

**The Rock: 05-31-2020****The Church**

**First reading:** John 3:16-21

**Title:** The Church and her mission

**Scripture:** Acts 1:6-11

**Theme:**

The Church, through the ages, has struggled with her role in society and culture. Often being placed properly, and at other times we have found ourselves fighting secondary battles as though they were prime.

**Introduction:**

A couple of things as we begin to root ourselves in the Scriptures -I know this is a topic that often times becomes very heated, as many views and opinions are voiced. Just look at Facebook since announcements about re-opening happened.

Some have come to the forefront as we continue to navigate our current situation. Thinking back since the last time we met in person almost eleven

weeks ago, and planning for when we will join together for worship.

The fellowship, seeing one another in-person, singing together and the regular gathering of the people of God. All of these I miss very much.

But my goal here isn't to map out an argument against any one view over and against another, nor is it my goal to get political. The pulpit is never for that.

Although the church in this world has to engage in "politics" -but doing so for the right reasons and with the right perspective.

Eugene Cho once said: The reason why politics matter is because politics create policy, policies affect people, and people matter to God.

In that light, I feel it is good to look to the Scriptures as our guidebook for living and settle our hearts around the truth there.

Because the longer we meet in this way, the more folks get frustrated and ask the WHY question. We make assumptions about our rights being violated, our freedoms taken away, and "persecuted"

as the Church because we haven't been able to meet.

Next week we will talk about why that is not a reason to rebel. I do wish we were together in person, yet in a very real sense we are, even though it is not in- person.

But GOD has us in this place and at this time for many reasons. And one of those reasons is to learn things we could not and would not otherwise.

I pray that you are before the LORD in prayer asking that question: What are you trying to show me and teach me LORD?

Because my prayer is that we emerge on the other side of this having grown and being conformed to King Jesus.

I admit, as I start this morning, this will make some people very happy, that it will make some even more frustrated than they are already.

My hope, however, is that all of us will be centered around the Scriptures and be taught. That is always my goal.

**The Story:**

One of the things I fear the most is a loss of focus. Our mission or our Prime Directive (for any Star Trek people out there)

We tend at times to become too focused on our Constitutional rights as American citizens, that we forget our Biblical responsibilities as the People of God.

We should do both, so long as we get them in the right order and apply the truths of the Scriptures accordingly. Because we discover in Acts one, that while these guys didn't have "constitutional rights" they were worried about the same things. Position in society, power and control.

Will we get to be in charge, run the show, make the rules? Will we get to be the prevailing cultural story, making sure everyone is following our lead?

All of these are packed into this one question:

"So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

**-Acts 1:6 ESV**

In other words: Are you going to give the Romans what's coming to them? Are you going to punish the Jewish leaders for what they did to you?

You see, this was the view of the Messiah, so the question was not a strange one. It was just the wrong one. They still thought that Messiah would rule with power, vanquish the enemies of God and set-up the Kingdom of God.

**And Jesus did that, just not in the way they thought and wanted at that moment.**

After three years with Jesus, being taught that it's about dying to yourself and serving others -these boys still didn't get it.

The disciples, more than anyone else, give me hope. I have a hard time getting it and being submissive to the call of God. In fact, I am more like the pre-Pentecost Peter than I ought to be. But that's not for today.

I'm sure we can all relate to that at some level.

These guys were thinking like James and John had been when they asked the question: "can one of us sit on your

right, and the other on your left when you come into 'your kingdom?'"

UM -I'm going with no boys, not today. That's not in my power to decide. FOCUS boys -upward, outward.

Here we are again at the birth of the Church, and they are already unfocused and derailing the mission. Funny how little has changed if we aren't careful and stay focused.

"He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

**-Acts 1:7-8 ESV**

These are a loaded two verses for the Church! There are two things here that are vital for us, and in context ought to be our focus.

- 1- It is not for you to know the times or seasons. The Father has set those by His own authority.

You have a mission and a task, and mapping out the times and seasons - IS NOT ONE OF THEM.

The Church, in times of crisis such as we are in, tends towards -God's judgement, and end-time prophecy. Is this the last days?

Those are not bad thoughts. They simply are the wrong thoughts. When Jesus says, "It is not for you to know", that is important for us in this context, as well as others.

Because the things which are unclear are secondary to our mission. When the Church is distracted in that way, she loses her focus and the clear things (commands) get lost.

John the Apostle wrote this as he ended his Gospel:

"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

**-John 20:30-31 ESV**

What that means in simplest terms is that, the plain things MUST be the main things. Why?

Because God always makes the main things, plain for us. They are essential to our mission. God wants us to know what we as His church in His world are to be doing.

Because of that, Jesus is plain and direct in His next statement in this text, and leads to point number 2 He is making as he re-focuses these boys:

2- BUT you will receive power. What power? The power of the Holy Spirit. To do what? Speak in tongues? NO. (That is the evidence of the baptism)

The purpose of the Baptism is NOT so you can get and speak in tongues, it is for the POWER TO WITNESS -Witness what?

The Gospel to the lost world. (John 20-remember) The life, crucifixion, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus of Nazareth. The savior KING of the world.

Where? Ultimately to the entire world, but starting in Jerusalem.

You see, as we look at the history of the church, the battle to maintain



proper focus and position in this world has ebbed and flowed.

Sometimes we have gotten it spot on right, and at other times we have gotten it horribly wrong.

I fear that we lose focus too often and struggle to keep the main things, main. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said once that the Church is to be the best friend of the government -whatever government. Until that government violates that friendship.

The Church herself is never be the one who violate that friendship, nor to seek to get into that position of power in order to rule in some theocratic way.

That is not our mission. In addressing proper focus as he preached here in America in 1930, he said:

"As a Christian minister I think that just here is one of the greatest tasks for our church: to strengthen the work of peace in every country and in the whole world...but more important than that is, it seems to me, that every Christian man and woman, boy and girl take seriously the great idea of the UNITY of Christianity above all

personal and national desires, of the Christian people in the whole world, of the brotherhood of mankind, of the charity, about which Paul says: Charity (love) suffers long and is kind..God will judge us according to our faith and love..

Come what may, let us never more forget that one Christian people IS the people of God, that if we are in accord, (Acts 2:44) no nationalism, no hate of races or classes can execute its designs.."

-No Rusty Swords: Pg. 83-84

Our mission in this world is to: **Love God, love people, and tell them why.** No matter who that person is.

We are called to go into all the world and preach the good news, in the power of the Holy Spirit, for it is Christ in us, the hope of Glory, as we learned last week:

"And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am

with you always, to the end of the age.”

**-Matthew 28:18-20 ESV**

We are never to seek to be the prevailing cultural story, nor are we to seek that kind of power. In fact, we are called to a counter-cultural way of being and doing life.

In a culture and a world absorbed with the idol of self, the Church is to always be about ‘THE OTHER’, never the “self”.

We have a message to share, and when we lose focus of that, the Church is in trouble and adrift on the sea of cultural conformity and confusion.

We concern ourselves more with trying to maintain our position culturally and politically. Fighting for our right to exist and be heard.

*That is actually the incorrect way to think.* Our right to exist does not come from any government (that is clear in this text), or constitutional guarantee.

No, it is the directive from Heaven itself, and we are to be The Church on mission in this world. And part of that

is being the best citizens of any government we may find ourselves under. Regardless of party or opinion.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

**-John 3:16-17 ESV**

This is the message and mission of the Church. Jesus, in Acts 1, is establishing that and is doing so very clearly. To this hapless bunch of boys, He says -Don't worry about political power, go tell people about me and what I have done for them.

That is clearly about "the other" and not about "self" and my worldly rights.

Ravi Zacharias once said that the Church, especially here in America, is obsessed with the wrong things. We care more about the music production, the building itself, and how comfortable people are with the message, especially those who don't know Jesus.

"We have become so seeker sensitive, that we have become message insensitive."

I am not saying those things are unimportant, but they are secondary to our prime mission of making much of Jesus. We have to focus on the main things.

He has left that in our care, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Are we focused on that? Or are we concerned about where and when we can meet and gather together?

Trust me, no one wants to see these seats filled once again more than I do. I want us to be together!

But location and mode of meeting should never change our focus and mission. We are all still being fed the gospel and disciplined, even though it looks a bit different. I have not been forbidden to preach. I just can't have us gather.

That is also important to remember. We will look at that next week and flesh out when a Church decides for civil disobedience. The reasons must be right.

If they aren't, we bring reproach against the Gospel and the prime message is lost.

**For when the credibility of the Gospel or the character of our King is called into question because of our actions and attitudes, we have to ask ourselves: "Am I walking as Jesus would have me to walk?"**

What are we doing right now to advance the mission of the Church? At home around table, in our place of work, in the utilizing of our gifts and encouragement to those who are struggling.

Perhaps you are struggling. Feeling isolated and lonely. Depression and anxiety are real, and family dynamics are a struggle as each day passes.

Know that the leadership here is dedicated to pray for you, and with you. Small groups have become a life-line of encouragement for so many.

These are part of our "new reality", and one that we will continue even after this is all over. What are we learning during this time? One thing we are learning, is that even though we may be shut in, the Gospel is not.

Fellowship and discipleship are actually growing in ways they never would have, had this not happened. God is working things to the good, for His purposes.

It is difficult, I know, to really stay focused on our role and task in our culture and society. Ask anyone who listens to me sputter during the week.

It is so loud with all the voices, opinions, and information. **I find great comfort in the Scriptures!** As well as in the voices of those who have gone before, people such as Bonhoeffer.

What can we learn here? Well, first, is to realign with the truth that: **We are Christians first and foremost, and citizens of whatever country we live in, second.**

Our primary citizenship, which is in heaven, must impact and affect our secondary one. It should never be the other way around.

Second - in light of our primary role of making Jesus known by speaking and preaching the gospel: **Has that been taken away from us?**

No, it hasn't. What has been, is our mode of meeting, our gathering place. But we are not being singled out, it has and is happened to everyone.

Are we being denied access to the Gospel? That is the primary question. The answer to that is no, we are not. Unless we are choosing to not gather at Sunday 9:30, or when you can carve out time at some point on Sunday to hear God's word. We have not been told to stop preaching the gospel.

That is critical to see and know when we think we are persecuted. **Our way of communicating and gathering has been shifted for a season, that is all.**

How are we growing? Are we taking advantage of this time to pray, seek His face, refocus our lives and grow? I do hope so.

For if we come out of this not having been challenged or changed, we have lost a great opportunity as His people. God is in this, and we are being challenged to grow through it, and the primary way in which we do that is through the Gospel, discipleship and prayer.



Stay the course, hold the line, and pray for your leaders as we seek the absolute best for you. We take very seriously the charge of being shepherds of the flock of God.

We love you, we care deeply for you, and cannot wait until June 21 to see your faces again.

(Close in prayer)