

**Sunday, October 20, 2019 – An Eye Toward the Future Series III**

**“God’s Love is for Everyone”**

1 Thessalonians 3: 6-13; Jonah 3: 1-10

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Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

In Dallas there’s a moving and tasteful museum on the Sixth Floor of the former Book Depository building, where Oswald shot at President Kennedy. There are several film clips from different periods of Kennedy’s life and presidency. Among them is a clip I’ve seen many times before often considered the catalyst for NASA, the space program and the Apollo manned lunar landing missions. He said, “We choose to go to the moon – not because it is easy but because it is hard.” The goal was set to have an American set foot on the moon by the close of the decade and, as we commemorated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that event this summer, the moon landing achieved its goal with five months to spare.

These targets we’ve explored the last few weeks might sound audacious, even impossible. That’s the point! They orient us in the direction that, under God’s guidance through His Word and with prayer, we want to go. The **vision statement** you spoke into as a congregation back at an April evening event is that “We are God’s chosen people, adopted in baptism, forgiven through His Gifts and sent on His mission to love and disciple others.” We’ve already seen three of the four **targets**: Our worship connects all people to Jesus. Our campus is welcoming and secure. We are disciples making disciples. And this week – Everyone in Vegas knows the love of Jesus.

See, God’s kingdom and His will come even without our prayer but we pray that love for our community and the expansion of His kingdom and will through His mission would come among us also. Selfless, Holy Spirit-given love will always overflow from us and lead us to actively seek ways to love other people. Love for its’ own sake is worthy in keeping with Jesus’ command – “love your neighbor as yourself.” And so too we love because Jesus’ perfect life, selfless death and resurrection that destroyed death wasn’t just for Himself, wasn’t just for you

and me, it's for the sin of the whole world. We want EVERYONE to know the life-giving news that Jesus died and rose for them. God's love is for everyone.

Jonah wasn't feeling that in our Old Testament lesson today. Begrudgingly trudging from the seashore to Assyria, down to the massive metropolis of Nineveh he executed the bare minimum of God's call to him. God ordered him to preach repentance to *those people*. The Ninevites were whittling away at Israel's land. They'd recently carried out brutal military campaigns and committed atrocities that would set them up for war crimes trials today. Jonah despised them for reasons anyone losing loved ones to senseless violence could understand. The last people in the world he wanted to preach to, is them. God ordered it, and he followed through... horror of horrors, to a person they repented. 120,000 Ninevites from the king down to the peasant farmer covered themselves in scratchy, uncomfortable sackcloth – think of a burlap sack or potato sack, and dust themselves with ashes. And no one in Nineveh, from the king down to the goats and cows, eats for three days as a deep expression of genuine remorse over their sin. The bad guys turned good. The most wicked nation committing the worst atrocities in the ancient world heard five words, the bare minimum Jonah could muster and check off God's command to him and they went on to have God wipe away their sin, and friends – one day, when Jesus returns, you and I will meet 120,000 resurrected Ninevites who repented over Jonah's words sharing eternal life with us in our resurrected bodies. These were the bad guys, making life miserable for Jonah's people. The worst of the worst. If you were Jonah, would you feel happy for them? Would you feel that justice had been served?

It's something we all struggle with, whether or not "those people" are the Assyrians or just some stranger that we'd rather not take the time to talk with because we're very busy and have places to go and be. Love for the other person always means sacrificing self – our priorities, preferences, comfort zones – for the sake of the Gospel and of God's mission. God is love. God is the one who aligns our purposes to His purposes.

We know the Holy Spirit is the only one who can bring a person to faith, so they believe in Jesus as their Savior. Yet we also know God uses our love as a primary tool to do exactly that. This is what Paul is getting at in 1 Thessalonians 3 when he says, "...may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints." This is why God sent Jonah to the last people Jonah ever wanted to see – because God's love is for everyone. Jesus is for everyone.

What does that mean practically for us? It means that Vegas, like Nineveh and everywhere else is a place teeming with people that God loves. This is a city where God planted you and me so that everyone knows the love of Jesus. That includes you knowing His love, through each other. That includes people who worship here occasionally as well as rarely. That includes our school families, whether they have a church to call their home or not. That includes the people who live on your street, your coworkers, the other kids and parents on the soccer team, the people speaking languages you don't understand and yes, even the tourists driving 20 under the speed limit with their blinker on. Everyone sins, everyone needs the forgiveness Jesus won and more than that, Jesus died for the sins of the whole world.

Five and a half years ago, my first "regular" Sunday sermon... not Easter, which was actually my first Sunday, I asked this question: "When you look at the world around you, do you love the culture or hate the culture? Sure, there are things you or I may not like about the culture but here's the thing – we can only be effective missionaries if we love the culture (and, I'll add, the people of it). Where has God put beauty in it, and how can we respond, so that we can relate to the world around us?... what does it mean for us who are already part of the Church to reach out to a culture around us that knows very little about God?"

So there are some specific goals developed, again with your input, driving toward everyone in Vegas knowing the love of Jesus. Goals like exploring more ways to directly partner in ministry – with our sister congregations, utilizing our Mission Society, our District and other

organizations – can we do more banding together than working apart? And why reinvent the wheel –if we really believe that you in your own sphere of influence are an ambassador of Jesus everywhere you go, how can your expertise, your influence as a Christ follower be felt outside MV LCS – community organizations, boards, your profession... what would it look like if we made those associations all known to each other? What if someone among us in need knew of resources and experts to help them with a problem, or had a creative idea of how to combine your shared areas of expertise to help the love of Jesus be known by more and more people? So too look for goals about helping train you how to share Jesus' love in natural ways in the relationships you already have. And we have goals for both our school families and all our staff thoughtfully, intentionally, constantly encouraged in Jesus' love in everything we do.

God has placed us here, now, for such a time as this. Please pull it the small notesized card – it'll say My Commitment across the top. In the back we also have printed copies of the Ministry Plan. Please read through it, pray over it. If you missed a week or two, listen to the last couple of sermons on our website. If you're ready to jump on board with this Ministry Plan and new future together, please fill this card out and either put it in the offering or in the box on that big table in the back as you leave this sanctuary. I know that new endeavors, new futures sometimes sound audacious, pie in the sky, maybe even risky. Yet whatever we do, even things that are hard, we know that it's God's mission and He uses us for His purposes. We know that it's God who strengthens our hearts. We know it's God's Gifts – the forgiveness won for us by Jesus – that spills over and helps us to love everyone in our little corner of Vegas with the love of Jesus. In His name we pray, Amen.