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Antioch Network Gathering
Christ Church Anglican, Phoenix, AZ

The Voice of Antioch Network #1

Apprenticeship to Jesus—the Foundation

By George Miley

Antioch Network has now passed to the next generation of leadership. This gives Hanna and me great joy. We can now just be present among you as you, under God and led by the Spirit, continue to take the work forward.

John 13:3-5—a picture of spiritual authority

The teaching this morning is part one of a two session mini-series. The second session tonight is titled on our program “Components of the Antioch Network Voice.” What we will say this morning is its foundation.

Last evening we discussed the question “What is Antioch Network?” I experience Antioch Network as 1) a fellowship 2) of Christians 3) which is international, and 4) composed of the entire spectrum of Christian traditions—Messianic Jews, Eastern Churches, Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholics, Reformation Protestants, post-Reformation Christians and contemporary non-denominational churches. This is what we understand to be the “one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church.”

Antioch Network is a fellowship with an apostolic calling. What do we mean by this? We understand that we are called to initiate, to pioneer. We were born with a passion for the completion of world evangelization.

Antioch Network is a fellowship with a prophetic calling. What do we mean by this? When we use the word “prophetic” we connect initially with the legacy of the Hebrew prophets. They were raised up by God to call his people to return to holiness. This was the primary (but not exclusive) component of their message. And the foundational characteristic of a prophet was a holy life. How can you call God’s people to return to a holy God when you are not living a holy life?

This leads us into a consideration of the various components of Antioch Network’s voice. What is the prophetic message with which we have been entrusted? Let me suggest that our “prophetic message” as a fellowship can be broken down into “prophetic messages”. Our collective voice has various components. Some among us carry one component more than others. This to be expected. This is the way Christ designed his Church. There is a diversity of callings, as there is a diversity of giftings. We celebrate this diversity.

What integrates these components? “Prepare the way for the Lord!” Antioch Network is a fellowship of Christians preparing the way for the Lord. Preparing the way for the Lord has two components to its meaning: 1) We are preparing the way for the Lord to return to earth in the future, and 2) We are preparing the way for the Lord to come now—into our own lives, families, societies, nations.

Revelation 21:5—“Behold, I am making all things new.” What is happening on earth? God is making all things new. Where is he starting? With the human being. God created humans to have dominion—to rule. Satan is God’s enemy, and he seeks to attack God by attacking God’s image bearers.

It is crucial that we keep the main thing the main thing. I want to suggest that our topic this morning is the main thing—the foundation upon which all else rests.

World mission is not the main thing. It springs from the main thing.

Reconciliation is not the main thing. It expresses the effects of the main thing. ***The main thing is Apprenticeship (discipleship) to Jesus.*** All the various components of the Antioch Network voice spring from this foundation.

Five points:

1 - The primary focus of Jesus’ teaching is not how to behave correctly. The primary focus of Jesus’ teaching is how to become the right kind of person—one who behaves in ways which express rightness formed on the inside. This is such a crucial understanding. Jesus did not come to make us act in certain ways; he came to make us a new kind of person. Living with him, as his disciple, transforms us.

2 - Becoming the right kind of person—a Christlike person—requires a process of being transformed. Be careful with your theology of the Holy Spirit. If we do not have a mature theology of the Holy Spirit, we will be trapped in immaturity. Our understanding of the Holy Spirit must be integrated with everything else Jesus and the apostles taught. The Holy Spirit transforms me. But he will not do it “to” me, or “for” me, but only “with” me. I must choose it, day by day. I must rely upon him, moment by moment. He does it all.

Discipleship with Jesus is a process that continues and matures throughout my life. I have been 1) formed by my own sin, and the sin all around me in family and society. Now I must be 2) re-formed. Part of being re-formed involves learned destructive behaviors being 3) unlearned—unformed—and new behaviors being learned—formed. The whole process can be thought of as trans-formation. It happens in apprenticeship to Jesus. Jesus came to teach us how to live.

3 - Transformation toward Christlikeness takes place as we learn to live moment by moment in God’s Presence. This is probably the most important thing for us to learn. If we think, for example, the most important thing is to love our neighbor, we are trapped. Why? We will try to love our neighbor. We will rely on our will-power. We will fail. We will try harder. We will fail again ... and again ... and again. And gradually we are more and more in danger of descending into a life of quiet desperation—a life of failure—a life where we give up hope. Our real need is to be transformed into the kind of person who loves—the kind of person Jesus is.

As his disciple, I am with Jesus, to learn from Jesus, how to be like Jesus. I learn how to live in the Presence of God. In the Presence of God I am transformed.

Our most foundational need as human beings is to be loved. But none of us has the capacity to meet that need, in ourselves or in others. Only God can meet it. But this requires a daily

relationship of closeness to him. The more we hear the voice of our Father saying, “I love you” the further our healing goes.

Missions is a high calling. It is also a delicate calling. The demands of cross-cultural ministry subject the malfunctions we carry within to increased pressure and attack. Proclamation of the gospel among all nations will be most effectively done by those who are being transformed into the likeness of Christ. The more we personally experience healing and transformation, the more we will naturally communicate a message that is truly good news.

4 - God is always present to us; we must learn how to be present to him. Living in God’s Presence is not about whether God is there. He is always there. It is about whether we are there. We are the ones who have gone away.

Why is living in the Presence of God so hard? Because sin has so extensively damaged us. We often think the only purpose of the cross was to take away guilt. Well, the good news is that the cross does indeed take away guilt. But dealing with guilt is the easiest part of salvation. Once we bring our guilt to the cross, much more needs to be done. We need cleansing, healing, reformation.

Do you know that you have a soul. Gradual transformation of the inner life toward Christlikeness cannot be achieved through willpower. But it does require our choices. We cannot change deeply-established destructive behaviors through willpower, but we can decide to follow practices Jesus teaches that allow us to open our inner life to God.

Spiritual disciplines are practices, exercises, we can choose. We learn them from Jesus and our Judeo-Christian fathers and mothers, who have practiced them for millennia. A great place to begin with the disciplines of the spirit is solitude.

5 - Living in an experience of God’s full salvation involves these things:

a - **removal of guilt.** Bring your guilt to the cross. You may say, “George, you don’t know how dark my heart is.” You are right; I don’t know. But I do know the God who created you. He created you in his image. He created you to be with him.

What is humility? It is simply living in harmony with what is true—about God and about me. What is true of me? I am a magnificent being, created in the image of a magnificent God. But I am also a fallen being. I went away from him, but he made a way for me to come back. The way is Jesus. Take the way!

Salvation is more than just the removal of guilt. It is deliverance from the pervasive damage of sin within us and returning us to the awesome state in which and for which God created us.

b - **cleansing.** Cleansing takes place in the Presence of God. Once our sin has been forgiven, and our guilt removed, our souls must be cleansed from its after effects.

c - **healing.** Sin has wounded us: our own sin, the sin all around us in family, society.

Although we have been wounded by sin, there is no need for us to live in pain from the sin someone else committed against us. We are determined, not by what happens to us, but by

how we respond to what happens to us. I cannot control someone else's choices. I am only responsible for my own choices. When I am wronged, I get to choose how I am going to respond to the wrong. How do I learn how to respond? In apprenticeship to Jesus. Jesus teaches me how.

If I am unable to do it, he teaches me how to become the kind of person who is able to respond in the right ways. Forgiveness is not saying it is okay. Forgiveness is stepping back and allowing God to be judge. I am wounded far more by my own wrong responses than by the choices of others to wrong me. I do not have to be wounded by a decision someone else makes.

d - **transformation.**

e - **redemption.** Whatever sin I have committed, God can redeem. I have made a mess of my life. God can bring good—beauty—out of it. In his time!

In your time, in your time,
You make all things beautiful in your time.
Lord, please show me everyday,
As you're teaching me your way
That you do just what you say,
In your time.

In your time, in your time,
You make all things beautiful in your time.
All my life to you I bring,
May each song that I will sing,
Be to you a lovely thing,
In your time.

