

I. Introduction

A. Leadership

1. How I lead

- a. Love (patient, kind, and honest);
- b. Vulnerable and candid
- c. I can't lead anyone without speaking freely and prayerfully Spirit-disciplined

*My responsibility or calling, any shepherd's calling for that matter, is to humbly lead toward the realization of the upside-down Kingdom of God and the process of becoming like Jesus as individuals. While God's redeemed family live all over the globe in different national and political contexts, we are called first to God's Kingdom even at the expense of our national and political contexts. Our first family is the family of God carrying out His mission to seek and save the lost.

2. Leadership is never easy, but this season, it's been really hard.

- a. Practicing Christians aka church people
 - 1) 9/2019: 79% attend church weekly
 - 2) 9/2020: 51% attend church weekly (in person/online)
 - 3) 1 in 5 church adults have abandoned church altogether

*1/3 waiting for the opportunity to leave; 1/3 remain home but engaged for good reasons; 1/3 assess any risk and are ready to go

- b. Predictions for 2021: major turnover in pastoral leadership (early retirement, change of occupation, not cut out for this, and overwhelmed to burnout or quit)

B. Today and next week

1. Where we are, what I see, and what God might be saying
2. What we are going to do about it

II. The Way Forward Pt. 1

A. Where we are

1. Convictions: God established His Church and calls her to glorify Him. He calls her to live in community, to submit to the governing authorities, and to populate the Kingdom.
 - a. Tension: gather, online, follow directives, etc. Every decision brings a new set of tension and criticism.
 - b. Core belief: every decision made and executed with a humble spirit and an obedient heart

*I'm doing my best but have assuredly made mistakes. I'll tell you this, the next time we experience a global viral pandemic accompanied with racial tension flowing into national unrest in a polarizing election year where there is a national shortage of toilet paper, coins, and bubble gum, I will do a much better job at leading.

2. Essential/non-essential

- a. Pastors and churches demanding to be labeled "essential" (joy when Trump identified and anger when Newsom didn't identify—we really shouldn't acknowledge either)

*Thank you, President Trump, and thank you, Governor Newsom, but neither of you have the pedigree to declare the church anything.

b. Reflection:

- 1) Government has no responsibility and no power to decide what church is or isn't
- 2) We do not look to the government to receive confirmation for or against our existence or practice
- 3) God alone conceived and established the church as a result of His redemptive purposes - the church was born out of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ

*This does not mean that the body of Christ does what it wants or rejects what it doesn't like. We have a right to do what loves God and loves neighbor. This means that there are no cut and dry easy answers during this time. (If you care about people you'll do **this**; if you are a courageous Christian you'll do **this**; anyone who is firmly planted in one of those places isn't actually leading)

3. The church is ...

- a. A people called out from every tribe, tongue, and nation (Rev 7:9-12) who have become God's family (Gal 3:23-29).

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." (Revelation 7:9-12)

Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. (Galatians 3:23-29)

- 1) Other than Israel, there is no nation that God has made a covenant with. The only new covenant since Israel is the new covenant of the blood of Jesus and it is made with God's global family, not a national entity.
 - 2) While believers live in the midst of the laws and freedoms in their nation, God's Word supersedes the context of all.
- b. Global family of God
- 1) 2012 - 2 billion Christians in the world
 - a) 2025: the most Christian continent will be either Africa or South America
 - b) Average Christian today: a woman in a village in Africa/South America who is inconceivably poor

*You have more in common with an inconceivably poor woman living in Nigeria who follows Jesus than you do with someone in your political party who doesn't follow Jesus. Following Jesus is not the same as public promotion of the Judeo-Christian ethic (like saying Mosaic Law is the same as the new covenant)

2) John 17

- a) vs 15-17: Jesus is the hope and light of the world through us
- b) vs 20-26: unity and love

*One of the things that I believe this season has revealed is that the Church of Jesus Christ is not good at loving one another. We don't sacrificially love our brothers and sisters in our own local bodies let alone our brothers and sisters around the world. In many ways, we live and think with little difference than any other American.

B. Our mission

1. Matthew 28:19-20

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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

2. Acts 14:21-23 (PATTERN!)

When they had preached the Gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God. And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in Whom they had believed.

- a. Evangelism (v 21)
 - 1) New converts
 - 2) The news of Jesus (through word and deed) to those who have not heard or have not accepted
- b. Discipleship (v 22)
 - 1) Maturing believers in Christ
 - 2) Communicate a new way of life that replaces the social norms and behavioral patterns; process of exchanging my will for God's will
- c. Community (v 23) Integration of these disciples into a new community (the church)

*Don't shrink or dilute the mission. We don't have the right or authority to focus on only one or the other. Each of us is called to surrender and obey the mission of evangelism, discipleship, and community (not one at the expense or neglect of another).

*Therefore, we set aside our preferences and equally focus on the lost world, the building of our faith, and the connection to one another we have in Christ, fully aware that we are a small part of God's global family.

C. My current experience

1. 2020

- a. Avengers: Loki and Hulk
- b. Cowardice or courageous?
 - 1) Hiding behind verses; afraid; lack of trust in God; not brave enough to say what needs to be said; sheep bending to the government

- 2) Leading well; moral courage; taking action on well-thought-out and considered moral and spiritual grounds despite the potential risks and consequences to myself

*"Matt, you are leading the church to not be the church"; "Matt, you are leading the church to be like Jesus."

*If you have a ministry like Jesus, it will probably be made up of 12 people who don't get your illustrations, and one who wants to kill you.

- c. Clarification: many of you have been encouraging and supportive, and inspirational, and have sought to ask questions, listened, and consider regardless of opinion
 - 1) Human nature and criticism or personal attacks
 - 2) My pandemic heroes: Beth Meade, Ray Neuman, Joni Strom, Ben Ward and many others who have written, emailed, and told me how much they are praying for me and love me. I also am on an incredible team of people leading CrossPoint who are not afraid to voice their convictions or disagreements and run toward the mission together despite the personal cost and sacrifice.
2. The problem: the same issues dividing Americans are also dividing the Church (which is in direct opposition of the prayer of Jesus).
 - a. We have behaved in a manner suggesting that we are willing to give up spiritual maturity for our conspiracies, our rights, our science, our fear, our influence, our sources, and our comfort.
 - b. The imago Dei in us must be screaming out that this isn't working and that we need something eternal and good and true. We need Jesus alone, unhinged from our preferences, politics, and philosophies. Not in some sentimentalized way, but a radical obedience and discipleship to Jesus where it's like we hate everything else but Him. That is our only hope.

D. Revelation of the pandemic

1. Revealed that the Church seems to have a frail faith dependent on environment rather than an active faith anchored in Christ (the thing about anchors—every generation has had the arrogance to think that they were only anchored to Jesus, but the Bible warns otherwise.)

*I'm not saying we don't have faith. Travis, about a month ago when he was preaching, said that if we die, we go home. And we all cheered. I don't doubt that many of us here at CrossPoint would be willing to die for Jesus but would we be willing to live without taste or without freedom for Jesus? In that moment, I thought to myself, "I will follow Jesus to death, but will I live for Him without what I want?"

- a. We are far more nationally anchored in our faith than anyone would like to admit. In fact, some of us won't admit it.
- b. The Bible is so clear on our citizenship but the draw to what is familiar and present and visible is so strong.
2. We live in a context that is not normal as far as God's people goes.
 - a. The Bible was primarily written by the poor, the exiled, the marginalized, the persecuted.

- b. We read the Bible from a position of favor that I believe has caused our faith to stop shallow (our concept of persecution; instead of using our freedoms to grow God's Kingdom, we complain about what we've lost and choose to fight by voting and passing legislation; why have legislation to bring our Bibles to school when we barely open them let alone surrender to the words contained in them and take them to heart?)

*I think in some ways we would be more satisfied with a moral society where we can't actually tell the difference between the redeemed and non-redeemed, than with a society that challenges the truth and is hard to live in but clearly identifies those who need Jesus so we can pursue them.

3. Biosphere 2, Arizona State University

- a. Fall of 1991, airtight three acre mini-world complete with humans
- b. Lots of discoveries and lessons but one that was unexpected
- c. Trees
 - 1) Grew faster than on biosphere 1 (planet Earth) but wouldn't completely mature
 - 2) They would grow fast then collapse - every one of them.
 - 3) Turns out that the lack of wind was the culprit.

*The presence of wind in a tree's life makes it stronger and is therefore able to mature and not fall down due to its own weight. If there's no wind, the trees end up being much weaker and aren't able to survive for very long but they grow fast!

*I believe that this pandemic has revealed that many of us, myself included, have grown up fast in the absence of "wind" (difficulty, trials, suffering, etc.). Our culture (even Christian culture) teaches us to fix or avoid difficulty and pain. I hate to admit it, but I'm becoming more and more convinced that the unbiblical prosperity thread in Christianity is not limited to Pentecostals but runs through the American mindset of following Jesus. This has resulted in a faith that may not be able to stand under its own weight let alone a moderately serious pandemic and government overreach.

*Obviously, this doesn't characterize everyone in the church. But be careful not to dismiss this. Interestingly, you know what my pandemic heroes have in common? They all have experienced significant wind in their lives. Have a conversation with them, and you'll see that they are trees that stand tall because they have shared in the sufferings of Jesus. Might be something to ponder.

*I believe that this pandemic is God's merciful test for His global family to recognize and evaluate where we are in the development of our faith and how we do or do not think like Jesus.

III. Transition

A. What next?

- 1. Over the last few months, God has been working on and in me, directing me and our staff toward what He wants from us in light of what's been revealed.
- 2. I'm done reacting to the ever-changing environment (not that it has been wrong). I'm not saying I'll ignore what's going on or be foolish, but I am seeing a clear path forward. As much as I've been tempted to walk away from this, I've never been more sure of what God has called me to do.

*The test has been given, we have some feedback, and it's time to shift from survival to action.

- 3. Next week ...

- a. Therefore... (specifics)
 - b. If you want a faith that will withstand the wind that Jesus promises is coming, then stick around. If you want to truly step into who we are as the global family of God, then you're in the right place. If you want to experience peace that is grafted into your character not dependent on circumstances, then hold on (for one more day ...). But if you want to go back to "normal" or the way things were, then I want you ask you, because I want to love you better, to consider sticking around and seeing if God wants to change your heart. Because I believe that if we ruthlessly root out our idols and tear down our strongholds we've built, God is going to do a work that you and I cannot comprehend. But it will be uncomfortable for all of us because we are by nature an adulterous people.
- B. So take some serious, focused time this week to wrestle with God and question yourself and question what I've said this morning. Come back next week to hear how we are going forward to become the righteous trees that God is committed to making us into.