

MISSION SUNDAY
What Does the Lord Require?
Ridge Church Missions
October 28th, 2007

Micah 6:6-8

“With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Introduction – Pastor Jeff

On Ridge Church’s website, www.ridgeumc.org, the following words serve as an introduction to the Mission Ministries of the church. *At Ridge United Methodist Church we have a heart for missions and are firm believers in the biblical admonition that to whom much is given much is required. As a result of this belief we strive to be active in missions as a way of giving our thanks back to God and making a difference in the world around us.*

This is the vision and focus of the work our mission teams do at Ridge Church as we seek to be good stewards of God’s creation and to care for God’s people by serving locally, nationally, internationally, and environmentally.

Today is Mission Sunday – an opportunity to look back upon and to celebrate the things that have happened within Missions at Ridge Church over the last year. As we do this today, we have selected some words to frame our time together; words that I imagine are familiar to many of you, words from the Prophet Micah. *“With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of*

my body for the sin of my soul?” He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

These words are important words that can be for us both a reminder and a challenge. They can be for us a reminder of God’s steadfast love for us, a love that is not conditional and that doesn’t need to be bought or earned. We don’t need to make sacrifices to be worthy, we don’t have to go through certain ritual actions; God’s love is offered to us because that is the nature of God. These words can also then be a challenge for us to respond to God’s love and to do so by loving kindness, by doing justice, and by walking humbly with God.

This morning, as we celebrate the things that have taken place in the area of missions over the last year, a representative from each of our four different mission teams will spend just a few minutes sharing stories about some of the great things that have happened. Hopefully in their stories you will also hear an invitation to partner and to join in the work that is being done for God and God’s people.

Environmental Missions – Kathryn Midkiff

Good morning! My name is Kathryn Midkiff. I am the team leader for the Environmental Missions Team. The Mission Sunday theme is Visible, making our invisible God, visible to the world. Throughout the morning, we will share with you some stories of individual lives affected by mission work, beginning with my own life.

The message of the Gospel is as clear as A, B, C: **A** Admit that you need God and the daily transforming power of the Holy Spirit. **B** Believe that God sent His only

Son, who died on the cross for your eternal salvation. **C** Commit to the Christian life. **A, B, & C!**

The only reason a person would need a Savior is if that person needed saving. For most of my life, I have believed that God sent His only son to die for our sins. That is a collective WE. *I* did not **NEED** God. Jesus died for the sins of the world but not my sins? What sins? There was a time when I looked around at others and thought that I was doing pretty well. Relatively speaking, I was a good person. I did not kill people or steal or even cheat on my taxes.

However...inside I had an aching emptiness, a longing that I could not quench. That was when I began to feel God nudging me to look more closely at my life, everything. Up close, it was pretty messy. When I began to look at myself, authentically and without any masks, it was painful. Instead of comparing myself to others, I began comparing myself to Jesus. According to Romans 12:2 I am **NOT** supposed to be conformed to the standards of this world, but I am to let God transform me inwardly by a complete change of my mind. Jesus was supposed to be the perfect example of how I should live my life, the benchmark for my life. With that in mind, I **definitely** needed saving. It was then that I acknowledged my own sinful nature and I began a personal relationship with Jesus.

The primary mission of the church is to effectively communicate the A, B, and C components of the Gospel message. The Christian life offers two distinct joys: 1) the joy of salvation, and 2) the joy of sanctification.

The joy of **salvation** is the knowledge that becoming a Christian means that I have eternal life. Jesus died on the cross for me, forgiving my past sins, washing them

away to the bottom of the ocean, and, in effect, wiping my slate clean, purifying my past, present, and my future.

The joy of **sanctification** is the experience of living the Christian life. Sanctification may be found through studying the word of God, by worshipping in community for other believers, and by serving Him. I now know the joy of sanctification.

God transforms us through Jesus Christ. God transforms the world through us. Mission work is one of the ways God uses us to transform the world.

Ridge Church participated in an annual shoe recycling campaign in August, collecting 1,600 pairs of shoes, for the following three purposes: 1) **RECYCLE** worn shoes, 2) **REUSE** shoes that are in good shape by distributing them to those in need, & 3) **REDUCE** trash by supporting this recycling effort.

Nike recycles the worn shoes into material used to make playground equipment for U.S. urban renewal programs. In addition, the recycled material is also used to make soccer balls as part of a program called ninemillion.org, created by Right to Play, a Canadian non-governmental organization, that supports sports in refugee camps worldwide. Nine million children are refugees right now. Paw Lah Hay, 14 years old, has lived in a refugee camp in Thailand since 1997. Her mother is dead and she lives with her father and older brothers and sisters. She is only one of 140,000 refugees living in Thailand. The refugees fled Myanmar as long as 20 years ago and sit, still waiting, for a dictatorship to crumble or another country to welcome them.

By supporting the Reuse-a-Shoe Campaign, you are offering the opportunity for children to play, providing something as simple as a soccer ball, yet it means so much to a child living in a refugee camp. Paw Lah Hay appreciates your mission work.

The Environmental Missions Team hosted a St. Francis Blessing of the Animals worship service at the end of September this year. This special service for pets and their owners was conducted in remembrance of St. Francis of Assisi and his great love for all creatures. Words do not adequately paint the picture of the experience of this worship service. There were 22 pets and their families who participated. There were dogs and cats, of course. In addition, there was a rabbit, a hermit crab, and a picture of a horse.

It was a beautiful day. We sang, read scripture, and each animal was blessed. I expected a lot of barking and chaos. It was exactly the opposite of what I expected. There was a lot of wanting to get to know one another; a lot of sniffing was involved with that aspect of the day. It was special to see Jeff Clinger moving from pet to pet, looking them each in the eye, and blessing them one by one. All pets and their owners waited patiently. It was amazing to witness. At the end of the worship service, each pet received a certificate and a treat. Please listen to the words of the animal blessing:

We love you, we bless you, we appreciate you, and we behold the loving spirit within you. We acknowledge that your presence is a blessing in our lives. May God continue to bless you with a long life, good health, and a happy home.

One family was particularly touched by the service. Mary brought her dog Midnight, a very thin black Labrador. Sadly, Midnight is dying from Leukemia. The service meant so much to Mary. She thanked and thanked everyone for the opportunity to share in this time of worship.

In closing, I would like to share the mission statement of the Environmental Missions Team: **We are committed disciples caring for Gods creations working toward a sustainable future.** I encourage you to get involved in mission work to make our invisible God, visible in the world! Thank you.

International Missions – Morgan Midkiff sharing from George and Sue Cook

Good morning. I am Morgan Midkiff. I was asked to give the message from the International Mission team, all of who are out of town this weekend.

Three years ago I went with others from Ridge church to Haiti. This experience opened my heart for International missions. This last summer, my mom and I went on a 10 day mission trip to Africa.

Ridge church, at this time, donates support to two places and people in Africa and two in Haiti. Let me tell you about them.

Lowell and Claudia Wertz have been missionaries in Africa for more that 25 years. Currently they are serving in Kigomia, Tanzaniza. The Wertz's are coming to Ridge church as part of Wednesday's WWE on January 16, 2008. We encourage everyone to hear about their mission experiences.

Kokeh Kotee is a native of Liberia and is ministering to pastors in his country. Kokeh has visited Ridge in the past and loves our congregation.

Haiti is the poorest country in the western hemisphere. Fortunately the political situation has greatly improved the last two years because of a new president. We are fortunate at Ridge to have Terry and Mary Jo Smith on the board of directors at HOPE orphanage, and Sue and George Cook who frequently are in Haiti filling in for missionaries at a guest house.

Each missionary raises their own support... that is living and traveling expenses. Ridge for several years has donated to Greg and Cathie Benson who are the Christian Service International (CSI) field directors and run the guest house where Sue and George are temporary hosts. We also donate to Tim and Toby Banks, a couple with 5 children, who left Ohio to run the CSI orphanage, called HOPE.

HOPE orphanage also gets some of the Ridge donations. HOPE was opened 2 ½ years ago with the plan of having 20 girls who were true orphans around 2 years old. The girls will grow up at HOPE to be great citizens of their country. There are now 19 girls ranging in age from 3 mo. to 8 years old.

In March when Sue was in Haiti, she e-mailed us a story about Gherlie. Let me read her story to you.

Two days ago, Toby Banks was called by Madame Luciene, who runs an overcrowded orphanage about an hour from here. Fortunately I was able to ride with her and FanFan (our Haitian driver). When we got to the place, way out in the country, the buildings were plain cement block and cement floor. Madame carried the 21 month old (16 pound little girl) and gave her to Toby. Afraid and crying she settled into Toby's arms, hanging on tight. Her name, we learned, is Rose Gherlie. She will be called Gherlie.

When we were ready to leave, Madame asked us into her chapel, just footsteps from where we were sitting. As we stood she started singing "How Great Thou Art" (in Creole). FanFan prayed. Whew! Holy Ground! We said goodbye. Toby sat in the back seat of the truck on the long ride home. Gherlie held on tightly to Toby, but loosened her grip as she almost fell asleep. As we neared the orphanage, (Toby and I changed vehicles

and Toby then drove to the orphanage). Now it was MY turn to hold this precious child of God. I even carried Gherlie into her new home, HOPE, and to have her new nanny moms meet her for her sisters to greet her. Holy Ground. Amazing Grace. Unspeakable Wonder. God moments. One of the nannies took her and bathed her, washed her filthy hair and changed her clothes. Then they fed her some spoonfuls of rice but kept her away from the other girls' hands. New children always have colds, worms, scabies and until that is cleared it can spread to other children. Toby said today that Gherlie was able to be with the other girls and she almost smiled. She is home.

Gherlie and many others are the reason Ridge believes in International missions. Thank you.

National Missions – Pat O'Brien

Our National Missions team supports our overall Mission statement that Jeff read earlier and we particularly believe that Ridge church has a heart for missions and in the biblical admonition that “to whom much is given, much is expected.

The National Mission team seeks out, prioritizes, and facilitates opportunities for Ridge church to thank God for all we have received by serving these goals anywhere in the United States except Lake and Porter counties, which fall under Local Missions.

Over the last two years National Missions has supported;

- College ministries such as Intervarsity at Purdue Calumet and College Connection at Ball State University.
- Red Bird Missions in Beverly Kentucky, which serves rural residents of Appalachia.
- The 1st UMC of Slidell, Louisiana which sat in 5ft of water and lost 90% of their contents from hurricane Katrina.
- Hurricane Katrina recovery by sending work teams to Slidell in 2006 and 2007 and we'll be going back in 2008.

Our first mission trip leads me to a story of hope and that hope fulfilled; We were assigned by UMCOR to work on two homes that were next door to each other that had sat in 4ft of water from Katrina. These homes were owned by two sisters in there mid eighties. Eris Lajaunie and Jermaine Pastoret, who were living temporarily in a trailer on their property. Jermaine's husband had passed away two weeks prior to Katrina and Eris' husband passed away two weeks after Katrina. Eris told us that he just couldn't cope with the devastation from the storm.

Eris had about \$6500.00 in the bank which she paid to a contractor to start on her home but the contractor left town with her money and several others. UMCOR and volunteers were their only hope.

These two ladies, particularly Eris came out everyday to talk to us and you could see and feel the hope that they had that with our help, as well as many others who worked on their homes, they would eventually get their lives back in order.

I'm happy to report that Eris and Jermaine were moved back into their home around Christmas time last year. I only wish we could have been there for the occasion.

In closing I'm going to ask for volunteers to serve; next Saturday, Nov 3rd we're going over to Nappanee to help out for the day. We'll be leaving the church parking lot at 6:00am. Give this prayerful consideration and if you think you can help please sign up in the entryway.

Local – prepared by Kathy Giannini

Our United Methodist tradition calls upon us to serve our less fortunate neighbors. They are only too easy for us to find – only six miles from our doorstep, the homeless of Hammond and northern Lake County communities are served by a family of charities

called the Greater Hammond Community Services. Not much further to our east lies many more in need in Gary, served through Sojourner Truth House, Brothers Keeper, and several other shelters.

Your church serves a weekly Monday night dinner, fifty-two weeks a year, to all clients of the Hammond Warming Shelter. Volunteer groups and families provide a hot lunch every week to approximately 25 clients of the State Street Center. Food supplies collected in our entryway grocery carts stock the Food Pantry, which is in desperate need this year. School supplies, laundry supplies, diapers and household goods help the homeless families with minor children at Capes House. The Angel Tree gift collection and bell ringing for the Salvation Army are coming up. Even our entryway Collection Centers help by collecting hotel toiletries for the shelters, used eyeglasses and hearing aids to the Lions Club, used cell phones for Sojourner Truth House, and medical supplies to Children of Abraham.

This year, as boxes upon boxes of school supplies were being unloaded at Capes House, one of the homeless mothers stopped in at the office. She looked at the Ridge Church representatives and said simply, "I don't know who you are, but thank you." Every child at the shelter went to school with their complete supply list and didn't have to stand out from the other kids as "the homeless ones".

At this same time in August, one grandmother trying to raise her two grandsons lost her job and subsequently their home. She and the boys became clients at Capes House. In typical bureaucratic fashion, she got caught in a paperwork jam between the county and the township, and was denied assistance for the boys at that time. The sixth grader was required to wear uniforms to his public school and she had no money to clothe

him. Capes House asked if we might locate any used clothing for him, though it had to be specific to their uniform code. From Ridge Church cash donations earmarked for Greater Hammond Community Services, within two days she had gift cards to buy him two new uniforms, socks, underwear, and a few extras. Michael himself sent us a handwritten thank you.

If you haven't yet, come out with us to serve lunch at State Street Center and talk to the clients. Last year Kathy Giannini met a fellow who was a past homeowner in Fairmeadows subdivision here in Munster. Do you think it can't happen to people you know? Too many families are one job loss or divorce from homelessness. Each one of us can be the helping hand to pull them back to their feet and walking again with dignity.

The opportunities are varied – come cook in our Ridge kitchen on Mondays for the Soup Kitchen, come serve a Saturday lunch at State Street, or pick up extra items each time you're grocery shopping for the Food Pantry. Do you like to bargain shop and help out at the same time? Join Kathy's email distribution list to get the latest needs from Capes House, and buy laundry detergent, bleach, mops, brooms, diapers, and whatever is the latest request. Can't get out much? Cash donations earmarked for Local needs or to Greater Hammond Community Center will be used wisely for people living only fifteen minutes from here. Clothing and household donations go to all the shelters. Want to get involved? Kathy Giannini would be thrilled to talk about all the opportunities. Join us in helping people who are truly our neighbors.

Conclusion – Pastor Jeff

As you can clearly see, there are a lot of great opportunities to serve being offered at and through Ridge Church. It is so exciting to see God at work in the lives of people being touched by these different ministries.

If you were present in worship on September 30th, you were handed a “Mission Priorities Questionnaire.” We received 125 completed questionnaires and learned a great deal from the responses. One of the things that came through the most clearly was that as a congregation we consider our local missions to be a very high priority. Both of our hunger ministries – our Saturday lunches at the State Street Center, and our Monday dinners at the Warming Shelter – were listed as top priorities on more questionnaires than anything else. The questionnaire also showed us that as a congregation we are much more likely to contribute financially to mission projects than we are to volunteer our time to serve or to travel on a mission trip.

We also learned that there is a good sized group of people who are interested in serving and who have ideas for mission projects that we could be doing as a church. Many of you wrote these ideas down on your questionnaire... and a couple of you even wrote your name. That’s right, many people said they had ideas for mission projects or were interested in being involved with mission projects, but didn’t write down their name. In the newsletter you should have just received, or that you will receive in the next couple of days, there is a list of these projects. If you were someone who was interested in working on these projects, please call me or email me so that we can get you plugged in to serve.

All of these things that the prophet Micah lists for us, loving kindness, doing justice, and walking humbly with God, are actions. God calls us to serve others in active

ways – by loving, by doing, by walking. If you have heard a story today that spoke to your heart, if you have heard something that sparked your interest in getting involved, listen to that calling and take action. Find a way to get involved with a mission ministry – talk to one of these presenters after the service this morning and learn more about how to get plugged in. Drop me an email or a phone call in the next week and we can talk about opportunities to serve. And if you aren't able to be physically involved, consider making a donation to support one of these ministries – every contribution physically or monetarily, makes a big difference in these various ministries. Join us, as we seek to make a difference in God's world by loving kindness, by doing justice, and by walking humbly with God.