includes Hinduism, Islam and other religious organizations as well as Christianity. Notice that affiliation says nothing about beliefs, activities and so on.

Of that 68%, 54% claimed that their religious or spiritual beliefs were somewhat or greatly important to how they lived their lives.

Another important question was asked: What is the importance of religious or spiritual beliefs in how to live one's life? Not surprisingly, 17% said it wasn't very important, and 29% said it wasn't important at all! That's 45% of the 68% believing that one's religious beliefs aren't all that important.

(Another statistic I found fascinating is that Canadians born outside of Canada, born between 1940 and 1999 - across all these age groups - have a much higher incidence of religious affiliation and put a much greater importance on their religious beliefs. They are more likely than native born Canadians, as well, to participate at least monthly, in organized religious activity.)

Another recent survey by the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada showed that roughly 50% of those they surveyed consider themselves agnostic, atheist, or unreligious.

This survey also tells us that only 8% of Canadians consider themselves Evangelical believers and only 10% of Canadians attend church services weekly.

The organization that did this research also stated that "from a church per capita perspective, Canada is one of the most unchurched countries in the world."

Personally, I take statistics and broad statements like this with a grain of salt; it's good to be a little sceptical, I think. Nevertheless, if any of these numbers and statements are even close to accurate, we have a problem right here in our own back yard. Any born again believer who's paying attention is going to know that we have huge problems right here at home even without the stats.

Let's take a quick look at South Korea. In 1885, South Korea was 1% Christian. One-hundred and thirty-eight years after the gospel first reached the Korean peninsula through the work of foreign missionaries, Christians now make up more than a [quarter](#) of the South Korean population. The majority of them belong to Protestant denominations.

Right now, 6 of the 10 largest megachurches in the world are in South Korea.

And according to an article I read a couple of weeks ago, "In 2012, official government statistics put the number of Protestant churches at [77,000](#), more than three times the number of convenience stores in the country at that time."

In 1974, South Korea had 24 foreign missionaries. Today, they have more than 28,000 in more than 100 countries. By the way, that includes Canada and the US. There are also countries in Africa that are sending Christian missionaries to North America. *(Kelvin B.'s story from 1970-Urbana).*

Oh, one more thing about Korean evangelicals: many churches have morning prayer meetings for people before they go to work, at 5 a.m. They believe that this sets the tone for the work or school day.

From an article: "Christians cannot live without faith and prayer, even for a moment," Seon Gyoo Kim, a church elder at Myungsung Church, told Christian Broadcast Network News in 2015. "I believe morning prayer is God's blessing for us."

I spoke with Steve Rowe this about this last Tuesday. As you know, Steve has been deeply involved in the prayer life of this church. He is leading a Tuesday morning Daybreak Morning

Prayer and Praise hour every Tuesday at 7 a.m. I know you're busy and I know it's early but if you can be there even occasionally, please join in! We need to be a praying church! This is foundational, I believe, to outreach even on our own turf! There is also the Women's online prayer meeting every Tuesday.

Enough with the statistics and the news report, you might be thinking! But the purpose in laying this out is to remind you that we need the gospel right here and right now in our families, in our church community, in the workplace, and in the community at large. Canada is spiritually starving and needs Jesus now more than ever.

We here in North America are seen by the Koreans and by others in Africa and South America, as places where the gospel needs to be spread.

One more statistic from a recent study of young people, predominantly students. This study was to determine what percentage of that young population are agnostic or atheists. Not surprisingly, the top percentage was in Communist China with 92% claiming to be atheist. In the "top" 25, where do you think our Canadian young people ranked? Iceland was number 25 with 54%. But Canada, our country, ranked number 17 with 63% of the polled students claiming to be agnostics or atheists. The US at 43% didn't make the top list. Neither did South Korea or any African country.

As I've said earlier, these polls and statistics may not be completely accurate but they do at least, highlight some concerns for us.

I remember hearing as a child that Canada was a Christian country. While that may not have been an accurate assessment then, it is certainly a false one now!

Point 3. The time to start is now!

We in this sanctuary, are required as Christians, to spread the gospel. This wasn't a gentle suggestion from Jesus; it was an imperative instruction. If you are a Christian, a follower of Jesus, this isn't an optional activity, something that we are to do when everything else in our busy lives is done. This is a fundamental focus for our lives as we put first things first - seeking the kingdom of God and spreading the message of the gospel to the nations, including Canada.

Next week we will explore some of the problems you and I might face as we consider being missionaries right here at home and the third week will be exploring new ways to serve here in Newmarket/Aurora/Bradford/Sharon and so on.

In closing, let's see how our Saviour did things in his ministry: **Matthew 9:35-38** **“And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. 36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; 38 therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” “**

Let's pray..