

In 1947, Spicer Manufacturing Company created a credit union to serve its employees. When the company changed its name to Dana Corporation, the credit union changed its name as well. Then, in the 1980's, the credit union moved out of Dana facilities to its own building and changed its name to Diamond Credit Union. Sandy's father (who was the manager at Dana at the time) was instrumental in that last change. But decades later, when Hal's grandson got a job at Diamond, few people there knew of the link of the Hiser name to their company's history.

One reason for that institutional amnesia was the credit union had moved away from its original purpose in a process that organizational experts call "mission drift." Not that it mattered. Diamond continued to amass assets. It continued to open new locations. And a few years ago, it's state charter was amended to allow it to open accounts for those living near its branches - which meant even more customers.

But when it comes to the church, "mission drift" be fatal. That is because when a Church drifts away from the purpose for which God created it, it ceases to be able to work with God to bring about His kingdom "*on earth as it is in heaven.*" And the reason it ceases to do be able to do that is that it ceases to be the Body of Christ - deteriorating instead into being nothing more than a religious club that is more interested in boasting about its supposed spiritual achievements than doing what God wants it to be doing (as we saw in the video).

Not that this spiritual illness is new to the church. Its danger was why by the Apostle Paul wrote with fervor to "*to the church of God in Corinth.*" It is why the Apostle James wrote in anguish "*to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations.*" And it is why the Apostle John wrote in vivid detail "*to the seven churches in the province of Asia*" to share with them the revelation God had given him of what would happen to churches that drift away from the mission of making disciples. For if the warnings weren't heeded, the churches would die! Which shouldn't be news to us. Two thousand years later, we are well aware that the Church was created to make disciples. We know that the disciples the Church is meant to make should be equipped to transform the world. And we know the only way that can happen is when the Church carries out its mission in a purposeful way.

And yet, all around the country there are churches that are limping along in trying to carry out mission and ministry activities. There are churches that are slowly growing older and smaller. And there are churches that close their doors each year. Not because something outside their control occurred. Not because something catastrophic happened in their community. And not because a pandemic closed down their in-person meetings. They limped along, dwindled down, and closed because they let a spiritual malady called "mission drift" slowly take them away from the reason they existed: making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

So we don't suffer from the spiritual malady of "mission drift" as we "coddIWomple" our way through this not quite "post-quarantine" world, we have asked all our members to read a book by Thom Rainer titled [The Post-Quarantine Church](#). The book invites us to do several things. First, it invites us to review what we have been doing in mission and ministry to evaluate if "mission drift" has crept in. Second, it invites us to ponder the changes that have occurred around us in our

community over the last 18 months. And third, it invites us to continue in as purposeful a manner as possible to seek to make disciples in the unknown of the next 18 months.

As we see to do those three things this week, we move to chapter 3 in Rainer's book. It is titled "Reconnect with the Community Near Your Church," and it invites us to examine how connected we are to the community around us, and - if we are not as connected as we want to be - to ponder how we might begin to "*reconnect with the community.*" That is because it is easy for a church to get so busy doing things it thinks are good missional activities that it misses whether or not they are what the people in THAT PARTICULAR COMMUNITY need the church to be doing for them to come into relationship with Jesus. Not that the modern church is alone in this problem.

In the passage from Luke we see this reality displayed vividly. For in that passage, Luke tells us that "*as the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.*" He tells us, as we saw in last week's passage from John, that Jesus was not willing to skirt around Samaria as the Jewish people of His day did because of their hatred for Samaritans. And he tells us that such animosity ran both ways. As a result, Luke tells us that a Samaritan village where Jesus intended to stay "*did not welcome him,*" and in response 2 of Jesus' disciples asked "*Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?*"

In episode 1 of the 2nd season of The Chosen, this scene is shown in a very helpful way. It shows several Samaritans being verbally nasty to the Jesus, James, and John, and then spitting on them (which in the ancient world was an extremely insulting thing to do.). In response, John turns to Jesus and in anger says "*let us do something!*" "*What would that achieve?*" Jesus asks. "*Defending your honor!*" John replies. "*They reviled and humiliated you,*" James quickly adds. John then jumps back in and says "*They deserve to have bolts of lightning reign down and incinerate them.*" "*Yes,*" James adds, "*fire from the heavens!*" "*FIRE?*" Jesus asks. "*You said we could do things like that,*" John pleads, "*say the word, and it will happen.*"

In the rebuke that then follows, Jesus then takes James and John on a review of what had been happening over the last few days, and how numerous Samaritans had come to faith in Him as the Messiah. Then, he summarizes what He had just been saying by stating that what He has been doing with all those Samaritans is "*sowing seeds that will have a lasting impact.*" And after letting that sink in, asks James and John "*Can you not see what's happening here? These people, who you hate so much, are believing in Me . . . and you're going to get in the way of that because a few people, from a region you don't like, were mean to you?*" After James and John apologize for not understanding what He had been doing, Jesus chides them one last time, saying "*You wanted to use the power of God to bring down fire to burn these people up?*" And John sheepishly replied "*Well it sounds a lot worse when you say it that way.*"

But Jesus didn't stop with just pointing out that they had misunderstood His work among the Samaritans. He then sought to RECONNECT them to their mission as His disciples, saying He was going to call them the "*sons of thunder,*" explaining that while this designation was a negative thing on this particular day their passion could be a positive thing if they were connected through

compassion to the people around them God was sending them to help Him save. WHICH IS A LESSON FOR US AS WELL! As disciples of Jesus here in this community, we too need to be connected to the people around us. We need to know who they are, what their needs are, and how we might “*share Christ’s love*” with them. And then we need to do so day after day.

What this might look like in the coming months we do not yet know. How we will seek to do this in the coming years has yet to be worked out. And what the results may be God alone knows right now. But we do know that if we commit to this work, our Heavenly Father will be with us. We know that Jesus will give us the vision to see what to do. And we know that the Holy Spirit will supply us with the power we need to even our enemies into friends - of us and God.

Not that such work is easy. In fact, it is incredibly difficult. And at times, it may feel and sound impossible. But since it is not US who will be doing the actual work of making disciples, but the God who can move mountains working in and through us (as we are merely channels for God’s miraculous work in this world), that will not be a problem. All we have to do is be faithful. All we have to do is follow Jesus’ teachings, obey His instructions, and seek in the programs we design and the mission activities we propose to move beyond just doing things for ourselves to doing things that are INTENDED TO “*introduce people to Jesus Christ, help them become faithful followers of Him, and equip them to share His love with others.*”

That is because the way we are to go about being the Body of Christ is not rocket science. It merely requires that we act in loving ways toward our community by finding out what the needs are of the people around us, evaluating with how we can help them with those needs, and then planning new programs or ministry initiatives to meet those needs. Sometimes that will take creativity. Other times it will take some preparation and planning. But sometimes the thing to do will be simple and obvious. We see this in a short excerpt from the writings of A.A. Milne.

In that excerpt, Milne tells how Winnie the Pooh and Piglet hadn’t heard from Eeyore for days. So they trotted across the Hundred Acre Wood to Eeyore’s house. “*Hello Eeyore,*” said Pooh. “*Hello Pooh. Hello Piglet,*” said Eeyore, in a glum voice. “*We thought we’d check on you,*” Piglet said, “*We hadn’t heard from you, and wanted to know if you were okay.*” Eeyore was silent for a moment. “*Am I okay?*” he asked eventually. “*I don’t know. Are any of us okay? All I can tell you is that right now I feel really rather sad, and alone, and not much fun to be around. Which is why I haven’t bothered you. Because you wouldn’t want to waste your time hanging out with someone who is sad, and alone, and not much fun to be around.*”

Pooh looked and Piglet, and Piglet looked at Pooh, and they sat down on each side of Eeyore. Eeyore looked at them in surprise. “*What are you doing?*” “*We’re sitting here with you,*” Pooh said, “*because we are your friends. And true friends don’t care if someone is feeling sad, or alone, or not much fun to be around. True friends are there for you anyway.*” “*Oh,*” Eeyore said. And so the three of them just sat there in silence. And while Pooh and Piglet said nothing; somehow, almost imperceptibly, Eeyore started to feel a very tiny bit better.

God calls us to do something similar in the ministry programs and mission initiatives we might create to just be with the people of our community, showing them God's love, offering them our friendship, and putting into practice the admonition to "*love one another as I have loved you.*" As we do seek to do that, the practical minded among us may ask how we are going to pay for the new ideas we might dream up. And the skeptical among us may answer that question by saying "*We can't afford to do new things.*" But when God is present, and God is calling a person - or a church - to step out in faith to do His work, HE promises to provide what is necessary. We see this promise in one of the most well known verses in the Bible, Psalm 23:1: "*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.*"

The word "*want*" in that verse doesn't mean desire, however, as in God will give us everything we desire. It means God will give us everything we NEED. And the truth of that promise is sitting right in front of you in this week's announcements. For in the announcements today, we are announcing that God has graciously provided a financial gift to cover the costs of new mission activities and ministry endeavors. We're calling God's gift "The Kingdom Fund" because we will be using it to fund an expansion of God's kingdom in this place as we seek to reconnect to our community with acts of love, mercy, and compassion. So, read the announcement about the creation of "The Kingdom Fund." Then speak to God about how YOU might help Him make disciples in some new way through our church. And then talk to me, or Shaun Hicks, so we might together (as we hear from Luke) work to be a church "*fit for service in the kingdom of God.*"