

Sermon Title: "Against All Odds" Series: "Missional Living: Reaching into Our Neighbourhoods"

January 5, 2014 Pastor Dave Sattler Texts: Acts 2 Sources: NIV Life App Bible; Commentaries: Marshall, Seay, & Comfort, "V Guide to Bible Events" - Beck, "Missional God" - Hastings, "Church of I2" - Lewis; "UnChristian"; Fall 2013 NSAC Survey.

<Series Slide> Review & Introduction:

- Happy New Year, everyone! I'm Dave Sattler, one of the pastors here at NSAC.
- To begin 2014, we launch a new series on our core value Missional Living, a staple of NSAC community life. Part of our DNA, our commitment to missional living states: "We will go into our neighbourhoods and around the world to express the love & hope of Jesus."
- We will be honing in on the local part of this value: reaching into our neighbourhoods.
- ILL - Back in the fall, we conducted a survey in which we asked congregants a dozen questions.
 - Nearly 300 people responded with some eye-catching results.
 - When asked "How many times in the last month have you had a spiritual conversation with people who are not Christians?", 94% of you indicated you had done so 1 or more times.
 - 58% of congregants suggested they felt moderately to fully confident "in explaining the good news of Jesus with someone else." This is very encouraging.
 - At the same time, significant "barriers" that hinder our mission were named: Top 4, 1) Fear of Rejection, 2) Inadequate Knowledge, 3) Not Wanting to Offend, & 4) Lack of Opportunity.
- We'll address these barriers in the coming weeks as well as some of the pressing challenges facing Christians today in our culture where questions abound about Christianity and its validity:
 - 1) Doesn't science disprove God & Christianity? 2) Isn't suffering evidence that a good & powerful God doesn't exist? 3) Aren't all religions the same and ultimately lead to God? & 4) Isn't the Bible unreliable & (just) full of fairy-tales?
 - Pastor Keith will also be teaching a 4-week class beginning in late January tackling in-depth each of these "Challenges to Christianity."
- ILL - A few years ago, one of my kids said this to me after a particularly difficult day,
 - Q: "Dad, it seems like it's okay to be any other religion but Christian at my school."
- ILL - In the book UnChristian, written in 2007, authors David Kinnaman & Gabe Lyons publish ...
 - Results from their Barna-Group-conducted poll of 16 to 29-year-olds on their perception of Christians in North America. The top 3 descriptor words that came up in there survey were: "hypocritical" (Christians walk doesn't match their talk), "insensitive" (they're fixated on converting people), & "judgmental" (meaning they're 'anti-homosexual'). A sobering trifecta.
 - **<Slide>** The book's conclusion, Q: "Christianity has an image problem."
- From its highly-oppressive residential schools to the much-publicized failings of its leaders, the strength and relevance of the church in the west, once the centre of public life, is radically diminishing. Our culture is becoming increasingly secular. We now live in a 'post-Christian' world.
- With the fulfillment of the Canadian Dream - wealth, power, status, recreation, happiness well within our reaches, typical North Shore people express little or no need for God.
- Which begs the question: Is there ever hope for reaching our family, friends, & neighbours with the transforming message of Jesus when the odds seem so stacked against it?
- In large part, church congregations have chosen ... EITHER to hunker down in their safe little 'Christian bubbles' to protect themselves from 'worldly decay' OR to completely dilute the Christian message in an effort win followers. Neither is God's intent.
- **<Slide>** So we come now to Acts 2, that great ('TSN) Turning Point' in the history of the Christian movement. I invite you to turn to pg. 1692-94 in the blue Bibles or on your electronic device.
- The church goes from a fearful huddle to 3000 converts in one morning!
- And eventually just decades later, **against all odds** the good news spread from that small "place" (1b) in Jerusalem to the entire Roman world!
- And there is hope for us in this story ... because their Jesus is our Jesus, and the same God and the same Holy Spirit is still on the move today longing and able to reach the people of the North Shore now through us. <READ 2:1-13> Prayer: "God, move me out of the way."

Text Outline: 1. <Slide> The Holy Spirit Comes (2:1-13)

- Numbers in Jerusalem swelled for the annual feast to celebrate God's provision of the grain harvest.
- It was Pentecost, a bit like our modern-day Thanksgiving. Fitting, isn't it? Peter's message that day would result in a worldwide harvest of new believers, the 'first-fruits' of God's church.
- Having come back down from Galilee in the north, the remaining small group of disciples "were all together" (1b).
- These were trying times. The power and pull of the Roman Empire threatened their faith and well-being. An exclusive Jewish religious system challenged the idea of a gospel of grace. And to make matters worse, just a week & a half before, their Leader had apparently 'abandoned' them.
- They were now likely gathering to pray. Wondering. Shoulder-glancing. Hoping. Hurting. Waiting.
- Perhaps even 'just about done'. Ready to bolt. Give up. Walk away. Go back to their old lives.
- But, just as Jesus had promised, the Holy Spirit came ... with "wind" & "tongues of fire" (2-3).
- And this caused quite a commotion among the thousands gathered in the city.
- Tongues, of course remind us that the Spirit's coming is all about communication - God reaching down to humanity, God getting His message out ... of love & hope to all people.
- And He chose a the ideal stage for it; evidently representatives from some 15 international locations were present - including even "visitors from Rome" (10b) - and all exclaimed, "we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" (11b)
- O God, but for a 'new tongue' to descend on us so that our family, friends, & neighbours may witness your wonders today too in their own language and be drawn in!
- As you might imagine there were skeptics in the crowd that day who "made fun" & said, 'They've had a few too many drinks with breakfast!' (13b)
- This sentiment about faith in general, the activities of God, or about Christianity, still exists today.
- Christianity is deemed 'archaic' or 'elementary' by many; "It's all just that 'Christian Crazy-Talk!'"
- ILL - In the epic comedy, Nacho Libre, Jack Black plays a monastery cook who moonlights as a wanna-be wrestler ... for the Lord, that is.
 - Nacho feels he needs to convert his wrestling partner, Steven aka. "Eskeleto" in order for them to have success in the ring. Steven refuses Nacho's repeated attempts finally saying:
 - **<Slide>** Q: "I don't believe in God, I believe in science!"
- ILL - There's an opinion out there that "to be a Christian is to 'check your brains in at the door.'"
 - And it's an age-old question: Faith & Reason, God & Science, can they mix?
 - 2nd Century Church Father, Tertullian raised the issue: Q: "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" Or, what has human thought & philosophy to do with faith & the Bible?
- Here's the modern argument as I see it:
 - Smart humans can acquire vast knowledge. Knowledge explains the universe and disproves God. Therefore, smart people don't believe in God or Christianity.
- Now, I'm no expert but I want to say that science will never be able to explain the possibility of God completely out of the picture. Same too, the existence of God does not delete science right out of the story. God & Science are not mutually exclusive.
- I want to take a moment to address high school and university students pursuing sciences, amateur and professional scientists among us here today.
- I know it can be a dark, lonely road of faith in these places. The things you're taught, the shots at Christianity you take from your peers can wear you down, I'm sure.
- I want to encourage you to stick with your faith in God and with science. We need you in there!

2. <Slide> Peter Speaks (2:14-41)

- <READ 2:14-17a; 21-24; 36-39, 41> Of the nearly 70 historical sites we visited on our recent trip to Italy, Turkey, & Israel, this was our favourite. Southeast corner of the old city, room to address a big crowd, & Jewish baths, normally used for ceremonial washing on the way to the temple, right there with room to baptize 3000. The temple steps in Jerusalem, the 'rabbis' teaching steps' - the likely spot where a 'new' bold-yet-humble Peter emerged, "stood up" and "addressed the crowd" (14): "These men are not drunk, as you suppose. No! This is God at work."

- The people heard tongues that day, but more than that they witnessed the power & presence of God through the Holy Spirit. And that was the 'game-changer'!!
- This will be what 'turns' our neighbourhoods too - the power & presence of God showing up.
- Peter's message would be revolutionary for his audience.
- "God says, 'I am pouring out my Spirit (17a) and this time it's not just for prophets, kings, & priests like in the OT, but "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (21).
- Peter himself, conservative Jewish Peter would struggle with this idea later in the story.
- Why didn't Messiah come just to save us? This was a hard message for many Jews to take.
- And this was one of the things that got Jesus crucified: His message of good news for all people.
- It's true wired into the Christmas Story and on through the Cross, that "God made this Jesus both Lord and Christ" (36) - Saviour ... not just for the elite, or devout, or those born into it.
- Perhaps you're in church today and you've 'written yourself out of the script.'
- You say, "Sattler, I've got a 'rap sheet' a mile long and God could never accept or forgive me!"
- Or maybe you've given up on a family member, friend, or neighbour. They're just too far away.
- Truth is: with God, you're never too far away. This promise extends "all who are far off" (39).
- Even to that friend! Or to that family member you've prayed for for years! Even to you!
- Many were "cut to the heart" (37a) when they heard Peter speak. And they responded.
- Q: "The Lord sent the Holy Spirit and filled many of the Jewish pilgrims in Jerusalem with an inspired faith that they could take home with them." And as a result, Q: "Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the church grew in ever-widening circles." - John A. Beck, VG to BE, p.216/213.
- 3000 repented, were baptized, and added to the fellowship of believers that morning.

3. <Slide> The Church Grows (2:42-47)

- <READ 2:42-47> ILL - I don't know about you, but when I make my way 'round the North Shore ...
 - Lynn Valley, Deep Cove, the Lonsdale Corridor, Ambleside ... some days it feels so dark and hopeless - that the mission of the church (that I've given my life to) is irrelevant and the message of Jesus (that I've embraced much of my life) is completely lost in our culture.
 - But this story, the story of the Christian church 1st to 4th Century gives me hope for our day when it seems there are way too many obstacles in the way for my family, friends, & neighbours ever seeing their need for Jesus or wanting to give their lives to Him.
- ILL - Robert Lewis in his great book The Church of Irresistible Influence, offers this powerful ...
 - Definition, Q: Church is "a community of people ... who present living proof of a loving God to a watching world" (p.41).
- Teaching. Breaking bread. Sharing resources. Prayer. Worship. Deep joy in magnetic community.
- This kind of growing, healthy church attracts people, "And the Lord added daily to their number those who were being saved" (47). Who wouldn't want to be part of a movement like that?!!!
- One of our deepest human needs is to be part of something bigger than ourselves. Just like this.
- Our community here at NSAC 'preaches' a vital message out into our neighbourhoods.
- <Slide> ILL - When Joanne & I walked the streets of Rome, Istanbul, Ephesus, Capernaum, & Jerusalem on our recent trip, we encountered 2000 years later the glory of ancient Rome still alive in the archaeology & architecture ... and I was struck again by the power of our story.
 - God began to turn the world upside-down through the 1st Century Christian Church.
 - The facts: the Church grew from roughly 120 followers in that 'fearful huddle' in Jerusalem to 5 million or 10% of the Roman Empire by the 4th Century!
 - How did this happen? The church offered an alternative family-like kinship for Gentiles, women, children, slaves, the disabled, the rich & the poor.
 - Non-Christian historian, Edward Gibbon in his book Decline & Fall of the Roman Empire in part blames the Church, citing the "unity & discipline of the Christian Community" and the "power of their changed lives" as a factor in the fall of Rome from its perch of power.
 - Sources record what witnesses said of the Christian church of that day; one of the telling observations was this, Q: "See how they love one another."

- The church offered opportunity for all people to be part of something bigger than themselves, bigger than all the 'glory' Rome had to offer.
- And God, now through us His church, offers the same to our family, friends, & neighbours in the 21st Century: the chance to belong to a community, a movement bigger than themselves!
- Bigger even than all the riches and experiences West Coast life has to offer.

Application: 2 points to conclude ...

- 1. <Slide>** I believe **Fear of Rejection** paralyzes many Christians from ever talking about their faith.
- In Canada we pride ourselves on being tolerant. But reality is, there's not a lot of tolerance for Christianity these days. Sharing the Christian Story in our culture involves significant risk.
 - Our message is perceived as offensive to some and meets outright rejection from others.
 - No doubt we will face some rejection, but I believe the fear of rejection is greater than the reality.
 - ILL - I arrived at the soccer pitch Friday, did a warm-up lap on my own ...
 - Then felt the Lord nudging me toward a new lunch-time soccer friend, Mike.
 - I ran over to stretch with him and God opened the door, "Why did you go to Turkey?" Mike asked. We talked about a guy named Paul (he'd heard of Paul) and his passion to take the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome with stops in Turkey. I could feel the gears turning for Mike.
 - We had our 2nd ever spiritual conversation right there on the field. Nothing amazing. Just a few minute chat. I'm praying Mike one step closer to Jesus as a result, praying for more opportunities for spiritual conversations.
 - The majority of North Shore people are many steps away from Jesus. Most times, we shouldn't go for the home run - dump the 'gospel truckload' on them. That will likely mean sure rejection - not just of you personally, but maybe of them ever being open to hear the Christian Story again.
 - Instead, listen. To the Spirit. To people. And when the door opens, speak up.
 - In my desire to reach out, there have been a few times I have wished I hadn't spoken up.
 - But many more times I've regretted that I didn't speak up when the opportunity presented itself.

2. <Slide> Finally, **Be Filled with the Spirit.**

- At Christmas, we've just celebrated the coming of Immanuel, "God with us."
- At the cross, Jesus died for us as our representative. Now, God goes one step further.
- At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit comes to be "God in us." Jesus made good on His promise to send the Holy Spirit to take up permanent residence in those who put their faith in Him.
- ILL - Our particular wing of the Christian movement, the C&MA is founded on ...
 - The belief in and pursuit of the indwelling Christ via the Holy Spirit, "the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." - Colossians 1:27.
 - And cultivating life in Christ fuels mission.
 - In the words of our founder, A.B. Simpson, Q: "No person can receive the deep, divine, and overflowing life and then live for themselves." Mission flows from encounter with Jesus.
- I may be a nice guy, I may be gifted, I may have resources to share with people, I may have dynamic personality, persuasive arguments, but these are no substitute for Christ in me.
- Only the Spirit makes the life of Jesus real in us and the mission of Jesus powerful through us.
- Jesus said, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." - Acts 1:8.
- Against all odds ... the Gospel went forth then and goes forth today. And I believe that same Holy Spirit sent by God at Pentecost is still on the move ready to be "poured out" here today.
- BQs: Are you hungry for Him? Anticipating God's presence to pour out here? Longing to be filled? Ready to live your life for His glory?
- Be filled today anew & afresh with the Spirit for God's mission reaching out into our neighbourhoods.
- Let us be 'carriers of God's presence.'
- I believe it's the manifest presence of Jesus real in our lives - through our words, through our attitudes, in how we spend our time, in how we love people that will impact our family, friends, & neighbours most. This will win the day. By the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.