What if the Church Loved KC? 2018
“What if the Church Prayed?”

For the next three weeks, Colonial will be collaborating with over 50 congregations throughout the KC metro in a movement called, “What if the Church?” If you recall, What If The Church is a movement that began just over 10 years ago when a few churches began to ask the question: What if the church in Kansas City prayed together, served together, and fellowshipped together? Over the years we have partnered with WITC to serve the city, to bless children in the foster care system, and last summer we joined in the citywide commitment to BLESS the city by living out the rhythms of prayer, listening, eating together, serving, and sharing our stories with those in our relational worlds. What if the Church is a citywide movement, but it asks churches to get together in “triads”, and the pastors of those triads then exchange pulpits over the course of three weeks in order to demonstrate the unity of Christ’s church in the city.

This year, WITC is asking this question: What if the Church loved KC? We will break down that question into three sermon topics: 1) What if the Church Prayed for KC? 2) What if the Church Cared for KC? And 3) What if the Church Shared with KC? I will deliver the first of those messages this morning, but next week we will be honored to host Pastor Phil Hopper from Abundant Life Church in Lees Summit. The following week we will host Pastor Randy Frazee who has recently come to town to serve as the new Lead Pastor at Westside Family Church. I, of course, will be preaching at Westside and Abundant Life during those weekends. You might recall that Colonial has partnered with Westside on several occasions with WITC, but this will be the first year that Abundant Life has joined the WITC movement, so be extra nice to Pastor Phil Hopper!

Now, with no further ado, let’s pray first, and then we’ll get started.

The question of the day is this: What if the Church Prayed for KC? There are two answers that we can provide to that question: 1) the theological, hypothetical answer; and 2) the practical, generally cynical answer.

On a theological, hypothetical level, I know…and you know…that if the Church in this city truly prayed for our city, God would move! Giants would be slain! Revival would sweep across the city and many souls would be saved! Marriages would be rescued, crime would all but disappear, the hearts of the fathers would be turned back to their children, and the Chiefs would win the Super Bowl! Right? I mean, if the CHURCH truly prayed for this city, STUFF would happen that would blow our minds…we would experience and witness unprecedented miracles, and God would be glorified, right? On a theological, hypothetical level…I know in my mind that this is true…I know that prayer can accomplish the miraculous…with the possible exception of the Chiefs winning the super bowl. That miracle would require prayer AND fasting.
Now…on a practical and somewhat cynical level, there is a part of me that thinks that our prayers for the city would be a monumental waste of time. Why? Because I know me…and I know that with all of my best intentions, I often fail miserably when it comes to living a life of prayer. I also recognize that I, and so many people in our city who call themselves Christians, often have very little faith that prayer changes anything whatsoever. So many of us are “faithless” when it comes to the power of prayer; such that, on a practical, somewhat cynical level, we truly doubt that anything all that remarkable would happen if WE…the faithless church…prayed for the city.

Like many of you, I am often like the man in Mark 9 who cried out to Jesus, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” Do you remember that story? Look to Mark 9:14-29. 14 And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them. 15 And immediately all the crowd, when they saw Jesus, were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him. 16 And he asked them, “What are you arguing about with them?” 17 And someone from the crowd answered him, “Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. 18 And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able.” 19 And he answered them, “O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me.”

If you remember the context of this story, Jesus has recently been up on the mountain with Peter, James, and John, where he was utterly transfigured right before their eyes. However, the other nine disciples were left in town at the foot of the mountain, and while they are waiting for Jesus to return, a man comes to them, hoping they will heal his son who has been plagued with a demonic spirit. Apparently, that did not go very well. As we just read, when Jesus walks back into town, there is a big crowd gathered around his nine disciples, and He finds them arguing with the teachers of the law. But notice, when the crowd sees Jesus, they were “greatly amazed and they ran to greet him.”

I’m wondering if you can appreciate the irony of this picture? On one hand you have the disciples of Jesus who have given up on ministry in order to argue about religion, and then you the WONDER of meeting Jesus! Do you think that might serve as a commentary on the way the world sees the church in the 21st century? Let me ask you a question: When the world looks at Jesus followers at Colonial, what do they see? Do they see argumentative people who have failed to help them; or do they see Jesus, such that they are overcome with wonder and their hearts are filled with hope? Church: what is our mission? To be the light of Christ, right? We want people to see Jesus, not a bunch of argumentative and ineffective disciples.
As the story continues, Jesus asks what they are arguing about. Now…that question is never answered, because a desperate father interrupts, pleading the case for his tortured son. In vs. 16 the father states, “Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able. And Jesus answered them, “O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me.”

Note: Jesus isn’t calling the father a “faithless generation;” Jesus is referring to his disciples. His disciples were supposed to carry on the ministry of Jesus in His physical absence, but they were “faithless.” They did not help the suffering boy and his anxious father; instead, they burned up their time arguing about religion. Jesus is clearly frustrated with his disciples. Over the years these very same disciples had witnessed countless miracles. And no doubt they tried to cast out the demonic spirit by all kinds of different methodologies and tactics, but to no avail. So…convinced that they couldn’t be expected to do the things that Jesus did, they resigned themselves to religious banter.

Church…take this story to heart. Jesus clearly expects His disciples to be full of faith, and to do His work in the world. His expectation is that we will learn from Him, and that we will exercise his power and his authority to bring healing, freedom, and hope to a hurting culture in His name. When we are faithless, we are rebuked, and let’s face it: we deserve that rebuke. And I’ll be honest, this rebuke makes me uncomfortable…and it should…because the question that He is asking of the Father is a legitimate question: “How long must I put up with faithless disciples?” That’s a telling question. The inference here is clear: disciples who are continuously “faithless” are those who will eventually lack the presence of Christ…He will withdraw from them…they will no longer benefit from His presence among them. Let that bother you like it bothers me for a few more minutes, and let’s look at what comes next in the story.

At the end of vs. 19 Jesus says, “Bring the boy to me.” Picking up the story in vs. 20, “And they brought the boy to Jesus. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. And Jesus asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.” And Jesus said to him, ‘If you can’! All things are possible for one who believes.” Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe; help my unbelief!” And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, “You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.” And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, “He is dead.” But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. And
when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, “Why could we not cast it out?” And he said to them, “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.”

There’s a lot here, so let me point out just a few things and then we’ll wrap up. First, notice that the most loving, most important, most powerful thing that we can do to help people is this: bring them to Jesus. At the moment that Jesus says, “Bring him to me…” you know something powerful and wonderful is going to happen.

When we pray for people, that is what we are doing…we are bringing people to Jesus. We are presenting them in all of their brokenness, we are laying them at His feet, and we are making ourselves available to do his bidding on their behalf. Picture that happening citywide! One of our goals for this season of WITC is that 100,000 people would be engaged in missional prayer. 100,000 disciples of Jesus would be bringing people to Jesus in prayer, and making themselves available to do our Master’s bidding on their behalf. That is a powerful picture…I’ll come back to that in just a minute.

Now, notice what happens when the boy is brought before Jesus. The first thing that happens is that the demon acts out. This is predictable: when darkness is confronted by the light of Christ, there is a confrontation. The King of the universe has authority over the agents of darkness, and they know it. So when the boy is brought before Jesus, the evil spirit throws the boy on the ground. Listen church: when you pray for people…when you bring people to Jesus…be aware of the fact that you may actually see things get worse before they get better. When Satan has control of a person, he is not inclined to give it up easily. There’s going to be a confrontation, but that’s OK…and it’s necessary if people are going to be set free and made whole in Jesus’ name.

Jesus then asks a question of the father, which gives the father an opportunity to reveal both the son’s condition, as well as his faith or lack thereof. The father reveals that his son has been tormented since his childhood, and we get the sense that the father is at the end of his rope. He is desperate, he is exhausted, he is scared to death for his boy, but after the failed efforts of the disciples, the father has little faith that Jesus can help his son. So he states, “If you can help us…help us.” I can image the raised eyebrow and the flicker in the eyes of our Master when he replies with, “If you can??!?” Is that the best you can do Dad… “If you can?” Jesus then declares, “All things are possible for one who believes.”

The boy’s father gets it immediately. He understands that as one who is interceding for his son, he has a role to play in bringing his son to Jesus. He must believe…he must demonstrate faith. And yet the father is honest enough to know that he has some “unbelief” issues, so he cries out, “I believe; please help me with my unbelief!”
What a powerful moment! I think so many of us can relate with this father. We do believe in our heads, but we need help ridding ourselves of the unbelief that has taken root in our hearts. And yet the picture is clear: without faith…without belief…there will be no healing on this day. Why is that? Why doesn’t Jesus simply cast out the demon and move on? Why is faith a prerequisite for healing and freedom? I suspect it’s because Jesus is not a “transactional” kind of guy. Remember, in the end, God is looking for a relationship with His creation. Jesus is looking for a relationship with His disciples. Our Father is looking for a relationship with His children. God is relational…not transactional. When we place our faith in someone, we invest our hope in their character, and we make ourselves vulnerable in that relationship. Jesus is looking for that investment in the relationship…He is waiting for us to admit that we cannot do it on our own…He is waiting for us to place our trust in Him and Him alone. Clearly Jesus will not simply heal the boy in a transactional way…he invites the father into a trusting relationship, and He is willing to make up the distance that is lacking in the father’s faith when the father admits his struggle with unbelief.

Then Mark writes, “And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit…and it came out…”

Notice, the liberation and healing of this boy is timely, because a large crowd will witness this transformation and they will be forever influenced by what takes place. In other words, the miracle that Jesus performs happens in the public square, not the privacy of a church sanctuary. Jesus absolutely intends to bring glory to the Father by accomplishing His purpose IN THE WORLD…IN THE CITY…in the workplace and in the schools. Read the gospels, and you’ll find that the vast majority of Jesus’ ministry happened outside the walls of a sanctuary. Such is why we need to be “out there,” bringing people to Jesus in prayer, with faith that Jesus absolutely will change their lives in a radical and public way.

Finally, as the story resolves, the disciples ask the question we would all be asking as well, “What did we do wrong? Why couldn’t we cast out that evil spirit? We employed best practices, we used every bit of our intelligence and giftedness, but we failed. Where did we go wrong?” And Jesus reveals what we all need to hear this morning: “This kind cannot be driven by anything but prayer.”

Prayer is the most powerful tool in the disciple’s toolbox. Prayer is not the last resort, it is the first. Prayer is not the least we can do…it is ultimately the best we can do. So, here are a few suggestions for sharpening your prayer life as we seek to pray for Kansas City as the Church in Kansas City.

1) Begin with repentance. God will not pour out His power and His glory upon an unrepentant soul. God will not work powerfully through the prayers of a believer who rebelliously continues
to live in sin with no brokenness or repentance. Do you want to see God work powerfully through your prayers and your life? Turn away from that sin that you secretly indulge in…run from it as fast as you can, and ask Jesus to forgive you and to remove that desire from your heart once and for all. When you finally experience freedom from your own sin, you will be filled with gratitude and faith to pray for others to experience the same.

2) Ask the Father to help you with your unbelief. Confess your unbelief and ask God to give you the gift of faith. As Paul writes in Ephesians 2, even faith is a gift so that no man may boast. You won’t simply muster up more faith on your own. You need to draw close to God, and He will fill you with faith that can move mountains.

3) Narrow the field. Choose a specific street of houses that you are going to pray for regularly in your neighborhood, or a certain group of co-workers, or even a specific person in your sphere of influence. Most of us pray too generally and too broadly such that we cannot possibly be rendering ourselves available to do God’s bidding for those whom we are praying. Pray specifically, and then be ready for God to use you in serving those you are praying for.

4) Identify prayer reminders. Most of us need to be reminded to pray throughout the day. So pick something that will remind you to pray. Perhaps it’s a street sign, or the Royals logo. Maybe it’s a certain time of the day like 11:11! WITC has some tools for you to use as well.

5) You are invited to text “LoveKC” to 74574 to receive a daily prayer guide. Some of those devotions were even written by yours truly. You will also receive a link for Blesseveryhome.com that will provide you with the opportunity to pray for a handful of your neighbors in your neighborhood every day. Again…these are tools that you can use to develop the habit of praying for our neighbors here in Kansas City.

6) Remember that to love the city, is to first PRAY for the CITY! And remember that by praying for another person, we are bringing them to Jesus with faith and confidence that Jesus absolutely will bring freedom, healing, and salvation to those whom we are praying for. I hope each and every one of you will be part of an army of 100,000 people who are praying for this city! Pray every day, and pray with faith! Amen?

Colonial, what is our mission? To be the light of a Christ in a hurting culture so that the lost are found, the broken are made whole, the fatherless find hope, and our city is blessed. And what is our first and most vital core value before all others? We PRAY FIRST. So let’s pray.