

SERMON TITLE- "Our Country and World"

TEXT- Acts 1:6-9

PREACHED AT- Neighbourhood Church

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We are closing off the formal part of our Sermon Series on our Mission Statement-

“To Build Committed Followers Of Jesus- To Do His Work In Our City, Country and World.”

I hope that it has been meaningful for you. It began as a response to the work, chaos, confusion and expense of our renovation. There have been times when we asked ourselves- “Why are we doing this? We had very nice offices and now everything is dirty and messed up.” We began this series when things were much more chaotic than they are now.

There is an answer- we are a missional church and what we are doing is part of that mission.

So what is our mission? What is it that we go back to when things get really frustrating? The answer should be our mission.

We have looked at the various aspects of that mission- piece by piece.

To Build-

We have a “building” assignment. Probably that language is influenced by the fact that in a former life I was a “builder.”

But that is not the reason for the language of building- the Bible tells us to build.

-Committed Followers of Jesus-

And what are we to “build”? We are building followers of Jesus.

But this is not a random process for the pure joy of building- these followers of Jesus are people on assignment- the assignment of doing the work that Jesus was sent to do.

-To Do His Work-

As we close off we come to a the phrase **“in Our City, Country and World.”**

If that phrase has a familiar sounding ring to it you are not mistaken- it comes from the very last conversation Jesus had with His followers-

So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" Acts 1:6

This is a very understandable question. Jesus’ followers had gone through an incredible season of highs and lows. For 3 years they had been following Jesus around listening to His teaching. They had become convinced that He was the Messiah and to them that meant that He would become King. That didn’t happen. Instead Jesus was executed as a criminal.

Then Jesus rose from the dead and that did not simplify things. The disciples were still trying to figure things out. Their big question however remained and they asked it again.

Jesus answered this way-

He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. Acts 1:7

Hmmm, not really an answer that solved a lot of problems but Jesus went on- **But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."** Acts 1:8

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. Acts 1:9

And there you have the phrase- **"Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth"** and our Mission Statement was deliberately patterned after it.

It is a pattern that says, the mission begins where we are living in and then it spreads, in concentric rings outward.

It begins with just one person- with you or me and our willingness to pick up and become followers of Jesus.

It goes from there to a community of people who make that commitment to follow Jesus. That is what the church is. We are working together to build this community. It is very real. It is very close. It is very tangible and its rewards and costs are easy to see.

We are building a church and to accomplish this people have to come and actually do the work. To pay for this people have to really write real checks.

But from that very close and personal challenge it goes outward.

Last week Ryan talked about the city. Where are we to do the work Jesus began? We are begin right here where we are living. God has placed us in Nanaimo. That is our city. This is where we live and work. This is the city we love and we easily have a passion to invest our time and energy into it.

But even investing in our city requires an outward vision- a vision that looks beyond a specific benefit to ourselves. Each year for the past several we have taken on projects that challenged us to look to our city. Those who worked at them felt inspired and rewarded- but the benefit went outward.

In doing these projects we are doing one aspect of doing Jesus' work in our city.

But our mission does not stop with our city. We are also people whose vision is not to stop with the city in which we live. As Kingdom people God has given us an assignment that is even bigger. It is an assignment that extends outward as far as we can see and even imagine- to the ends of the earth.

It is an assignment that is captured in the language of the Kingdom of God. It is captured in the Lord's Prayer that we repeat every Sunday-

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Matthew 6:9-10

As Kingdom people we live with the knowledge that the world as we see it is seriously broken and needs fixing.

What this means is that when Kingdom people see the pain and brokenness of the world they live in- even when it is far away- there is something in them looks for ways to bring healing and restoration.

Since the beginning of the church- Kingdom people began orphanages, hospitals

and schools. Since the beginning they went to visit those in prison.

Why? because they thought that they could fix the world? No, for the most part they didn't but they were driven by an impulse that said, "This is not how things are in the Kingdom to come- I am not going to accept that suffering is OK."

Peace Sunday

Today was designated Peace Sunday by someone in response to the fact that in a few days we are going mark Remembrance Day. Remembrance Day is when we remember those who have died in the wars of our nation. In many cases those wars were wars intended to protect our freedoms. It is an honouring of sacrifice that is deeply Biblical. Men and women gave their lives for us. To fail to acknowledge that is a terrible crime.

Along side of that it is only right for the church to set aside a Peace Sunday. As much as wars to defend our families and nation are part of the world we live in- war does not reflect God's will as it done in heaven.

We also do well to remember to pray for peace and wisdom to those who must make terrible choices.

While Ryan and I were in Saskatoon at the study conference I had a long talk with a man who is passionate needing to be messengers of peace in the world. He has set up Peace Maker teams that go into places of conflict for the specific purpose of working to bringing the message that there is a way of peace. When I spoke to him I wondered at some of his ideas- but what I didn't wonder about was that he was trying to bring the message that the KoG is a place of peace. He was living under the verse- "your Kingdom come."

He operates with a view that he is reaching beyond his city to the ends of the earth.

World Relief

We live in a world in which hunger and preventable disease is a brutal reality. We live insulated from this except when it hits the news from time to time.

But Christians from the very beginning have not only observed the hunger and disease in the world- they have been building hospitals and buying food to distribute.

In our MB world we have a organization called MCC that works specifically in all kinds of different ways to help those suffering from hunger, disease or natural disaster.

They operate with a view that they are reaching out to those in need all the way to the ends of the earth.

Evangelism

Alongside of these two needs, as Kingdom people we have also been given a very specific assignment- we are to spread the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

The very last conversation was Jesus' instruction, "you will be My witnesses." This means we need to actually tell people the Good News that Jesus came to bring and telling this Good News is where Jesus was very clear- telling this everywhere is our big assignment.

In our conference we have an agency called, MBMSI that is focused specifically on making sure that we never forget the "ends of the earth" part of that assignment.

Obviously when put in terms like this we quickly realize that we have been given a massive assignment. We have just moved from the small scale to as large a scale as can be conceived.

Of course this could be very inspiring but hopefully you have also asked yourself the question-

So how do we tackle this massive assignment?

This is a critically important question. The mission of God's people as agents of the KoG is massive and inspiring. In many ways it is kind of like the Star Wars movies- it is a story that spans over generations and the entire universe. Seeing ourselves in such a big picture feels very good.

But beyond feeling very good about having a place in the big picture- what does it mean? Is there a practical side to this?

In fact in the Kingdom of God, being down to earth is very important. The big picture is important, not only for inspiration, but because it makes a difference with what we do with our minutes, days, weeks and years.

Investing In The Kingdom Of God

And what does it mean for our daily lives? It means we need to invest our time and energy in that big picture.

Obviously with 3 themes as big as the one I mentioned that still means we hardly know where to begin but I want to focus on one aspect of investing in the big picture today and I will tell a story that I remember reading, even though I haven't been able to track the source.

It is a story of Admiral Nelson, commander of the British navy in the late 18th C. He was commander during the very height of British naval power.

In those days the ships of the navy were built of oak and to build a fleet like the British had required massive oak forests. Of course that meant cutting down those very forests. Somewhere along the way Nelson realized that while he was the beneficiary of the great oak forests of England- they were being rapidly depleted.

During his lifetime there would not be a problem but a future problem was inevitable. It was clear to Nelson that if England was to maintain its navies in the future new fleets of oak built ships would be built. To build these would require new forests of oak. And so Nelson began a program of planting new oak forests.

These forests would not mature for 100 years- well beyond his own lifetime- or even the lifetime of his children- but Nelson invested his own time and effort and persuaded others to invest in oak forests.

When I read that story I was struck by the fact that Nelson was acting according to a Kingdom principle.

It is easy and natural to invest according to what is closest to us. We don't need to be convinced that our families, our friends, our church and our city need investment. But as the circle gets wider and wider the immediacy of our concerns diminishes. That's how we are made. And to actually invest for generations still to come- that is even more challenging.

To invest beyond the circle of proximity and time requires a very deliberate choice to take some resources from the immediate and assign them to Nelson's oak forest. It is why that story is so compelling [I hope that it is actually true :) but even if it isn't the principle of the story, stands].

This principle has a very specific application for us as a church- it means that we take action to actually plant that “oak forest” that is required. It means that we take the assignment to look to “the ends of the earth” seriously.

It is why we deliberately, in keeping with our Mission Statement, think of agencies such as MCC, MBMS and MBBS as part of the calling as a church. Some of that takes place in our church’s budget commitment to those agencies beyond our city and province.

When you put your tithe to the church- by that very act you are contributing to your mission “to the ends of the earth.”

As our mission has evolved over the years we also have come to the conclusion that we need to have more regular and tangible reminders of our mission. As so we have gradually formed some patterns.

For several years now we have done “Community Projects” which represent, in very tangible ways our mission to our city. Ruth Bard has done a great job in giving us a project which allows us to work as a team to bless our city. That usually takes place in early spring.

This year Arlene, as you heard earlier, was inspired to try to take another longstanding commitment of our church and help make that into a church team project.

It is our commitment to educational training.

Over the years our church has given substantial resources to our students- specifically to those going to CBC. It happened somewhat randomly. Arlene suggested that it shouldn’t be random.

The more I thought about it the more I agreed.

In fact, the more I thought about it, the more I have become convinced that investing in education is a great illustration of the “Nelson’s Oaks” principle.

How is this?

#1. It Begins With Planting The Seeds

A forest begins when the seeds of trees are planted and this is what Children’s Ministry is doing.

Teaching our children to walk in the ways of God is a primary commandment.

Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Deuteronomy 11:18-19

This is a great commandment that God’s people have carried with them from the beginning. We need to first get God’s words into our own hearts and then we need to invest our lives into ensuring that these words are planted into the hearts and minds of our children.

We invest in this very practically and deliberately in our church.

We work at our Children’s Ministry program.

We hire a Youth Pastor

We have built a Youth Centre

We are making sure that we build the best possible Sunday School rooms that we can possibly do.

This is all working towards the instruction, “Teach your children.”

But it is all very focused close to home. It focuses on our children, on our neighborhoods, on our city. That is very important and that is where the work of building begins.

But what about the ends of the earth? We also have a vision to send our children out into the world. Some will stay close to home but many will not.

The ones we send out are carrying on the work of taking the Gospel to “the ends of the earth” when they take the seeds that have been planted in them into their new places of work, their new communities, their new families.

That after all was how the Good News spread from the beginning. It was not through big meetings where people made public onetime commitments.

Our children are the seedlings of Nelson’s Oaks- our church does the tree nursery well.

#2. It Takes Nurturing The Forest

This is an obvious statement. Unlike most crops, which produce crops each year- a forest produces a crop in the time frame of life times. The oak forests required to keep navies afloat, apparently took 100 years to mature. There were some trees that needed to be very large in order to build some of the ship’s beams.

As we look at our mandate of looking to “the ends of the earth” the same principle applies. Some part of our vision requires much deeper investment. For a person like Ryan to get his training- he required 7 years of full time education. Colin required 4 years of full time education. And unlike those who become doctors and lawyers the end will not be a salary that pays it back.

In this forest we need people who are willing to invest their lives in this particular way.

But that is not all, in order for that training to take place, someone will have to pay for it.

Thankfully generations in the past have invested and we are living off the forests that they have taken care of. Our young men and women are being trained and going and coming back.

But we need to make sure we are investing back to ensure that mature forests keep growing.

This week we are reminding ourselves of the fact that obeying Jesus’ instruction to go to the ends of the earth means we have to invest in aspects of the KoG that go beyond our city, our own sphere in concerns and even our own time. We are challenged to invest in the KoG.

Next week we will be introduced to a particular project- a couple of our children who are investing themselves towards the command to go to the ends of the earth.

Next week we will look for ways to invest with them.