

Psalm 47, Acts 1:6-8
“Going out into the world: Part II”

Well, how was your week? The first week of summer usually tends to be that week where you take a deep breath, check inventory, with kids you figure out how they're going to be active during the summer. This week we had 2 funerals, 3 evening board meetings, we were in high gear to leave for our mission trip, we had Stacy's sister and husband and 3 kids over our house from Washington State until Thursday. It was a pretty full week. On top of that there was the World Cup in soccer, which is the greatest sporting event, period. Today we have U.S. against Portugal which leaves this American pastor born in Portugal a bit conflicted, but just a bit.

Then today we have a celebration and we have been so focused on sending out 35 people this week alone into the world. I was so excited to preach on this topic, my favorite of all topics, of Jesus calling us to go out into the world to make disciples and then the news from Thursday evening hijacked our celebration. Nothing like real life interrupting our plans. But we have not cancelled our mission trip, even if one of our participants broke his collar bone on Sunday, he's still coming. No we go on and do mission regardless of what is happening in the world around us and in our denomination. It is who we are, it is what we do.

I was going to change my Scripture for today because I felt forced to address the decision that our denomination made and probably a Scripture based on mission would not be appropriate. But God knew what we will be facing and when we are going to be faced with it. It is actually a great Scripture for today, one that has Jesus making his disciples rethink their very narrow single issue upon which they placed their hope and substituting it with a worldwide mission and movement that his disciples are empowered to follow. Let's read.

READ

As you can see this is part II of the Great Commission and last week we addressed part I which focused on going out into the world by first of all ensuring that we are reaching out to our own community. You need to know that since that sermon was preached 7 families received cookies to welcome them to the community and thanking them for visiting. What a great response, thank you so much for taking up the charge, and let's keep it going.

Some friends of ours had an exchange student from Korea living with them for this year. Their daughter was a senior as was the exchange student. On graduation weekend the student's

parents came all the way from South Korea to graduate. The mom and dad didn't speak any English at all. For graduation the mom bought both the kids the same card for graduation. It was very sweet. On the front it said Congratulations, and when they opened it up it said Mazeltov on your bar mitzvah. It was still a celebration.

Today we launch into a celebration as we give thanks as we fulfill the Great Commission to go out into all the world with teams heading to Italy and West Virginia. Both places that seem a bit out of this world.

Psalms 47 is a praise Psalm that tells us to clap our hands, to shout to God, to sing loud songs to God because his name is being proclaimed throughout the world. The disciples were also in a celebratory mood in our Acts Scripture even though they had a long week, a very long week. Luke 24:51 has Jesus ascending into heaven the same day of his resurrection. Luke wrote Acts and if that were the case that Jesus ascended into heaven on the day of the resurrection, it was a long week for the disciples.

In one week they ride into Jerusalem with the whole city celebrating, they go into the temple and kick out the greedy merchants, they perform a number of miracles, they prepare to celebrate Passover together in the upper room. In the same week Jesus is betrayed by one of his own, and then arrested, and all the disciples scatter and run away. Jesus is crucified which they watched at a distance, Jesus is buried. It's already a long week and the moments of celebration seem so far away. But the week isn't over...yet. Jesus rises from the dead and now today, at the end of all of this, there is so much happening here that some stretch this time out to 40 days, just as Acts 1 says earlier in these verses. Today they all gather in Galilee, a true celebration with the resurrected Jesus Christ.

We pick up with the disciples coming together in verse 6 and as soon as they see him they ask him what for them is the most important issue that is for their time. "Jesus, are you going to restore the kingdom now?" This is what the Messiah was supposed to do after all, bring back Israel's glory, put Israel back on the map politically, and make Israel the one that was the most important not only in the eyes of God, but of the world.

This isn't the first time that this issue is seen as crucially important for the disciples. Their entire time with Jesus for the disciples was a time of waiting and praying for the restoration of Israel. In Luke 24:21 we find the disciples after the resurrection on the road to Emmaus hugely disappointed because, in their own words, "we had hoped he was the one to redeem or

restore Israel.” Jesus, won’t you do this now, you know how important this issue is. It is the first thing they ask when they see Jesus, this is the one issue that they had placed their hope. Just last week people were cheering, blessing is he who comes in the name of the Lord, the king. Everyone was shooting for this to happen, there was no other issue more important than this one for the disciples. So this became, in essence, the mission of the disciples, to make sure this one topic be realized.

What Jesus does in his answer is correct the disciples’ mission from being a narrow single issue hope, and replace it with a universal mission that was far greater than the disciples ever imagined they could dream. He takes a one issues people and makes them into missionaries emboldened to go out into all the world. Something they never realized they could do.

He tells them, I am not going to have you focus on this one issue, I want you to go out into all the world and preach the Gospel and make that your mission and don’t allow a single issue to become your mission. Today, we are seeing proof that we are able to do just that if we would only put our focus and our time and our effort in preaching the Gospel to the world.

On Thursday the governing body of our denomination, the General Assembly, issued an authoritative interpretation which allows pastors and churches to marry couples of the same sex. They also took steps to change our current constitutional definition of marriage from a man and a women to two people. I have been on record in 3 enews and 2 sermons in my 3 years here that I am strongly opposed to this change. Marriage was defined by our Savior Jesus Christ in Mark 10:6-9 as a union between a man and a woman. Those who say my Savior was silent on this issue are wrong.

I also know that there are some who even though I have clearly been on record do not trust me and refuse to take me at my word when I say I will not marry people of the same gender because I don’t believe God has blessed or has approved those relationships as part of his plan. I don’t know how else to say it.

Today your session is going to meet in a special meeting at 2pm to address this recent decision by the denomination. Over the past 4 months we have given 30 minutes each meeting to this topic because we knew it was a possibility that this would happen this year. We wanted to be prepared through prayer and time and not just produce a reactionary, impulsive response. I hope by Monday morning we will mail out by house mail, email, and church mail what decision your session has made.

We are now all focused on this one issue, Satan has won this battle, the battle of taking all of our time and expending it on this one issue, which is not the issue that Jesus would have us spend our time on, according to Acts 1. But I am determined that Satan will not win the war. Satan will not take us away from making mission into the world and locally be our primary focus. Just like the disciples, does this mean your kingdom will come, instead of focusing on Jesus' words to go out into the world.

Jesus tells us to combat this news by sending even more people out into the world. I know some of you want to leave the denomination, and I have also been on record from when the Pastor Nominating Committee and I discussed this issue I told them I do not see myself ever leaving the denomination. But it isn't about me. It is about 182 years of faithful service that can continue if you don't allow a single issue to distract you. Those who want to leave the denomination, is your disassociation from the denomination more important to you than your association with this church and its people?

Some months back I was asked where I drew my line in the sand. It is not around this issue because otherwise at any church you will be drawing a line continually depending on the issue. I ask each of us, do we pay taxes? Then we are supporting gay marriage. Do you have health insurance? Then you are supporting gay marriage. Do you drive a car? Then you are supporting a corporation that supports gay marriage. You can be an American, with health insurance, driving a VW and be vehemently opposed to gay marriage, even have stickers on your car that says you are opposed to it, but you have not drawn a line by giving up your nationality, your health insurance, your car. How much more should you support your church, your local church which will not change one iota because of the news from last Thursday. We are on the same team, we are allies, our goal is to make disciples, not divide ourselves on this one issue. We can still be First Presbyterian and send people into this world even after this discussion and be opposed to the actions taken by our denomination.

If you are considering leaving here is what I ask. Draw your line in the sand with me, let's stand united so that if our church body, our denomination should ever put into question the exclusive claim of salvation in Christ alone, then we can act together in concert.

How do we make disciples in this mess? Jesus tells his disciples by driving our focus away from a single issue and getting back to what we are good at, celebrations as we send disciple into the world. Amen.