

April 2, 2023
Palm Sunday
Pastor Matt Duerr

All this Took Place-For Us

Grace, Mercy and Peace from God our Father and From our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Here it is Palm Sunday we are rapidly ending the Lenten Season. And we come to the last “All This Took Place” Sermon Series. We've seen that all this took place, everything that Jesus did, took place to fulfill prophecy. In the second week we saw it was an issue of faith. By faith we are saved. All this took place in week three for them, the Gentiles; so that we might be grafted in. And in week four, all this took place for the untouchables. Because we're all untouchable, we're all unclean as a result of sin, and yet God sent His Son (the One who's truly untouchable) to come into this world so that we might touch Him and put Him on the cross. Last week we saw all this took place to make it clear that Christ alone is God, the Son of God, the Savior of the world.

And today all this took place, for us, for today, a day of unity, a new beginning in ministry. An exciting beginning and yet one that brings with it some questions. What does the future hold for us? And understand what we are all about as we travel down this road together. I want you to think of a road. Imagine it in your mind, a road heading to the mountains. No one on it, what do you see? You see a road that's got some lines on it and a shoulder on it? Maybe it has a sign that says 55 mph.

But that picture I think could give us a real good vision of kind of what ministry is looking like. Ministry has a mission. It would be the road. That's what we're all about. It's where we're traveling. And yet that road has a vision to it; where we want to go, what we see for ourselves in the future. It has those lines, the shoulder, the speed limit sign. Those are the values, the guiding principles, that guide us as we make that journey.

A couple weeks ago Pastor Tim and I went to our winkle, which is the gathering of pastors within our circuit, to spend time with each other, talk with each other, learn and grow with each other. The presenter was

Pastor Alan Steinbeck who is serving at Saint Paul in Merced right now. He presented us with the picture of a wagon wheel, and he explained to us that that wagon wheel, that we saw out in the field with the some other dilapidated wood around, it is a wagon wheel that was a part of the family wagon that they rode in when they came here from the East and settled on this property, just outside of Paso Robles. The wagon has pretty well decayed, there's not much of it left. The wagon wheel there's quite a bit of it left, but the outer rim has definitely decayed. It's missing some pieces and some of the spokes are a little broken. But if you look at the hub of that wheel, it's in great shape. It's still functional and he pointed out to us that that's kind of what ministry is like.

At the very center of the wheel is the hub and the hub is Jesus and Jesus is the same today, yesterday, and forever. We could tie it into Ephesians 2:19 and 20 where Paul writes: "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the Saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, (that's God's word) Christ Himself being the cornerstone. So, as we travel on this road, understand it's like a wagon wheel with Christ at the center. He's the hub, everything begins with Him.

Now the spokes that come out of it those would be our values, our guiding principles, and the first of them is scripture. John 17:17 when Jesus prayed for his disciples in the high priestly prayer, "sanctify them in the truth, your word is truth." Sanctify, set them apart in the truth, your word is truth. The Psalmist's words in Psalm 109 verse 105 are "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." We begin with scripture as our number one guiding value. It is God's gift to us and I'm going to keep coming back to it.

The second thing is community. First Corinthians 12:27 tells us "you are the body of Christ." That is how we're supposed to look at ourselves as the body. The body is built in such a way that, as Paul says, in first Corinthians 12:26. "If one part suffers, they all suffer. One part rejoices they all rejoice." And is that not the way our body actually works? And at the same time and verses 12 through 25, he takes the whole time to just lay out that there's no part that's greater, and there's

no part that's lesser. A healthy body is all the parts doing their job and none saying, 'oh they think they're so good or they think they're so this, or I'm so this... No, they all work together and accept each other and rejoice with each other and suffer with each other. A healthy body being affected by God's word relies on something else, integrity. Might I say structural integrity because if a part is broken down whole body suffers. In fact, proverbs 11:3 tells us the integrity of the upright guides them. But what makes integrity, integrity? This integrity of the upright or the righteous. I think Paul defines that force in Philippians 4 verse it gives us some wonderful guidance here. "Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." He puts it all in the positive. Think about that which is pure, lovely, good, righteous, just. Don't be distracted by the world and all the garbage that is going on. When we focus on these things, we begin to work righteously, think righteously, and that makes for integrity; structural integrity as well, that holds the body together.

Fourth is transparency. Consider what Paul says here as he writes to the people of Thessalonica. He's not there, but he writes to them, and he says, "we ought always to give thanks to God for you brothers as is right because your faith is growing abundantly; and the love of every one of you from one another is increasing. Therefore, we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the inflictions that you are enduring." How do you know that? How did he know that he, Barnabas and all the others should be giving thanks for the people of Thessalonica? Because they were totally transparent. They didn't hold things back. They loved each other and everyone knew it. Their faith, they had steadfast faith, and everybody could see it. No one hid it they were growing and people could see it. They weren't afraid of what some people would say, 'well if you're growing it means you weren't in very good position in the first place.' No, they're so focused on Christ the hub, and following God's word, and being a community, and doing that which is right and focusing on the right

things that they're OK with anybody seeing them. They are not worried about what others are going to think.

And that allows them to collaborate. Philippians 1:27 and 28 tells us “only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ. So, whether I come and see you or I'm absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving side-by-side for The faith of The Gospel and not frightened by your opponents.” One faith, one spirit, one mind, one Gospel. You put that together, this is where we are all thinking the same way. We can collaborate, work together and accomplish much and we don't have to worry and be frightened about anything on the outside because really we're doing what God wants.

And finally, youth and education. Proverbs 22:6 says, “train up a child in the way he should go; when he is old he will not depart from it.” I have to say I take that verse very seriously and I'm very selfish because I want to see my children in heaven. Both Margie and I from day one, prayed so hard and we've done our very best and made a lot of mistakes. Paul, Bethany, would tell you that. Boy we prayed hard and tried to introduce them to God's word. Now that we have grandchildren, we're going through it again. We want to see them saved.

For us as a church going about Christ's ministry, we now have to adopt Christ's eyes, who sees all of us as His children. He wants all of them saved. And therefore, we become outward focused, thinking about how we can train up others so that they won't turn from God's work and we do that in the actual ministry of the church which is the outer part of the wheel. We nurture, we want our children to grow up in a safe environment, prepared for the future. So, we've got to provide them with a healthy environment; and provide each other with a healthy, safe environment. Again, we focus on the good things that Paul mentioned, not on the little nuisances and things. Especially when it comes to young families and them trying to bring children up in God's word. It's hard enough bringing up a child in this day and age without having the church saying, ‘well you ought to be doing this, or you have got to do this or whatever.’ We need to band together and help the parents.

We provide nourishment. That's our job, nourishment. We provide worship when we can come in number one praise God. This is what worship is about, 'giving worth to God.' But with worship comes the sacraments. We provide baptism through which the Holy Spirit comes through the waters of baptism to both children and adults alike. We provide communion with Christ Himself comes to us through the bread, through the wine. We provide times of fellowship, the body being with the body and enjoying being with the body. Actually, again being transparent and saying to somebody, 'it is so doggone good to see you!' And also, another person saying, 'gosh I sure missed you this last week.' Caring about each other and of course, as we fellowship with each other, we're talking about potlucks and luncheons and all that good food. But our number one food is again God's word, Bible study. Because again scripture points out to us in the book of Isaiah that God's word will not return to Him void.

So we nurture, we provide that safe, healthy, nurturing, environment and a mission. A mission of equipping the Saints. Consider Jesus after His resurrection. On the road to Emmaus, He comes upon those two disciples and they're questioning why this happened; like so many of us question about things in this world today. And Jesus takes them right back to scripture beginning with Moses and all the prophets. That's the first five books of the Bible. And then all the prophets, basically the old testament. Beginning with Moses and the prophets he interpreted them in all the scriptures, the things concerning Himself. This is the job of the church. I've had people who have said, 'if he says Bible study one more time, I think I'm gonna shoot him.' Well get your guns ready, because I cannot help but talk about the need to know God's word. It's part of the training up and we must do this. We must know God's word so that we can connect with family, with neighbors, with the community around us. It's what Jesus said and the Great Commission, "Go and make disciples of all nations.'

But I learned at that winkle, that if you look at the Greek word that's there and the way it is written in the context that is in the structure literally. It should maybe be translated, 'after you get to where

you are going,' we are supposed to be moving. And when we get to where we are going; we are supposed to have a nurturing environment; we have a clear mission with clear values; that are guiding and directing us, then we make disciples. We baptize disciples, and we teach them... What do we teach them? Everything! Jesus says that He has commanded us. It's not a pick and choose. It's opening the word and covering it all!

That takes us back to the very beginning of the sermon. It's an exciting time! What does the future look like? Well, it looks like this sermon. Where we have a mission, we have a vision of where we want to go, we want to be moving forward. We want to be expanding God's Kingdom. We have values that are guiding us. It all begins with Jesus and His word. And you might say but Pastor Matt, 'We're older congregations. That's so much work. We just can't do it.' I know, I think that's why Jesus finished the Great Commission with, "and I am with you always, to the very end of the age. Now tell me, with Jesus, what can't you do? I believe that we can do all things through Him, the Hub, the Cornerstone, who gives us strength.

In our Savior's Name, Amen.