

Missions Month 2023, "Sharing Christ in the Trenches", 2/5/23

Blank Slide If you are new to Brandywine Valley, it would be important to know that we have a rich, 53 year history of missions engagement, both global and local. We directly support 25 missionaries in over a dozen countries, several that are homegrown from our own congregation serving locally and internationally. Annually, we give about half a million toward missions. This priority is tied directly to our mission- to introduce people to Jesus Christ and help them follow him, and our core value- Local and Global Gospel partnerships. For many years, we have set aside the month of February to have a special focus on missions. Included in missions month are four practices: 1) **Faith Promise**: This is a special financial gift that we encourage the church to give above and beyond general giving that goes toward specific missions endeavors and partners. Last year we raised funds for our **Circle of Care** initiative focused on serving Afghan allies who became refugees when the Taliban took control. I'd like to share with you a recap of how that initiative went. **[Video]**

We would like to begin another **circle of care** this year, potentially focused on Ukrainian refugees. If you are interested in serving with refugees this year reach out to us. This year our **Faith Promise** will be focused on supporting the church in Reya, Ukraine with infrastructure improvements and their work supporting refugees who are fleeing to the village of Reya because it is safer than their hometowns. Faith Promise goal is \$25,000. Visit our website to give to Faith Promise.

Speaking of Ukraine, our second practice of missions month is inviting one of our **missionary partners** to join us for the month to learn from them, be an encouragement and bless them as they go. We are so grateful to have Valik and Natasha **Grushetskyy and their 6 children with us [Picture]**. Pastor Valik has been a partner since the days of his youth, when members of our church met him in 1998 on a missions trip to his village in Ukraine, eventually he came in 2002 as an intern with our student ministry, and we have been partnering with the Grushetskyy's ever since. Their ministry involves pastoring their church in Reya, outreach to youth, serving their community's needs, especially disability ministry. You will have opportunities throughout the month to hear more about their ministry- Pastor Valik will be preaching next Sunday, and in Christian Ed ministry on the 19th. They will also be teaching with the student ministry and the Awana.

The Third Practice is **the Missions Dinner**, this involves getting an international experience with your sense of taste, and a Q&A so that you can learn more about our missionaries. Sold Out? You can get on the waitlist.

4) The fourth practice is our **sermon series** focused on personal missions engagement. Because it's easy to think that missionaries are those super-Christians that live in huts, speak other languages, and dress funny. But all of us are called to the mission of the great commission, to go into the world and make disciples.

And that brings us to our theme for the next three weeks, “In the Trenches” from selected passages in 1 Peter. Let me frame where we want to go in this series with an image from one of my favorite animated movies of all-time, Wall-E. Only two animated movies made me cry- Toy Story and Wall-E. Wall-E is about a dystopian future, the planet becomes uninhabitable, no plant life is able to grow on it anymore, and so a remnant of the human population leaves on an enormous self-sustainable, luxury spaceship. Now for the first few generations on this spaceship people were still trying to figure out a way back to Earth and make it inhabitable again...but after a few hundred years, the generations started to forget about the mission back to Earth...after all, life on the spaceship was pretty good, they had all the technology they needed. They could sit in front of screens and be entertained and have everything taken care of for them with AI. And because of their extreme comfort and inactivity over the generations their bodies and limbs began to atrophy into chubby, soft couch potatoes. [Picture]

To me this is a parable of Christianity in America. The danger, and in many ways the reality, is that with hundreds of years enjoying the cultural prominence and wide acceptance of Christianity, it gets easy to lose sight that we have a mission. [Title Slide]. Instead of a faith with an important message to share with the world, it becomes therapeutic, self-help religion. The Bible gets turned into a tool for living the good life instead of discipleship training, prayer gets coopted as a means of bringing more comfort, blessing and safety into our lives instead the primary means of effectively reaching the lost. We begin to be more passionate about our football team, or our politics, or what is trending in fashion than our faith. When Christianity drifts from the mission, inevitably it atrophies, becomes soft and weak.

And suddenly we wake up, and we find ourselves in an increasingly post-Christian America that many of us do not recognize or understand. Christian beliefs that where once culturally accepted and celebrated are now considered bigoted hate speech. Teaching the Bible called gas-lighting, and sharing our faith is thought of as offensive and an attempt to culturally colonize others. Many Christians feel way in over their heads, fearful of being marginalized or cancelled, and ill-equipped to speak up about what they believe and why they believe it.

Now, I know I’ve sounded negative and critical. But I’m actually the opposite. I’m hopeful, because I think this is fertile ground for true Christianity to thrive, for us to get back to our roots of gritty, disciple-making in the trenches. Of having our faith tested under pressure, to face forms of persecution even in order to build resilience. And this brings us to our study in 1 Peter, because it was written to build resilience in the early church that was facing significant suffering, marginalization and persecution for their faith. They had no political, social or financial power in the society, and yet over the next hundred years they turned the world upside down because of their resilience in living out their faith in the trenches. So over these three weeks we will learn how to move forward by looking back to 1 Peter.

1 Peter 3 ¹³ *Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?* ¹⁴ *But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.”*

¹⁵ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

¹⁷ For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit.

The focus of this message will be **verse 15**, but let me give you some of the context surrounding it. This command to “be prepared to give an answer for our hope” is in the context of the experience of suffering. Now there are lots of ways to suffer physically, you can throw your back out like two of our pastors did in the last couple weeks. You can suffer financially, making a bad investment in bitcoin that gets zeroed out in a bad market...But the kind of suffering that Peter is talking about is **uniquely Christian suffering because of our demonstration and declaration of our faith** in a culture hostile to Christianity.

Let's talk about these two words- by demonstration I mean the fruit of our faith being lived out in self-sacrificial love of our neighbor, serving our community, meeting the needs around us. This demonstrates the grace, love and sacrifice of the gospel and gives credence to our declaration. This demonstration is what Peter calls in v.13 and again in verse 17 “doing good.” And this is normal Christianity, not the exception. It is others focused service, not self-focused comfort.

Also notice, in verse 13 he implies by his rhetorical question, it would be unusual to be persecuted for the demonstration the gospel. We would agree in most cases. You probably aren't having people try to cancel you for serving at Sunday Breakfast Mission. You probably won't lose your job for serving those with disabilities, or mowing your elderly neighbor's lawn, circle of care is who we are...we agree?

And yet, Peter also recognizes in verses 14 and 17 that our demonstration of the gospel can lead to persecution. How does that happen? Well, it can happen when doing good starts to be considered evil and evil considered good in a society. Like when the Christians in the civil rights movement lead by Dr. King here in America were advocating for desegregation and equality for people of color. But that good was considered evil by many in America, therefore it was met with persecution.

And of course there are many things today the Bible calls good that the culture increasingly considers evil, whether it's advocating for the rights of the unborn, the sanctity of marriage and the family, or the distinction between male and female, or the importance of fathers as leaders of their families, or encouraging sexual purity until marriage or modesty, honoring our

authorities...many things. And when we are doing good and suffer for it Peter says, ¹⁷ *For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.* See it's not that we go looking to be persecuted, that's sadistic. We don't choose suffering, we choose God's will, just as Jesus did, whether it means we suffer or not. Now we will be talking more about how to face persecution and forms of persecution in the next couple of weeks, but this is the context in which Peter is telling us to be prepared to not only demonstrate the gospel but declare the gospel. *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,*

3 Keys to Effectively Sharing Your Faith:

#1 Share Your Hope

Now, notice it is prepared to give the reason for hope...not prepared to answer every Bible stumping question on the internet- how old is the earth? and is Genesis 1 and 2 literal days? And how did Noah fit all the animals on the boat? Here's one that stumped me this week that I was thinking about? Why was King Abimelech in Genesis 20 so attracted to Abraham's wife Sarah when she was almost 100 years old? I mean that must have been one fine granny. We are not expected to be Bible answer men and women. Some of us are terrified to open our mouths because we think need to have on the tip of our tongues the answers to all of life's existential questions. Good luck, you will never share if you are waiting for that to happen. But every Christian ought to be able to give a response to why they have hope. If I gave you 5 minutes and a sheet of paper you can probably come up with a dozen reasons or more. That's what we share. Do you realize that the greatest apologetic for your faith is your what you hope in? Most people don't have hope in anything. They have no good reason to hope. They don't have a hope passed this grave. They don't know why they are even here. Wow, you have something to share.

#2 Share with Gentleness and Respect

Gentleness and respect- not aggression and demeaning tones. Not combative, not trying to win a verbal war, not trying to meet hostility with hostility, snarkiness with snarkiness, name calling with name calling. Sermon on the mount- do unto others, as you would want do to you. How would you want to be spoken to?

#3 Share the Gospel

Of course, this is implied is hope, because the hope that Peter is talking about is specifically the living hope of the gospel of Jesus. One of our goals in building resilient disciples is to train everyone of us with at least one way of declaring the hope of the Gospel in a simple, accessible, clear way. **3 Circles.**

The Challenge:

Use 3 Circles to Share Your Faith with at least one person between now and Easter.

Now you may say, I don't know Nate, what if someone rejects me for that, or cuts me off, or makes fun of me? You know how Peter encourages us to continue on? Pointing to our leader,

our savior, Jesus. *¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit.*

Communion