

111217 Matthew 25:14-30 “Opportunity●Vision●Plan”

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What do you see when you drive to church? Here's what I see every day (*picture of new home*), on almost every road I drive. New house after new house. New development after new development. New building going on all around us. Wake Forest is growing. Rolesville, Youngsville, North Raleigh, Franklinton -- all growing. New people moving in around us all the time.

Now, we can complain about the increased traffic, whine about the constant construction, and question how many more grocery stores they'll squeeze into Wake Forest. But we can also see all of this community growth as a positive opportunity for our church.

Because I know, without a shadow of a doubt, that God wants every single one of these people to know his love, to know his Son, to be part of his Kingdom. Many of these new young families and recent retirees streaming into our community already know the Lord; but many of them do not. Many do not have a church home, and many have been part of Christian churches that lay a heavy legal burden on them, and teach them that they have to do something to earn their way into heaven, when Jesus has already done it all for them.

Every day when I drive around the community, this is what I'm seeing. God is putting an incredible opportunity into our hands here at Hope. “Reach these people for Christ. Help these people come into the Kingdom of God.” What is Hope going to do with that opportunity?

There's a simple principle that the Bible teaches. ***When the Lord God puts something in your hands, he expects you to make excellent use of it.*** I call this the principle of Christian management. You and I are Christian managers. God entrusts us with all sorts of things in this world. He created the world and everything in it. He owns it all. But the Bible teaches us that God puts a certain amount of his stuff into your hands, into mine. We are the managers of things like money, time, health, talents, food, clothing, homes, smart phones, families, friendships ... opportunities, too.

And ***when the Lord God puts something in your hands, he expects you to make excellent use of it.***

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

In our Bible reading for today, Jesus talks about this principle of Christian management. He tells the story of a man who goes away on a journey, leaving his servants in charge. He gives them each a sum of money, and with it the opportunity to use the money wisely or foolishly. When the man comes back, there's one guy who gets in serious trouble. Why? Because he made absolutely no use of what was entrusted to him. He hid it away. He sat on his hands, and didn't bother trying to use what he'd been given to benefit his boss.

Reading: Matthew 25:14-30

"Make excellent use of everything I give you," Jesus is saying to us today -- talking to us as individual Christians, but also talking to us as a church. And that's where I'd like to focus today.

God has put many wonderful things into our collective hands, as a congregation; and he expects Hope Lutheran Church to make excellent use of it all. And right now God is putting into our hands at Hope this particular opportunity.

“Reach them for Christ,” he encourages us. “Help them come into the Kingdom of God.”

I’ve talked about this a lot with our staff members at Hope, and with our lay leaders, and we’re all seeing this opportunity from God. Our vision is not to make Hope into some kind of a mega-church. Our vision is not to change the character and style of this congregation, or to lose the personal warmth of this church. Our vision is, very simply, to reach more people in our community for Christ. It’s to help more people in our community come into the Kingdom of God.

Do you share this vision? Do you see the opportunity that God is giving us?

When God puts something in our hands as a church – like the opportunity to reach a steady stream of newcomers in the community for Christ – he expects us to make excellent use of it. Don’t believe, for a moment, that he’d be just fine with us sitting on our hands, and resting on our laurels. I believe, with all my heart, that the good Lord expects us to do our very best, and that he will equip and enable us to seize this moment and make the most of this opportunity.

How? Our ministry plan for 2018 and beyond has three key points to help Hope respond to this opportunity.

1. Focused ministry priorities
2. Strengthened ministry staff
3. Increased ministry support

First, we need to strategically focus the congregation’s ministry priorities. We definitely want to keep doing what we’re doing well: children’s and youth ministries, small group ministries, Christian education ministries for all ages, caring

for the spiritual well-being of the members of our congregation.

But we definitely also want to be intentionally aiming our ministry efforts at the newcomers in our community. The time is right to expand our publicity and outreach efforts, letting more people out there know who we are, and what we have to offer as a Bible-based, Christ-centered, Word and Sacrament church. And as Hope has been doing from the very beginning, we need to keep moving forward, intently proclaiming and living the Word and love of Christ with boldness and creativity. You'll hear more, in the weeks and months ahead, about focusing the congregation's ministry priorities.

Second, we need to strengthen the ministry staff. Over the years, by God's grace, we've seen tremendous growth in our church. Membership keeps growing every year. Our facilities have expanded. We see a high volume of visitors in our church weekly. We're continually adding ministry programs, addressing both needs in the congregation and in the community. Hope's children's ministry, youth ministry, preschool ministry, trackout and Little Blessings ministries are all helping bring new families in the church. We've strengthened our budget and cash reserve positions in recent years. Our congregation, in many ways, is ripe for growth.

And, yet, we're still employing the same basic ministry staff model that we have used for the past 10-13 years: two full-time pastors, and one or two full-time DCE's. This year we have two interns and a vicar, but they're not here as a permanent staffing solution. With all of the wonderful ministry that's going on right now, with all of the incredible ministry opportunities that God is putting before us, the time is right for Hope to strengthen its ministry staff. So in January we'll be asking the congregation to extend calls to both of our

DCE interns, and to make them by next summer permanent members of our ministry team.

And here's the third key to our ministry plan: increased ministry support. We're going to challenge you, over the next weeks and months, to increase your prayers, praying for God to use this church to help his Kingdom to grow. We're going to challenge you to increase your participation, to get involved in Kingdom work, using your God-given time and talents. And we're going to challenge you to increase your generosity in giving, too. Our total congregational giving from year to year has been pretty good; but if those who can increase their generosity, can make that extra little sacrifice, our God will bless those gifts and enable Hope to do some exciting things for the Kingdom here in our community. One of our congregation leaders will talk with you about this a bit more in a moment.

What do you see when you drive to church? And what do you see when you look down the road for our church? God is putting an opportunity into our hands. ***And when the Lord God puts something in our hands, he expects us to make excellent use of it.*** Our vision is to reach more people for Christ, and to help God's Kingdom to grow. With focused ministry priorities, a strengthened ministry staff, and increased ministry support, we can achieve that vision.

I pray that God gives us joy as we work together to make that happen. In Christ's name. Amen.