

Jacob Hanson
01-06-2019

Sermon Title: "God's Grand Plan for Reaching the World"

Prelude

TFWS #2130 "The Summons"/Praise Book #199 "Lord, I Lift Your Name On High"

UMH #389 "Freely, Freely"

Responsive Reading: Psalm 72:1-14 UMH #795

Sharing of Blessings and Concerns

Prayer of Confession: Book of Worship #475

Children's Message: How do you talk about Jesus?

Nicene Creed: UMH #880

Lord's Prayer UMH #896 (Said during Communion)

Ephesians 3:1-12

Isaiah 60:1-6

Matthew 28:18-20

Sermon: "God's Grand Plan for Reaching the World"

Sermon Song: UMH #571 "Go, Make of All Disciples"

Communion: Isaiah 53:5; 1st Corinthians 11:23-32

Offering

Doxology: "Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow" UMH #95

UMH #664 "Sent Forth by God's Blessing"

Sending Prayer

Benediction

Announcements/Dismissal

Postlude

Questions:

- 1) Although you may not be a missionary or a person naturally gifted in evangelism, the Lord's plan for reaching the world definitely does involve you. How can you "make disciples of all nations" in your own life?
- 2) Looking at Isaiah 60:3 we see that God's plan for reaching the world includes using the Jews to reach the other nations. How did/does this happen?
- 3) Do you take evangelism (sharing your faith) seriously in your Christian walk?

Memory Verse: Matthew 28:19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."

"God's Grand Plan for Reaching the World"

Pastor Jacob Hanson

01/06/2019

Opening Prayer

Good morning, welcome to Kasson/Pleasant Corners UMC, I am Pastor Jacob Hanson and it is a blessing to be here with you this morning. We are finally in the New Year. We are now past all of the holiday season stuff, the Christmas trees are taken down, and we all have to change our calendars. It is 2019. As we enter this New Year, we are going to be talking about being new creations in Christ here in our church. The truth is that when you become a Christian, you are made new in God's image. You are no longer defined by the stuff that captivated you before. There is a transformation that happens where we leave behind our old selves, and become more like our Lord. There are a lot of aspects to that, but the one that you are going to hear quite a bit about this month is the sharing of the Good News, and how that is woven deep with being a new creation in Christ. You cannot talk about being a new creation in Christ without also talking about Evangelism. Today we start at the beginning of that trek, with God's plan to reach the world.

A section of scripture that we did not read today is actually our jumping off point in talking about sharing our faith in regards to God's great plan to reach the world. In Genesis 22:17-18 we read "Indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." That

scripture is God speaking to Abraham, the beginning of the Hebrews. In it we see that God's plan for the world is for Abraham's offspring to be exceedingly numerous, and that they will come to bless and save the nations of the earth. Spoiler alert, Jesus comes from the lineage of Abraham, it is through Jesus that people around the world are saved, and Christians number about 2 billion worldwide... which is an exceedingly large number. This is the idea that surrounds everything in Christianity.

In our first scripture we actually read together for today, Isaiah 60:1-6, we looked at an old prophecy that was given to the Jewish people long before the time of Christ. In the book of Isaiah you in fact have a lot of prophecies like this one that hold merit not only for the people of their day, but also for us. In these six verse we read God is talking about how He is going to help the nation of Israel to be made great for His name. The people that would have first read this, Israelites, would have been in captivity for a long time, and hearing good news like this from the Lord would have definitely been wonderful. However, there is something interesting in these six verse that gives a clue to God's plan to reach the world... to reach you and me. "Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising." While that may not sound like much on its own, put into the context of this entire book (which we will get into more this month) we will see that it is God's plan not only to save the people of Israel, but also everyone from around the world who would turn to Him. Don't forget that it is through Jesus that we are saved... and Jesus was a Jew.

If we are going to talk about God's grand plan for saving the world, we cannot overlook the fact that salvation is not just for any one group of people, but for all who call on the name of Jesus. In the case of our

reading in Ephesians we read about this dispute that occurs between Jewish and Gentile Christians over who is allowed into the Kingdom of Heaven. For those Jewish Christians, they expect that any Gentiles (meaning non-Jews) who want to follow the Lord must follow all of the Old Testament laws. The Gentiles, mostly Greeks and Romans, who had not grown up with these laws, disagreed. Paul's response to this dispute in the book of Ephesians is important for us to acknowledge and act upon. Paul is telling those in the church of Ephesus that the Good News of Christ's life, death, and resurrection is not just for one group of people... but rather for all who call on Jesus's name.

Now of course there are things that define one as a Christian or not. We read the Nicene Creed together this morning, and in it we get the basis for what it means to follow Jesus. It is also important to remember that Jesus says in the Gospel of John that "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through Me." We have to keep those facts in mind as we look at Paul's writing in Ephesians. However, Paul writes in verse six, "To be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." There is no disputing what God's plan is for the people of the world in Paul's eyes. This salvific gift that begins with the Jews is extended to all through Christ Jesus. Furthermore, Paul states that "so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places." In other words, through the church (both Gentile and Jewish) the world comes to know God's saving grace for all. It is through His people that others in all walks of life are supposed to come to know the grace of Christ. It is God's plan for saving the world that we as His people would share our hope, joy, and faith in Christ with others.

Christianity 101 is that Jesus came, died, and rose again so that we who believe in Him can go to heaven. No matter how you came to know the saving grace of Christ (growing up around it, through the church, through a friend, etc.) you can rest assured that you are saved through Jesus's blood if you call on Christ as your savior. This gift of salvation is huge and important and should be at the core of our lives. It is with this faith that we can go to the funeral of a loved one who knew Christ and legitimately say they are in a better place. It is with this faith that we can have hope in tomorrow even if today is just dreadful. This faith that we have is sustaining and life giving. But imagine if you had never heard about this good news. Imagine if you had never had parents or friends or a loved one or an acquaintance that cared enough about you to introduce you to Jesus in the first place... you would be without that life giving Good News. In the grand scheme of things, in the grand plan of the Lord for reaching/saving the world, it turns out that we as His church have an important role: to share that gift we have been given with others. As Paul says "This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him."

I want to share with you some truths about sharing your faith. First and foremost, we are called to share our faith by Jesus Himself. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." You are called to share the faith you have been given if you are indeed a Christian. When people here that they are supposed to share their faith, to "Evangelize", they often get uncomfortable... especially us stoic Nordic folks. But sharing your faith doesn't mean that you have to be a preacher, a missionary (in the traditional sense), or a crazy person. You

can get creative with how your faith is proclaimed, you just have to be willing to share it.

Everyone is a little different when it comes to sharing their faith. Some people are ridiculously outspoken and straightforward... others find ways that better suit their skills to share their faith. The big underlying thing for you is intentionality. Being intentional about sharing your faith is essential to you doing your part in God's great plan to reach the world. I have heard of folks who will send cards to those who are having a rough time, sharing their love of Jesus in its contents. I have seen folks intentionally put themselves in places with the goal of reaching others in that same place for Christ. I know for a fact that John Morris, a former Pastor here in our churches, helped out as a coach with the goal being to reach children for Jesus. Everyone's skill sets, interests, and abilities differ, but that intentionality to reach folks for Jesus is what really matters. I am talking about intentionality because that is the key point that most of us really struggle with. We treat talking about our faith like it is something that will just happen, like it's a bowel movement that will come out when it's ready... but that isn't how Evangelism works. If you think folks will love Jesus and come to church just because, then you are kidding yourself. Intentional sharing of faith is key, and it shows to a certain degree how deep your faith really is and if you really do love that person you are speaking to.

True evangelism comes from intentional prayer, and intentionally doing what the Lord has called you to do in reaching out to those around you. Think about it like doing the dishes or fixing your car. It doesn't matter if you wash all of your dishes by hand or have a nice dishwasher, the important part is doing the dishes! It doesn't matter if you have every tool and all the skill necessary to fix your radiator or take it in to a

mechanic who knows what they are doing, it is that the car gets fixed. In terms of Evangelism, sharing our faith with others, it is not how you do it, but that you intentionally reach out and share this saving faith with others. Many people will argue that they are not gifted in that way, that they have never done it before, or that they are scared. Like everything else in life that is worthwhile, it takes practice to get really good at sharing your faith. But no matter how much experience you have, you are still called to do it as a Christian. This isn't about tithes, or a higher church attendance, it is about eternal salvation. For the love of the Lord and for your fellow human beings who need this saving faith just like we do, we must be willing to intentionally share our faith. The reality is that if you are not intentional about sharing your faith, if you are not following Christ's words to "Go and make disciples of all nations," then either you are too skittish or you don't care about following Christ's word, and don't love others. Folks will perish without this saving faith. Don't forget, God's plan for saving the world involves us as His people talking about what He has accomplished.

As we leave here this morning, there is a question I want you to ponder and act upon. That question is, "Do I intentionally share my faith?" Realistically, as a new creation in Christ, as a Christian, do you share your faith with folks who you know don't know Jesus? Friends, family, coworkers, etc.? Are you praying for those people? Do you legitimately care enough about their souls to share with them? Do you, intentionally share your faith? To that end, you have a challenge this week. That challenge is to in some small way intentionally share your faith with someone else. It might be in a card, it might be a casual comment about how you enjoy church, it might be about something interesting you read in your Bible, but your challenge this week is to intentionally share your saving faith in Christ with someone else. That

is your part in God's grand plan to save the world. From Abraham to Isaiah to the Ephesians to you... this is His plan, that you would share your faith and bring others into His kingdom. Let us pray.

Closing Prayer

January Plan:

Outreach/Making All Things New

Jan. 6th: Ephesians 3:1-12; Isaiah 60:1-6, Matthew 28:18-20 "God's Grand Plan for Reaching the World"

Responsive Reading: Psalm 72:1-14 UMH #795

Jan. 13th: Acts 10:34-43; Isaiah 42:1-9, "A New Creation in Christ"

Responsive Reading: Psalm 29:1-11 UMH #761

Jan 20th: John 1:29-42; Isaiah 49:1-7, "God's Chosen People, from all Walks of Life"

Responsive Reading: Psalm 40:1-8 UMH #774-775

Jan. 27th: Isaiah 6:1-8; Isaiah 52:7-10, Romans 10:8-15, "How Lovely Are Those Who Announce Peace"

Responsive Reading: Psalm 27:1-4 UMH #758