

Calling the Church Back to Its Senses

APEST



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Recovering the Sensational Church:

Calling the Church Back to Its Senses

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“Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.”
Ephesians 4:19

It feels as if our world has gone mad—in both senses of the word. Every day it seems we wake up to another news story of someone who is wreaking havoc on everyone and everything around him. It’s a world that has lost its sensitivity and given itself over to all kinds of sensuality. And thankfully, it is in these moments that we have the ancient words of Scripture to remind us that we are not the first to face a world gone horribly wrong.

If we have learned anything over the past couple of weeks, it is that we are in a leadership crisis of sorts. Just turn on any news channel and someone will be blaming the leadership of someone else for the present crisis. And while it would be easy to simply lob further criticism from the cheap seats, this sense of leadership crisis is less a statement on society and more a call and opportunity for the church. Leaders either mirror or make a culture. And in a world where most of our leaders and “would be” leaders today reflect the chaotic culture around them, the need is for leaders who would be culture makers of a different kind of society to rise up.

It is no coincidence that this poignant description of the world from Paul in Ephesians 4:19, comes on the heels of his call for the church to become the mature reflection of Christ. And for that to happen the Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Shepherds and Teachers will need to help the church return to all she was destined to be.

If you have been following our recent blog posts, then you know that Alan and Neil have spent the last few weeks continuing to establish our need as a church to return to the fivefold ministry defined in Ephesians 4. This means training and releasing leaders in all 5 of the church’s leadership functions. In today’s blog, I want to continue working this idea out for us as a church.

To do so, I want to release a metaphor that I hope will help us continue to make more sense of what training and releasing these leaders might look like and exactly what again is at stake if we don’t. It’s not a pure explanation, in that it’s a metaphor and like all metaphors breaks down in certain places. But as I’ve sought to explain and relate the fivefold ministry of the church to others, it has helped some get their hands around the idea.



The 5 Senses

Today I want to suggest that the fivefold ministry of Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Shepherds and Teachers (APEST) function to the body of the church in much of the same way our 5 senses function to our physical bodies. In other words, just like our 5 senses lead our body into maturity, so the fivefold ministry of the church provides the same for the body of Christ. And while our bodies certainly do more than our five senses, it is our five senses that help us make sense of the world around us and function well within it. In the same way, the church does more than APEST. But APEST helps the church become all she should be and live into maturity within the world. And it is why a church without every part of the APEST in function and operation may never live up to her full potential at best—or become senseless at worst. While I'm hesitant to create a one to one correspondence between APEST and each of our senses, it is at least worth noting the following correlation.

Apostles: help the church see

Prophets: help the church hear

Evangelists: help the church taste the goodness of God and share it

Shepherds: help the church touch (feel both pleasure and pain of others)

Teachers: help the church have a nose for the truth

Again, while I would be hesitant to put too much weight into any one to one correspondence, you can imagine that we could at least say that a church operating without Apostles and Prophets would be struggling to see, hear and say at best—or be deaf, mute and blind at worst. A church that refuses to train up Shepherds will eventually fall out of touch with those around them. A church without teachers will step into all kinds of things they could have avoided if their sense of smell was working. A church without evangelists will in the end wind up tasteless in more ways than one. Unfortunately, these are the exact descriptions that people outside (and sometimes inside) the church have often used to describe us as the church in our present state. And it is why I would suggest there often feels like such a difference between Christianity and Christ.

Jesus was Sensational

While I know the word sensational has some baggage on it today, I think it is worth redeeming when it comes to Jesus. Jesus really was sensational in every way (meaning he had all five senses in operation without limitation), but never gave into sensationalism. Everywhere Jesus went people tasted the good news. He saw what His Father was doing and joined Him in it. He heard from and talked to His Father on a regular basis. He was deeply in touch with everyone around him. And he constantly smelled out the traps of the religious teachers that tried to ensnare him. In other words, Jesus is the model Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Shepherd and Teacher. The Acts of the Apostles show us just what a church that has been led by the fivefold expression of Christ up close and personal might be equipped to be and do in the world.

Every Believer Has a Sensibility

The beauty of the church is that together we have the opportunity to be this same reflection of Christ in the world. More than simply mirroring the world around us, we mirror Jesus and in the process re-make the world. We do this individually and uniquely but never independently, because while we are each called to represent Christ in the world, it will take both of us to fill out His shadow. So every believer has a sensibility—a leadership gift to share with her brothers and sisters to make us all what God destined the church to be. While none of us can fully represent Christ individually, together we do what none of us can do on our own. Which means each of us has a propensity or wiring toward at least one of the fivefold leadership gifts. While none of us will have all five gifts in limitless proportions, the church together has the opportunity to resemble the limitless force of Christ in the world as each one of us lives into his sensibility.



A Call for Common Sense

It is worth noting that just because we each have a sensibility, none of us is excused from living without common sense. In other words, while we aren't all evangelists, each of us is called to share the good news. While we aren't all pastors, each of us is called to care. Not all of us are prophets, but we can all hear God speak—and so on. Every believer is called not simply to play to her strengths but also develop her weaknesses. And it is by imitating and learning from the gifts and strengths of others who function as God's grace upon our lives that we each become more like Jesus.

The Temptation of Sensuality

It is also worth noting that every leadership gift comes with a shadow side. Every sense has a sensuality of sorts. Remember, all sensuality stems from using what we have been given to overpower or use others for our own personal gratification instead of empowering others for their and the world's benefit. All too often what God has meant to bless the church with becomes her cursing. And while we don't have time in this blog to delve into all of the fivefold shadow sides, suffice it to say that it has often been the experience of these shadow sides that has led parts of the church to reject some of these gifts all together.

The World's Sensitivity

Finally, for every sense given to the church, the world has a potential sensitivity. In other words, the world is hardwired for the church to lead. What is the entrepreneurial instinct but a call for the Apostle? What is the need for empathy and counseling but the world expressing the need for a Shepherd to be among us? And it is as the church steps into its fivefold gifting that she is ready to lead in a world that often is unknowingly longing for her true leadership. Sadly, when the church stops leading the world often loses its sensitivity or expresses it in unhelpful ways.

A Call to Come Back to Our Senses

This is why we at 100M are doing our best to call the church back to its senses. It is time for the church to become sensational again. The world has enough leaders mirroring the chaos around them. What we need is for the church to once again mirror Jesus and re-make the world. So why not be part of this "permanent revolution" or "primal" force and allow the Spirit of God to help you and your church realize your true potential?



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