

The principle of a critical mass works on human populations as well. There always seems to be some "magic number" that must be achieved before anything gets accomplished. The critical mass that turns a still photograph into cinematography is 24 frames per second. In business, there must be a critical mass of investors to start a new venture. YouTube defines critical mass for "viral" videos as 5 million hits within a 3-7 days period. In politics, "critical mass" is often confused with "majorities": in some instances, a simple majority of 51% initiates action; in other cases, like the congressional override of a presidential veto, critical mass is a two-thirds majority before change is achieved.

But even before the term became popular, Jesus defined the principle of critical mass for us. According to Jesus, the number of Christians required for critical mass is "two or three...gathered in my name" (Matthew 18:20).

Although you wouldn't know it by the bloated bureaucracies of many modern churches, Jesus intended congregations to be highly efficient operations. Jesus insisted to his disciples that valid Christian decisions can be achieved when just two or three believing members of the Christian community gather with faithful hearts and minds turned toward God.

We don't need a consensus or a quorum. We don't need to establish a standing committee. We don't need have to develop a long-range plan. We don't need an Executive Board action. We don't need a regional evaluation or investigation. We don't need two-thirds, 51% or even a simple majority of those present. We don't need district superintendents, area ministers, Presbytery or Synod executives, bishops, priests or ordained ministers of any kind to make good and valid, binding decisions within the living body of Christ.

What we do need for critical mass is two or three Christians with the heart of Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit. With Christ's Spirit, the community of faith always moves forward, even though perhaps only two or three are gathered in his name. Without Christ's Spirit, not even an assembly of 10,000 can achieve results that will empower the church for the future.

Jessica Moffatt, the executive minister of First United Methodist Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma, encapsulated the can-do and can-do-it-now attitude that Christ's Spirit can inject into a genuine Christ-body community. If any Christian at her church receives a call to act on an issue concerning faith, she says, "God can lay it on your heart in the morning, you can find a partner or team to help you do it by the afternoon, and you can tell us...about it the next day."

Too often our enthusiasm for organization sidetracks us away from the power of a critical mass of believers. We create such a glorious system of hierarchies and authority structures ("ecclesiocracies") that we forget how Christ chose a much simpler way to be present among us. This is not to say that sometimes big jobs and big plans for the church don't take large numbers of people working at a multitude of carefully coordinated tasks. Christ can also be present in a crowd. But we cannot forget that all fellowships of Christ start small: where two or three are gathered in Christ's name. We ought to celebrate this heritage and rejoice in the fact that the church is truly an example of "every-member-ministry."

I want you to look at the person on your left. Now look at the person on your right. Look at the person in front of you and the person behind you. Any two or three of you can literally change the world. With Christ's help, that's all it takes. Two or three. Critical mass.

Christianity is founded on the principle that two or three committed believers can change the world. Together, the prayers and faith of two or three can work the most astounding miracles this world has ever seen. We can incarnate the presence of Christ in this world. We can create the critical mass necessary for Christ's love to become a vital force on Earth.

The Reformer Martin Luther believed in the principle of critical mass: he called it the "Priesthood of All Believers." According to Luther, God created each one of us with the capacity to do great things if we have a Christ-like heart and an openness to the Spirit working in and through us. This was a radical idea in Luther's day. The Church preached that the clergy had a monopoly on God's gifts for ministry; lay persons had no claim to the Gifts of the Spirit.

Matthew 18:15-20 challenges that presumption. Jesus never said that critical mass occurs “where two or three pastors are gathered together.” Nor did Jesus choose the priests of his day as his critical mass of disciples: he chose twelve ordinary tradesmen. Wherever two or three ordinary, everyday Christians are gathered with the extraordinary heart of Christ and the exceptional presence of the Spirit, great things will happen for God’s Kingdom.

One last thought: The *Mythbusters* (on TV) believe the triangle to be the strongest of all shapes because “any added force is evenly spread through all three sides.”<sup>1</sup> Our God exists as a Trinity – one God in three persons – working in harmony, supporting one another, constituting the strongest force known. Where two are gathered in Christ’s name and the Spirit is present, there are also three: an unbreakable shape, able to withstand the pressures of life. Two people and Christ: critical mass.

If you think about it, you already know this to be true. There are people in our congregation and community who are real “go-getters,” people who always seem to get things done. Sometimes they have help, but it’s never a big crowd supporting them. These people will “see to it personally” that things get done without a big committee or a big budget. They just buckle down and get started, trusting that God will help them achieve wonderful things for God’s people.

The church is the place where “see-to-it-personally” people come together to “see to it together.” Will you be part of the two-or-three this morning? Will you join the critical mass forming in this church for a new day, for a new year, for a new future? The start of a new church year is a great time to consider your ministry at Federated Church and for the Fergus Falls community.

Prayer: Dear God, send your Holy Spirit upon us so we can have wisdom to make right judgements. Open our eyes to see what is right and what is wrong and what remains to be done. Encourage us to act. We ask this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen

## Celebrating Our Critical Mass

Rally Sunday, September 9, 2018

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Matthew 18:15-20

Before the middle of the last century, polio was the most terrifying and debilitating disease known to humanity. Many people considered polio the cruelest of all diseases because it overwhelmingly targeted children. Polio breaks out primarily in the warm, golden summer months, killing or permanently crippling its victims within hours or days. When, in 1953, Dr. Jonas Salk announced the possibility of a polio vaccine, the hoped-for cure went from experimental laboratory to the doctor's office in record time.

Today, due to cautious testing, group analyses, possible side-effects research, and insurance ramifications, it would take years to approve and circulate such a dramatic vaccine. But in 1953, panic over the approach of yet another hot, polio-ridden summer spurred public opinion ahead of scientific caution. Thousands of school-age children around the country lined up to participate in test runs of the new vaccine.

The impatience of the public reached what scientists call “a critical mass.” The demand to get the new, still-not-fully tested polio vaccine out and available to every child in America became an unstoppable force. Against many cautious voices in the medical community, the Salk vaccine went into production and became the long-awaited first line of defense against polio.

Physicists first used the concept of a “critical mass” to describe the conditions needed for a molecular chain reaction that begins once a certain atomic weight is reached and the atom splits. Once begun, the process is unstoppable, and the ensuing nuclear fission results in the release of tremendous energy. Safely harnessed, this energy runs the massive turbines at nuclear power plants. Packed into a metal casing, this energy becomes the deadliest of bombs. But nothing happens, for good or for ill, until that first initial critical mass is achieved.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://math.stackexchange.com/questions/1393965/are-triangles-the-strongest-shape>. Site visited September 6, 2018.