

**PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY
REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON
“WHY CHURCH? REASON FOUR: MENTORS”
2 TIMOTHY 1:1-14
October 3, 2010
9:00 & 11:00 A.M. SERVICES**

Today is World Communion Sunday. The sermon today is the fourth and last in our series on: **“Why Church.”** The focus of our attention today is a little bit different; it’s on me as the pastor, the shepherd or spiritual leader of this congregation. The scripture today provides for me a homiletical framework to have a frank conversation with you about my role as the spiritual leader and mentor of this congregation; at least, from the point of view of what Scripture says about it.

Studies show that people analyze their pastors. They love them, tolerate them or flat out don’t like them. Other than the starting quarterback of the local football team, there is hardly any other role that gets as much armchair scrutiny as the pastor.

There was a man who never seemed willing to wake up for church. His wife tried and tried every week, but he refused to get up. She said, **“Honey, come on. You’re going to be late for church.”**

“I don’t care — I don’t want to go,” he mumbled.

“We go through this every Sunday Why don’t you want to go?”

“Because I don’t like those people, and I don’t like the pastor.”

She replied, **“Honey, get out of bed and get dressed. You are the pastor!”**

Frankly, if you don’t like the pastor, get in line. There are days when some pastors don’t even like themselves.

All joking aside, the reason there's such admiration or dislike for some pastors is that leadership and mentoring are important. Today's sermon offers a fourth reason why we do church: We crave spiritual mentoring.

So I am going to discuss with you this morning what good pastoral mentoring looks like. I am going to combine Paul's example in this text with my own values, hopes and shortcomings. Then we'll be able to take an honest look at the kind of spiritual leadership we all crave.

Look at Paul in 2 Timothy, chapter 1. He's encouraging Timothy to be a leader. In doing so, Paul is also offering several insights concerning the nature of effective pastoral leadership. Paul was a leader and a shepherd who walked the talk.

Look at the picture of Paul in verses 3 and 4. Praying for Timothy. Remembering shared experiences. Longing to see him. Having a relationship where he's deeply impacted by the younger man he serves.

Spiritual leadership that is most effective is interactive. Relational. Caring. Emotive.

Rev. Melanie Rosa, is the District Superintendent of the Miles High Pikes Peak District where I served before coming here to Park hill. While Melanie was serving as the pastor of the Lakewood United Methodist Church, she told of a time she heard another pastor preach a funeral for a teenager who committed suicide. He spoke of eternal punishment and how this teenager would never go to heaven. He pontificated about all the problems with young people today — drugs, rock 'n' roll, greed, godlessness.

The preacher said nothing to comfort that family. Said nothing about God's forgiving love. Said nothing that demonstrated any human connection to the people he was serving. His focus was on making a point. Not consistent with Paul's instructions to the young Timothy. Why church? Because this is the place where I can demonstrate care, affection and connection to you, the people God has sent me here to serve.

Two dominant images stand out in the New Testament as pastoral references: the shepherd and the servant. These images stand out more than the teacher and more than the leader. As pastors, we don't shepherd and serve information, the budget, our e-mail inbox or the committee agenda. The direct object of shepherding and serving is always you, the people with whom we're connected.

As pastors, we will always face the challenge of attending to the urgent over the important. Spiritual leadership means remembering that people, not programs, are the most important agenda in the church.

What's more likely to produce growth in most people — information or inspiration? Some people leave the service informed, others leave inspired. I would venture to say that inspiration will always trump information in fostering ones growth.

That's what Paul is about here. Sure, he's instructing Timothy — but he's calling to his heart. He's hoping to reignite his soul.

For all the importance of my preaching, it isn't textual accuracy that brings transformation as much as textual efficacy. This stuff really works. And O, how it works! You can become a new creation in Christ Jesus. Through Christ, I am able to become something different. Why Church? The church helps me to become the person God has called me to be.

In an NBC radio interview way back in 1972, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel offered some advice that still speaks to us almost 40 years later: **“Let them remember that there is a meaning beyond absurdity. Let them be sure that every little deed counts, that every word has power and that we can do — every one — our share to redeem the world in spite of all absurdities and all frustrations and all disappointments. And above all, remember that the meaning of life is to live life as it if were a work of art.”**

Look around you; you are living works of art. My prayer is that every Sunday as you come to worship, you will be inspired as artists in the way your lives are being painted.

What do you want to hear from this pulpit? What does your heart need to hear? What would make you walk tall out of the door back there after every service in this sanctuary?

Spiritual leadership requires inspiration. Whether it's in sermons, in meetings, in counsel, or in side conversations I pray that what we do here inspires each of you toward real life changes. In my estimation that is effective leadership!

In verses 8 and 9, Paul reminds us that God *“has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose*

and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, ...revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”

Why church? Because there are just certain deep soul-needs within all of us that can only be satisfied through the power and relevance of preaching Christ Jesus. We need the church.

It is here in church where we can get an understanding of God that makes sense in our cubicles on Monday mornings. It is here where we can get the Truth that impacts how we are to take care of the kids. It is here, in church, where we can get a better idea of how to love those people who are near-impossible to love. It is here where you can learn how to make their lives different because of something important you heard in church. All of this is possible because in this place we are *“relying on the power of God”* (v. 8).

Why church? Because the pastor is here every Sunday modeling kingdom living. Paul says, *“Follow me as I follow Christ”*. My calling is not just to teach about the Christian life, but to model it. Perhaps that is the course that Bishop long missed or forgot in seminary. As your pastor, I am charged by God to make the scripture alive and relevant. Words are great, but action is better! Come and worship every Sunday and get a demonstration of the Spirit and power of God’s presence. Let us all model kingdom living.

The church’s mission is vital. Yet the intangibility of what our work produces can be problematic. Let me sound a word of thanks for all of those who volunteer week after week to make our ministry meaningful here at Park Hill. Regardless to how difficult some weeks can be I thank God for a biblical worldview that informs the way I am able to approach the difficulties of life, faith and career.

I need that assurance when a members calls to say, **“My mother committed suicide.”** I need that assurance when I have more emails that I have time to read. I need that assurance when I am working at the very edge of my capacity.

Dan B. Allender, in his book **Leading With a Limp**, emphasizes the advantages of loving weakness: **“Our calling is often shaped by our weaknesses as much as by our strengths. We tend to run with our strengths and avoid those people and tasks that expose our weaknesses. But the story of God is not a saga of human potential; it is the revelation of kindness and passion of the Father who seeks and redeems sinners. Therefore, our strengths may help**

us with certain tasks and responsibilities, but it is our frailty and sin that make known the glory of God's story" (pp. 149-50).

I thank God for you, the people of this church. I thank God for those of you who send encouraging notes and emails. I thank God for those who send challenging and troubling emails. I thank God for those who demonstrate an understanding that the church is so much more than a person or personality. I thank God for those of you who crave spiritual mentoring and look for it here at your church.

Why church: Because I pledge to you my best in relationship, inspiration, teaching and modeling. If you can cite other reasons for coming to church and want a healthy picture of spiritual leadership, I would love to be your pastor. I would love for this to be your church.