

February 16, 2020

Rooted: Branching Out To Serve Others

Isaiah 61; Matthew 13:31-32

For the past month we have been unpacking our new mission statement of who we believe God has called us to be and to become here at FPC.

Let's put that on the screen and all together let's say it. We are: Rooted in Jesus, Growing in His love, Branching Out to Serve others. For me, it has been so encouraging to see how this is connecting with so many people of all ages along and also how It is impacting the life and ministry of this church.

It was just on Thursday night; my daughters and I were on FaceTime with my parents and my Dad was asking me about our current sermon series. I shared with him we have been going through our new mission statement and before I could even say what it was, my girls without any prompting were proclaiming out loud in unison. "Rooted in Jesus, growing in His love, branching out to serve others." It was awesome.

For this week and next week, we will be focusing on that third phrase, "Branching out to serve others." And just because I think it is good for us to be reminded, this is not just the next step on a "to do" check list. Our mission statement isn't meant to be understood in a linear way; it's dynamic and there is this back/forth. It is ongoing; and connected; like a tree.

Rather than a "to do" list think of it as a "to be" list. We want **to be** more like Jesus. We want **to be** rooted in Him, we want **to be** growing in His love, and we want **to be** branching out to serve others.

I look at it as three movements that are connected, woven together, and ideally taking place at the same time. Up, In and out.

Being Rooted in Jesus is being focused on Him, being connected to Him and so that is the "up." Growing in His love is the heart transformation. The below the surface spiritual growth that bubbles out. That is the "in."

And then sharing that love with others and branching out to serve others is the "out".

Last week Tom left was with the encouragement and challenge that we should be "Rooted in Jesus, Growing in His ravishing, perfect, amazing unending love, because then, when we Branch Out to serve Others... people will want to know the source of that beautiful fruit and shade that God produces out of His faithful, obedient servants."

This becomes our opportunity to respond to the gospel, to the grace and love of God and His redeeming work in our own lives by branching out and serve others by sharing with them through words and action what Jesus has done for us.

What he did that we could not do for ourselves. Primarily save us from our sin.

Isaiah 61 speaks to this and ultimately tells of the work and love of God in our lives through Jesus our savior.

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; (Isaiah 61:1-2)

If the first few verses sounded a bit familiar it is because they are the very same verses Jesus quotes and identifies himself as in Luke 4 on the day, he preaches in his hometown synagogue in Nazareth announcing His ministry and calling.

But if you remember, the hometown crowd did not respond so well to this sermon as we see the service ends with the congregation trying to kill the preacher. Hopefully that won't be the case this morning 😊

These words in Isaiah are words of hope, words of deliverance. It is good news to the oppressed, the helpless and hopeless, those who are brokenhearted, and those who are grieving or mourning. Which I'm pretty sure covers just about all of us at some point in our lives.

This passage is all about the Messiah. The one who brings good news and comforts the brokenhearted. The one who brings freedom to the captives. The one who loves us and delivers us and calls us his beloved children.

These words originally came at a time in Israel's history where God's people were feeling pretty low. They had fallen away from God consumed by sin and idolatry they disobeyed God and His commandments and found themselves in exile far away from their land.

They probably felt God had abandoned them that all was hopeless and that they were past the point of any redemption.

They needed to be reminded of God's love and His promises. To be reminded that God cares for His people and no one is beyond the reach of His love and redemption.

The reality is there are people in every time and place in the church and outside the church, in our workplaces, in our schools, our neighborhoods, in our lives and in this world, who need to hear these words. Who need to hear good news of Jesus.

In a very real sense this is the message that God gives the church, his people in all times and all places. A message of freedom, of redemption, of deliverance, of grace. It is good news for us and good news for the world!

In other words because of God's work, because of His love for Us in sending Jesus we are enabled to be rooted in him, growing in His love and branch out to serve others.

And a crucial part of God's plan of salvation in this world and His story of redemption is His church, His people branching out to serve others by sharing the good news of Jesus.

I love this beautiful picture of God's grace and the kingdom we see in Isaiah. How God redeems and restores broken people and enables them to be righteous to then display His glory and reach other broken people with the good news and love of God.

Isaiah 61:3 - "They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor"

Who is the they? Well "they" are not the ones that have it all together but are the broken ones, the poor, the captives, the oppressed.

God takes broken people and does beautiful things.

It reminds me of a song I love by a husband and wife duo called Gunger. This song stirs all the emotions. It is called "Beautiful Things."

*All this pain, I wonder if I'll ever find my way
I wonder if my life could really change, at all
All this earth, Could all that is lost ever be found?
Could a garden come out from this ground, at all?
You make beautiful things, You make beautiful things out of the dust, You make beautiful things
You make beautiful things out of us.
All around, Hope is springing up from this old ground Out of chaos life is being found, in you*

Friends, this is the kingdom of God! Broken made beautiful. Ordinary made extraordinary. The last made first. Prisoner to freedom. The lost found and the dead back to life!

Isiah 61:10-11 paints this picture:

*I am overwhelmed with joy in the LORD my God!
For he has dressed me with the clothing of salvation
and draped me in a robe of righteousness.
I am like a bridegroom dressed for his wedding
or a bride with her jewels.
¹¹ The Sovereign LORD will show his justice to the nations of the world.
Everyone will praise him!
His righteousness will be like a garden in early spring,
with plants springing up everywhere.*

And this is what it looks like to branch out and serve others. It is broken people that God has redeemed and enabled to be rooted in Jesus, growing in His love, branching out to share all about the one who is producing the fruit and making beautiful things.

It is serving and loving others who need justice, deliverance, and hope. Who need good news!

There are so many opportunities and ways that we can do this. Both in word and action. We heard from IJM this morning and that is a great way of branching out to serve others. God cares deeply about justice and we can and should be part of that. Praying, supporting, sharing with others.

Sharefest is another great example opportunity to branch out and serve others.

A few weeks ago, we had the missions fair which provided at least 43 different opportunities to branch out and serve others.

These are all seeds of the kingdom of God. Seeds we spread when we branch out and serve others, in our words, in our actions and in our attitudes.

So, what holds us back or hinders/prevents us from branching out to serve others? To share the good news? There are many things that can, but I want to identify two main hold ups.

For one, perhaps we get held up on the simplicity of the gospel. Believe in Jesus and you will be saved. Is it really that simple? Well Yes and No, right? Yes, it is the simple truth of God's love for us and our response to that. And no, because it is a lifelong process of daily dying to self and becoming more like Jesus. Also, we tend to complicate things, especially the Gospel, and add all these other things to the it.

Jesus tells us we can be confident in the simplicity of the gospel message. Trust that He is at work and just be faithful in following Him and stepping out and spreading those kingdom seeds.

I came across a quote from the Ancient St. Jerome about the gospel:

The Scriptures gospel, are shallow enough for babies to wade in and never drown and yet deep enough for scholars to swim in and never touch bottom.

Simple and yet deep!

Another side to that is at times we doubt or don't think what we do matters. We see it as so small and insignificant compared to the bigness of the problem. We get focused on the results without being faithful to the seeds God has called us to spread.

As we read in Matthew 13 . The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed. Though it is small it becomes large and grows into a tree, and birds come and make nests in its branches.

We have the seeds of truth. The mustard seeds of the kingdom. Small yet powerful and mighty potential of growth. Dale Bruner. In his commentary on Matthew, reminds us:

Have confidence in the little gospel. The gospel goes out as seed, little but alive, and it comes back with big things like food, shade, shelter for the nations.

This Is how the kingdom of God works and we get to be part of spreading those seeds and trusting that God will grow it.

We can be confident the seed will do its job in time, It's good seed! We need to just be faithful in branching out spreading the seeds and let God do His work.

Again as Isaiah 61:11reminds us. "For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations."

The second hang-up that keeps us from branching out is we get comfortable. We get stuck bouncing back and forth between the up and in. Rooted in Jesus and growing in His love .

But Jesus calls us to "Go and make disciples." He calls us to branch out to serve others. In Matthew 5 Jesus says "you" are to be salt and light that point others to Him and his redeeming grace. This is a plural "you" and an instruction for us. His church and His people.

If salt and light are functioning properly, they have the power to transform everything they encounter. Jesus is saying this is the way it should be with his followers; together, if we're functioning properly, we have the power to transform our neighborhoods, our communities and the world as we branch out and serve others.

But here is what often happens. We end up like salt in this saltshaker. Don't worry it's kosher salt☺ We get with other salt- salty people and it is nice and comfortable and kumbaya.

The purpose of a saltshaker is to shake that salt and get it out there. Not for the salt to just stay in there.

Jesus never intended for us to just be confined to the walls of our sanctuaries or to limit our Christianity to Sundays, or to just be salt with salt. His intent and desire is for us to bear fruit for Him -- to be obedient and faithful in branching out, sharing with others the love of Christ. To do what the saltshaker is meant to do Shake that salt! Get It out there!

How do we be or become people who are surrendered to God to be used by Him to branch out and serve others and spread the seeds of the kingdom?

I was thinking about this the other day on one of my sermon runs as I refer to them a word from the Lord came to me. I say that so if you don't like it, talk to God about it 😊

But if we want to continue to be rooted in Jesus, growing in His love, and branching out to serve others then we need to check our CROPS.

What I mean by crops is CROPS is our spiritual crops and an acronym for our attitudes and actions that can help us move from just the up and in to the out.

C is Come humbly before God.

Humility is the attitude that we are broken and need Jesus. Humility is allowing God to work in us and use us for His kingdom and for His glory. Jesus demonstrated true humility as he humbled himself and became a servant to all. We need to have the humility of Jesus.

I love Micah 6:8 as it captures this posture.

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.

And what does the LORD require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy

and to walk humbly with your God.

R is Remember.

Remember who is in charge. God is God and we are not. We love to be in charge and in control and decide our next steps but we need to remember God is charge. His ways are perfect! We need to be faithful in following Him and seek His kingdom come and His will be done.

Also Remember, we are not the fruit. Jesus tells us in John 15, "You are the branches, remain in me and you will bear much fruit."

We are the branches. Our job is to do branch-like things and stick to the tree. We need to stay connected and lean into Jesus and then do whatever He says. That's the branchy thing to do.

But Often we can get so involved and so invested in our ministry and the fruit of our lives that we begin to focus on our fruit, and we forget to do branchy things. Like staying rooted in Jesus and branching out to serve other.

O is Obedience. Simply stated. Obey His word. Obey His commandments.

I am reminded of a Sunday school song we sang growing up. I can't believe I am going to do this but I am going to sing it for you.

Obedience is the very best way,

To show that you believe.

Doing exactly what the Lord commands,

Doing it happily.

*Action is the key - do it immediately,
Joy you will receive.
Obedience is the very best way to show that you believe.*

2 John 1:6 is a reminder of this obedience that God desires:

Love means doing what God has commanded us, and he has commanded us to love one another, just as you heard from the beginning.

Are we being obedient to God and His word?

P is Prepare. We prepare by 3 more "P's." Pause, Prayer, and Praise. Pause is that rest and stillness. Listening to God and receiving His love. Prayer is the ongoing communication with God. Talking with Him about what you are doing together. And then praise is giving glory to God. We can do this through worship and living our lives that display His glory and splendor and point to Him

Then S is share.

Share with others the good news of Jesus. Share by serving. Serve others as Christ has served us. Be the salt and spread the seeds of the kingdom.

Romans 10:15 says:

And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is why the Scriptures say, "How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!"

I want to adapt that for us and say, How beautiful are the branches that bring good news, who branch out and serve others!