

## 1-8-23 Sermon #2 Forgiven

Last week, I put a challenge out: How can we start Natural God conversations with others?

I'm not sure how many of you tried but, I hope you at least thought about it. When I first started to ask strangers how I could pray for them, it was so awkward. Learning how to do something requires trusting God and using perseverance.

Our society has changed a lot, and finding ways to adjust without compromising our beliefs can be challenging. There's so many different ways to bring God into people's lives, and it requires using the gifts we been entrusted with.

One way that many churches are doing this is by using small group settings. It's much easier to do anything when we have others to help. I've been trying to look at how many different ways we can have outreach. Creating an environment where God is the center of it must happen. Many people are trying to use common interests to start these small groups. People who've been given the gift of hospitality or leadership are inviting others to join them for a time of fellowship.

In some earlier sermons, you may remember that we explored the triangle ministry of Jesus.

We looked at what Christian fellowship is, and we learned that it's not just hanging out with Christian friends. Christian fellowship is when we incorporate God into the time.

I think about the golf league at our church. Last year, during the time on the course, some of you shared with others how our church is changing, and these conversations came naturally. No one was pushing Jesus on others. You shared with others because of a likeness for what is going on in our church.

Last week, we looked at how people in Jesus' time did outreach. We looked at 1 Corinthians 3:6:

<sup>6</sup> I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow.

That's all we can do. Once we plant and water, then God will make it grow. In a recent conversation, it was shared how one of our local churches has been developing their small groups. One group that stands out is a hunting group. In the church, one of its members likes to hunt and decided to start the small group. They don't have a bible study so to speak, but they do take time to talk about God and pray with each other. Making God alive through natural conversation can happen just by gathering friends together and letting them invite their friends.

It grows naturally. Learning about each other without trying to manipulate people is planting and watering. It's important to build friendships and that requires investing time around each other.

This is one reason why small groups are so effective. People meet on a regular basis, and they share how much joy they get from times with others. Then God makes it grow.

People are attracted to others who have mutual interests. It's a natural way for us to be able to share the enjoyment we get by having God in our lives.

Last year, we spent a lot of time around becoming more prayerful and it makes me think about Ephesians 3:14-19:

<sup>14</sup> For this reason I kneel before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom every family<sup>[a]</sup> in heaven and on earth derives its name. <sup>16</sup> I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, <sup>18</sup> may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, <sup>19</sup> and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Paul is illustrating just how important the “UP” part of the triangle ministry is.

Prayer is the beginning of all things.

Whether we are asking others to get together, or how they feel about the church, or how we can pray for them – if we were not using prayer, we're depending on self, and that always leads to trouble.

After prayer, then the “IN” part can happen. The “IN” happens once we're together. Then the “OUT” phase is how God will make it grow.

Trish and I are going to Myerstown this week. Part of the time is going to be spent looking at how to bring Christ to people in today's time. The denomination asked that we read a book called God's Space by Doug Polluck, and I would recommend it to anyone. At the end of the chapters, it asks the reader to answer some questions, and they do bring out helpful insight.

As I've been thinking about the way Jesus ministered to people, I can see significant differences in ways that people have done this in the past. The results are being seen in the amount of church closings. If churches today don't want to disappear, the body of believers needs to ask themselves some tough questions. Questions like: Would people outside the church even know if they closed? Would anyone really notice? Some of you have questioned what does the future have in store for us.

“Great things” is my answer.

Last Thursday during our Prayer & Praise time, one praise that I want all of you to know is: December was the first month that we averaged over 40 people in attendance for a whole month. I believe this happened because we're really trying to stay focused on “Who are we doing it for?”

On his own, Jim started our small group on Thursdays, and it's growing. It started with just a few, and now we usually have 8-10 people come. Our Wednesday night classes are starting to increase, and I have to praise Sandy, Julie and Avis for starting and leading the ladies' group.

Having 25 people in our Congregational Care Group and having some of you pray in the beginning of worship is so encouraging.

“Who are we doing it for?” is catching on.

The way God's been answering our prayers and the amount of people who are getting the “Prayer bug” is awesome. 1 Corinthians 3:6 says,

<sup>6</sup> I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow.

This is happening here at First Church. I see us trying! And we're getting better. Gaining experience through perseverance and repetition allows us to see more of God's promises come true.

Today I want to expand on the question, “Who is this Jesus?” I'd like to look at a couple of biblical examples for learning more about what actions Jesus took to reach people.

In Luke 7:36-50, Jesus was “Anointed by a Sinful Woman”. The story begins back in verse 36, but I'm only going to read verses 44-50:

<sup>44</sup> Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. <sup>45</sup> You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. <sup>46</sup> You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. <sup>47</sup> Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.” <sup>48</sup> Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” <sup>49</sup> The other guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” <sup>50</sup> Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

This only happened because Jesus was eating with a Pharisee in the Pharisee's home. This “sinner” or woman heard about Jesus being there, and she had to “GO” to Him. She brought perfume and broke down in tears as she poured perfume on Christ and kissed His feet.

Then Jesus forgave her “MANY” sins! I love verse 47 because it reveals the level of LOVE:

<sup>47</sup> Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.”

Do we have her kind of LOVE? Do we understand how much forgiveness we need in our own lives? What Jesus says in verse 50 is powerful:

<sup>50</sup> Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has “**SAVED**” you; go in peace.”

A few weeks back, during a conversation with a friend, I was told that Alistair Begg, a Scottish pastor on Moody radio, made a very bold statement. During a sermon he asked if we remember when we were saved. He followed that question by making a statement. If we don't remember when we were saved, we're probably not.

My first response is to want to argue with that. When I read about the woman who anointed Jesus, her Faith compared to the Pharisee's reveals just how important it is to need Christ's forgiveness.

She knew “Who is this Jesus?”

John 4:1-42 tells a story about the woman at the well. I'm not going to start at verse 1, but please take the time to read all the verses for this story. I'm going to use verses 39-42. Let's read them together:

<sup>39</sup> Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” <sup>40</sup> So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. <sup>41</sup> And because of his words many more became believers. <sup>42</sup> They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.”

The story of the Samaritan woman, also known as the woman at the well, represents all the Gospel. Jesus demonstrates His care for all, regardless of their social standing. The point I want to make is how much excitement the Samaritan woman got from Jesus' presence. She wasn't telling people to be saved, she just told them what Jesus did for her. She planted a seed and others had to see for themselves.

Knowing what Jesus has done for you is very important. Ask yourself, “What was it that made you believe?”

About a week ago, Pauline shared something with me. Jim Beltz has told me the same thing. They both shared with me that after their baptisms, they can't stop wanting to get into conversations about what God has done for them. “This Jesus” caused them to want to do more for people in the name of Christ. Both of them love sharing what Jesus did for them! It's not that we have to preach Christ to others. For them, sharing with others why they needed to be baptized has created questions in others' lives. How the spirit of God works is a great mystery.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 is a promise and it keeps proving to be true:

<sup>11</sup> He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet<sup>[a]</sup> no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

This need for Christ's forgiveness is in all of us. It's how we find a deeper meaning of "LOVE". Having the ability to step out in Faith by starting natural God conversations isn't about saving others, it's about planting and watering.

God will use your story for helping others. The best way to represent Christ is to share what God's done for you. This story will be different for everyone. Some of us are bolder, some are softer. Not only did Christ bring forgiveness, He then gave us gifts to use for finding true happiness. Do you use them for growing God's kingdom? We are becoming a healthy body of believers, and hopefully we'll want to try and encourage others to be a part of us.

Let's pray.