



Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina
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What You Don't Know May Help Someone Else Isaiah 61:1-3

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; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of rescue of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.

Isaiah 61:1-3

It was not merely coincidence that when he preached his first sermon at his home synagogue in Nazareth that Jesus read this passage from the prophesy of Isaiah. He did not simply unroll the scroll, close his eyes, and put his finger on the page. Jesus had thought about what he would say to the people who knew him best. He had read Isaiah's words many times and understood what God had asked the prophet to do. He also wanted to bring the kind of good news that Isaiah had brought. He, too, wanted to initiate radical change in the world. He, too, wanted to offer hope and happiness to his people.

I will admit that for anyone other than Isaiah or Jesus, this list of goals is more than daunting. Offering hope to people who are oppressed, healing broken hearts, obtaining freedom for captives and prisoners, and ushering in the era of God's favor and rescue are lofty goals. Who other than an anointed prophet and the Messiah himself could do such things? Everyone who is called of God and responds willingly.

The truth is that each and every one of us as followers of Christ is called to do these things. Today we celebrate with Robert and Lenka their call as missionaries to do these things among the people of Slovakia.

This litany of ministry opportunities is in poetic form which is majestic and fitting for a prophet or messiah, but we cannot allow these grand images to overshadow the simplicity of the work to which we are called.

You can offer good news to the oppressed when you remind someone that unfair working conditions, unjust legal systems, even oppressive relationships are not what God intends for us. You can encourage them to find the strength to stand up for themselves, to insist on better treatment, and you can stand with them in their time of challenge. Your encouragement can help change lives.

You will find broken hearts wherever you go and all those individuals need is another heart to share their sorrow and disappointment with them. Let your compassion be a source of healing for other people and remind them that God is the healer and restorer of all broken hearts.

Captives and prisoners are found not only in military camps and prisons, but also in unrealistic fears, negative self worth, addictions, unhealthy relationships, and sin. By sharing the Good News of God's redeeming love and the power of God's Spirit to change our lives, you can let other people know that they can be free of all the things that bind their spirits and confine their lives. Be bold to help people discover the life God intends for us all.

The Hebrews practiced a Jubilee year in which debts were forgiven, property was returned to its original owners, and everyone experienced a fresh start. Isaiah and Jesus take it upon themselves to let people know that God offers a new beginning to everyone. Isaiah also suggests a day of rescue for God's people. Often mistranslated as "the day of vengeance," the idea is actually that God will rescue his children from whatever threatens or diminishes them.

You can help people to understand that God cares for them and wants a better life for them. You can bring them to a place where they can put aside old ways of doing things and begin life in a fresh way. You can help people change when they allow God to rescue them from the things that hold them down.

We all know what it is like to mourn. We suffer some loss or hurt that cuts us to the quick and aches to the very core of our being. Life changes and we cannot find a place that is not filled with sadness. Your calling is to comfort people who mourn. Be with them. Support them. Encourage them. Sit in silence with them and weep with them. Do not forget to remind them that their mourning will end, however. Help them to see signs of life all around them. Help them discover laughter in the midst of tears. Help them to recognize their blessings even in the midst of their sorrow. By doing so you

will enable them to recover and find their strength in God's mercy. Scripture calls these people "oaks of righteousness" because of their sturdy spirits. You can plant the seeds that will help people grow strong.

One can and will spend a lifetime of ministry working on this list. I daresay, however, that you could ask most career ministers and missionaries if they have accomplished such a list and they would say "No." Those goals seem quite lofty and far-reaching. Most of us are barely able to take care of needs that are immediate and near-at-hand. The key is to do what you do day by day, not focusing on a grand design for life, but putting your attention on people and meeting their needs. God will take care of the grand and glorious if you will take care of his people.

In the movie, *Moneyball*, the story is told of the 2002 Oakland Athletics and their struggle to have a winning season against tremendous odds. Near the end of the movie the A's have reached the unheard of feat of 20 consecutive wins, but they lose to the Minnesota Twins in the playoffs. General Manager Billy Beane is discouraged that once again his team has fallen short of reaching the World Series. As he talks with Peter Brand, the young whiz kid who has developed an algorithm to identify players who can help the team win, Brand plays a tape of a recent ball game. It is an Orioles game played a few weeks before. The tape shows a rather overweight and out-of-condition batter step up to the plate. Clearly he is someone who rarely gets on base by any means but this time he contacts the ball. As he runs to first base, he falls down and thinks he will be called out, but his teammates are yelling at him to get up and run because he hit a home run. Brand says to Beane, "He hit a home run without even knowing it."

Ministry is often like that home run. On some days we connect but feel like our efforts are feeble at best. In truth we may have hit the ball out of the park and do not even realize it. It may be days or weeks or years or never before we see some of the effects of what we do in the name of Christ. Our goal as ministers of the Gospel, however, is not results. Our goal as ministers—and that includes all of us—is faithfulness and response to the calling God has given us. If we are privileged to see the results of our ministry, then all the better.

Robert and Lenka have responded to God's call to share Good News with the people of Slovakia. They will be asked to do a great many things in the name of Christ, not all of which will be grand and glorious. Most of their

work will be mundane and routine. All of their ministry, however, will benefit the people whom they meet and to whom they reach out in compassion.

We celebrate with the two of you in the calling God has offered you. We rejoice in your response and offer our blessing to you both.

Robert and Lenka, I ask you to stand before the congregation as we offer our blessing to you.

The Blessing

Minister: You have listened for the voice of God in sacred places, particularly within your own heart and soul and mind.

People: We have watched you increase in wisdom and in years and in divine and human favor. The delight we take in your presence in our lives is a reflection of God's joy over you.

Minister: Like the Hebrew Samuel, you awakened to a voice calling you in the night. You recognized the voice as God's and responded to God's call.

People: We believe the story of your call is an expression of God's continuous revelation in your life.

Minister: We rejoice that you have found the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet. Therefore, we bless and affirm your ministry, whatever shape it may take.

People: May you continue to know God's healing even as you offer yourselves as instruments of God's healing to others.

Minister: May you be surprised by God's light in the darkness when you need the illumination of divine guidance.

People: May the passion you feel for your calling give wholeness and life to your vocation.

Minister: Above all, know that no matter where your call may lead you, our prayers will surround you, Christ's peace will go with you, and God's love will sustain you. This is our assurance and our hope.

People: Thanks be to God. *Sharland Sledge*

The Laying on of Hands is an ancient ritual that confers blessing. When God called Paul and Silas to become missionaries, the other believers laid their hands upon them and blessed them, sending them out into the world.

You are invited to come forward and offer your blessing to Lenka and Robert. Everyone is welcomed to participate. You may leave your seat and come to the front by the south aisle. You may place your hands on their heads or shoulders or hands. You may offer a brief prayer or say something like, "God bless you," "God's grace be upon you," "May God grant you strength and peace," or something similar. Even a silent prayer indicates to them that your prayers and support are with them. You may return to your seats by the side aisle on the north side of the sanctuary. All are welcome to come and offer blessing.

February 12, 2012

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

We realize, O God, that we are your lambs and that you have provided many people to care for us. We are thankful for the supervisors and teachers, the parents and neighbors, the mechanics and nurses, the policemen and grocers who provide for us and watch over us each and every day. Bless all those people who look out for us and help them to take care of us, we pray.

We thank you for the privilege of caring for others of your children. We are humbled by the opportunities we have of shaping, guiding, and protecting life. Help us “to lead lives worthy of the calling to which we have been called” and to always be attuned to needs around us.

We thank you, O God, for the care we have experienced in weeks past. Death has visited our family of faith and we are wounded by the deaths of the people we love. Hold us closely in your loving arms and provide us with comfort and encouragement, we pray.

At the same time, we rejoice in new life that has come our way. Babies bring with them an excitement and energy for life and we are grateful for the ways in which they enliven us. Bless these little ones and watch over them as they grow into the persons you desire them to become.

Help us in the many ways we call out to you, O God. Make us mindful of the people you place in our lives to provide guidance and counsel. Make us grateful for the people you use to help and heal us. Help us to pay attention to the lives of people who have helped us the most so that we may model ourselves after them and not miss opportunities to minister in your name.

We offer our blessings to Lenka and Robert as they begin their journey of ministry together. Keep them safe as they travel. Provide them a comfortable and happy home in a new land. Surround them with new friends and strong supporters. And bless their ministry to all whose paths they cross. Keep them close to one another and even closer to you, we pray.

Bless us all, O God, for we know you have called each of us to minister in our own way in the places we frequent. Fill us all with your Spirit and guide us with your grace, for we ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.