

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 29, 2019

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“Reach for the Stars”

Based on 1 Corinthians 15:35-41

A report came through the office computer this week, updating congregations on the work of Presbyterian World Service & Development in the aftermath of Cyclone Iaida earlier this year. As you might recall, we, along with congregations across the country, rallied quickly to take advantage of the Federal Government's grant matching program, to double the impact of our money. I am happy to say that although life is not back to normal for many in Malawi and Mozambique, most are now receiving steady food supplies, medical care, and beginning to take their lives and livelihoods back. Well done, everyone!

A preacher I studied with some years ago had a passion for street ministry. He found the walls of an established church confining, and restrictive to the audience he was searching out, and the congregation he was trying to build. He was a man of great courage, in my mind. With a grant from national office, he and his guitar rented out a run down office unit on the wrong side of the tracks and started singing; probably not

the hymns you like to sing on Sunday morning, but the kind of hymns and choruses they sing at some of those 'other' churches down the road! When I met this man, his church had grown to a weekly attendance of 125 people; he had two worship teams, and an assistant for the pulpit. He confided to me one day, that what he and the gracious spirit of God had built was beginning to feel rather like a 'church' and that it might be time to move on, and start again somewhere else. He was uncertain where it would all lead, but eager to see what God had in mind next.

‘THE SUN HAS
ONE KIND OF
SPLENDOR, THE
MOON ANOTHER
AND THE STARS
ANOTHER; AND
STAR DIFFERS
FROM STAR IN
SPLENDOR.’

~1 COR: 15:41

Both stories are of success. Both stories required a sense of purpose and vision.

But these stories used 'money for missional work' in very different ways.

Churches and congregations are very good at supporting mission work, especially when there is a need or an urgency involved. When disaster strikes, we know people need help, and we know that our national church is connected with other international organizations and charities that have the specialized resources and people to get the money and supplies to where the money and supplies are needed. We are even so lucky in these days of technology, to see the 'before' and 'after' pictures of families and communities. We can see our money in action and believe that we have accomplished something useful. We can rest well at night, knowing that we made a good investment towards lifting up the people of the world.

But street ministry? Hmm. That's a little riskier, don't you think? What if no-one shows up? What if the people that do come make us uncomfortable? What if there isn't enough money on the donation plate?

What if the other businesses on the street are not very happy with all the commotion on Sunday mornings?

And what about all those other crazy projects and ideas out there?

- If you start to support one church in financial trouble, then you're stuck helping them all out, right?
- If a church wants to try and expand their ministry, they should come up with all the money themselves before they start, right?
- If a student wants to attend Seminary, then they should have enough gumption to work their way through school like we did, right?
- And we don't need all these fancy publications from national office. We have a perfectly good photocopier! We've got bills to pay right here, and if we don't look after ourselves first, then where does that leave us at the end of the day? Hurricane relief, clean water, food, and vaccinations for children in Africa. I can support that. But all this other stuff? Baa hum bug! Charity begins at home.

Well, yes, charity does begin at home...at home in our hearts. Mission work does not begin with our checkbook. Mission work begins with the whispers of God saying, "Plant My seeds."

Today, we are challenged to consider the mission work of

the church that many simply push aside, or consider unnecessary, or not needed in these days of budget crunching and keeping our churches ship shape.

- It's hard to consider new projects that may or may not be successful when it's unclear if we are going to end the year in the black.
- It's hard to consider supporting a church expansion on the other side of the country if your church is shrinking and there are whispers of closing the doors forever.
- It's hard to trust that God has plans for us, that are concrete and real and possible, if only we would step out in faith and trust Him. I mean, we pray about every Sunday, but actually believing it, and living it out faithfully, is a much harder task.

But our scriptures whisper to us time and time again, "Plant My seeds."

Our scriptures do not say, "Plant the seeds and wait until you get the results you want!" The scriptures say, "Plant my seeds. Plant some more. And then, plant some more." What those seeds become, quite frankly, is not up to you or I.

When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind

of seed he gives its own body. (v37-38)

- It's up to God what happens to those seeds of faith and discipleship and joy.
- It's up to God whether it becomes a black or a red line in the budget.
- It's up to God whether you will ever see the results of your efforts, or wonder for the rest of your life whether you should have bothered or not.
- It's up to God.

And He's already warned us of the outcome, of stepping out and supporting His work:

- The results might be unexpected. The results might not be what we had in mind.
- The results might be varied and different and hard to imagine
- We might never get our money back.
- But the results will be, to the glory of God.

The seeds will have flourished. Men and women and children will come to know our Saviour. We will have reached for the stars, and the stars will have multiplied.

If you want the world to reach for heavenly stars,

1. Plant the seeds of faith.
2. Step back and give God room.
3. Repeat. Repeat. Repeat.

That is all. Amen.