Answering The Call

(John 15:9-13)

Welcome to Christ’s Community Church. I am so glad that you’re here to worship with us this morning because this is a special day to honor the first responders in our community. As I was reflecting on this weekend, one thought that kept coming to mind over and over and over. And that is that I kept trying to understand how Jesus could do what he did, how he could resist the basic instinct of self-preservation? I’ve been trying to figure out what makes somebody give up their whole life for people that don’t even acknowledge them.

In fact, for three years Jesus poured his life into his twelve disciples. They did life together, they ministered together, but when persecution came, when hard times came, they all fled without a second thought. There were others who received miracles from Jesus and never said thank you. And so, what was it that motivated Jesus to serve and to give his life for strangers, many of whom were self-serving and ungrateful?

As I was thinking about this many Scriptures came to mind, but one stuck out from the gospel of John. If you would like to follow along, turn in your Bible or on your phone to John chapter fifteen and let’s look at verse nine. We are also going to put it up on the screen, John chapter fifteen, verse nine,

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love” (John 15:9-10).

“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you” (John 15:11-12).

“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

In other words, true love is rarely misunderstood because the essence of true genuine love is sacrifice. And so, love is not about taking, love is about giving. In fact, in John chapter three, the Bible describes it this way, “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son” (John 3:16). And so, it was love that drove him. In other words, you were his passion, you were the joy set before him, and it was his love for you that gave him this unwavering focus, the singularity of purpose, because you were in danger and there is an emergency in the world.

The Bible says that even now, “All of creation is groaning in anguish, groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up until the present time.” And not just creation, “But we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:22-23). In other words, the earth is screaming, “Someone call 9-1-1”, because it is reeling under the effects of sin.

But Jesus promised, “Now is the time for judgment on this world; now (the devil) the prince of this world will be driven out” (John 12:31). And so, the alarm has sounded, there is an emergency in the world, like when you get those Amber alerts on your phone.

You see, there is an emergency in the world. It’s like when you get those Amber alerts on your phone. Some of you may remember when they would put missing people on the back of a milk carton? I don’t know if they do that anymore because we’ve had so many children in our house that we have to purchase milk in bulk quantities. But anyway, they post the picture on the milk carton because they’re in danger. There is a chance somebody might see them somewhere, and so we’ve got to get the word out, because they are lost and need to be found. Which is exactly what Jesus said that he came to do, he said, “The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10).

Jesus came into this world running into a dangerous and perilous situation knowing that it would cost him his life. He went to the garden of Gethsemane on Thursday night knowing that they were going to arrest him, condemn him and crucify him. And so with that knowledge he drew deep into the depths of the garden to be alone, praying with his closest disciples, and there he fell on the ground in anguish praying and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground (Luke 22:44). In other words, he was praying for strength knowing that the next day they were going to condemn him and crucify him, not because of what he had done but because of what we have done.

There is no greater love than this. The Bible says it this way, “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). In other words, he didn’t die for those who loved him, he didn’t die for perfect people, Jesus died for the ungodly, the unloving, and the uncaring.

Today there is an emergency in the world. Jesus said, “Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world” (Luke 21:26). And yet many of us come into church nonchalantly, grabbing a coffee, and finding our way to our favorite seat where we can get comfortable. Meanwhile, there is an emergency out there in the world, the alarm is sounding, and it’s time for the church to wake up, because we are surrounded by people on the brink of an eternity separated from the goodness of God.

You see, as the church, we weren’t invited to come in here and get comfortable. Jesus told us to go out and make disciples, and we must take his command seriously because the Bible tells us, “Snatch others from the fire and save them” (Jude 23). That’s how you love others like Jesus loved you, and so we want to be a church that runs into the flames for people that are dying, running into danger for people whose lives are a wreck, and for people that are hurting and without hope. Because we have the good news, the knowledge of Jesus Christ, the answer for their sin, the cure for their disease, and the hope of their salvation.

And so, would you run into a burning building to save as many as you could? Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). I believe it is time for us to get serious about the gospel, because anyone of us could be walking down the street, driving in our car, and suddenly, in a split second, we are standing in front of Jesus. That’s why we need to wake up and pay attention when the Bible says, “Dear children, this is the last hour” (1 John 2:18).

The good news is that God loves you and the rest of the story is that God loves you enough to tell you the truth. And so, when Jesus came into the world, he didn’t come to judge it, but to save it, and when he began to preach, he had a simple message. “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 4:17). He warned us to repent because he came to save us. He warned us to repent because sin is real, hell is real, and unless you repent, you’re not going to heaven. In other words, if you are living in sin and rebellion without repentance, you’re going to find yourself in hell.

Jesus had a lot to say about this and it’s important because it’s not just bad people that are going to hell, but there are going to be some good people, some religious people, and even some preachers. We know that because Jesus said, “Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!” (Matthew 7:22-23). In other words, you can go to church, you can do all that good stuff, but if you don’t repent of your sin, if you don’t have a relationship with Jesus, on the last day he will say, “I never knew you.”

I don’t know if you have noticed or not, but there are a lot of people claiming to be Christians, claiming to be followers of Jesus, running around living like God is okay with everything, but he’s not okay with everything. In fact, if God was okay with everything, he wouldn’t have had to send his one and only Son Jesus Christ to rescue us. If he was okay with everything, he would not have subjected himself to the cruelty of men who would mock him, spit on him, flog him, and kill him (Mark 10:34). But he did and they did, they stripped him, they mocked him, they spit on him, they took a staff and struck him on the head again and again (Matthew 27:28-30). In fact, the Bible says, “His appearance was so disfigured, beyond that of any man, and his form marred beyond human likeness” (Isaiah 52:14).

I know it’s popular in our culture today to think that just because you believe in God you can live however you want, but Jesus said you have got to produce good fruit. In fact, he said, “A good tree cannot bear bad fruit” (Matthew 7:18). And so, we want to have good fruit in our lives because, “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matthew 7:19). And so, we’ve got to get serious and quit playing games about things with eternal significance because, “The end of all things is near” (1 Peter 4:7).

Today more than ever, we’ve got to be focused, clear minded and self-controlled. We’ve got to be a praying church, a holy church, a praying community of believers as we take seriously the command to snatch others from the fire, because there are people all around us that are hurting and dying without hope. Meanwhile, some of you are sitting here looking at your watch hoping to get home in time to watch the basketball game. I don’t know if there any Philadelphia Sixers fans in here, but I do know that Jesus wants to get your attention this morning, he wants to get you on board with his purpose and his mission.

In fact, he warned the church saying, “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! Because you are lukewarm — neither hot nor cold — I am about to spit you out of my mouth” (Revelation 3:15-16). In other words, he says if you’re going to claim my name, if you’re going to identify with my Church, get all the way in and be fully committed. He says, “Quit playing games, get on one side of the fence or the other. If you’re going to follow me, go all the way. If you’re going to sin, you might as well do it well and enjoy it.”

You see, this is important to understand, he calls us to commit, to make a decision, and to respond to his call. He said, “Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:27). In other words, he wants you to respond right now, to give up your life, and surrender to his purpose for the kingdom of God in your life. He says, “In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33). I’m afraid that in our culture today everybody wants the fame without the work, they want the victory without the fight, nobody wants to pay the cost. And in the same way, many people go to church to feel better about themselves, but they don’t want to get all the way in and be disciples of Jesus Christ.

I believe that today, God is calling us out of the comfortable church and he’s calling us to be a little bit dangerous. In other words, he’s calling us to be a church that goes after lost souls even if you have to give up everything. I know this because I’ve been there, I’ve been at the crossroads where I had my own agenda and I had a decision to make. I say this to my shame, I resisted following Jesus for many years, and I know what it’s like to be at the bar and not have any hope. I know what it’s like to be so close to hell that I smelled like smoke. And so, I’m not judging anybody because I’ve been there. For many years of my life, I lived with my own agenda, my own goals, establishing my own business, but I let it all go to serve the Lord Jesus (Mark 10:21).

You see, everybody wants more stuff, comfort and security, but there is a cost for that too. Everybody has to sacrifice something to get what they want, but I stand in agreement with the apostle Paul who said, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). Now, we don’t really understand suffering in America. For many of us, suffering is sitting in line at the drive through at McDonald’s. In fact, most of us see suffering as pain without purpose, something to be avoided at all cost. But I wonder this morning, if there are any of you here that know that suffering can be a good thing?

Look at what the Spirit of God says through the apostle Paul, this is the word of the Lord. He said, “We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope” (Romans 5:2-4). In other words, from God’s perspective, we can rejoice in suffering because we know that God is doing a greater work in us, and it’s just a temporary thing, there is a greater glory that will be revealed in us.

Again, the apostle Paul who was so familiar with suffering for the name of Jesus wrote to the Corinthian church, “Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all” (2 Corinthians 4:17). And yet, for some of us, at the first sign of difficulty, a little bit of inconvenience, just a little bit of suffering and we want to throw up our hands and quit. You know, I’m not going to church anymore, I can’t serve a God like that because he didn’t answer my prayer the way I wanted him to. But sometimes you need to go through something, because what he is doing in you is of greater significance than what is happening to you. In other words, he is pressing you and conforming you, preparing you for an eternal glory.

Jesus called the crowd to him along with his disciples and gave this invitation:

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34). And so, we can’t play it safe anymore, worrying about whether people will like us. We’ve got to take a risk, inconveniencing ourselves, getting down where the real people are because Jesus said, “Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it” (Mark 8:35).

Jesus calls us to live dangerously, and so we can’t stay on the couch, staying comfortable and safe, but we’ve got to go out where its inconvenient, where it’s uncomfortable and even dangerous. And Jesus said, “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves,” which sounds pretty dangerous. And then he said, “Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16). In other words, God is calling us to be like those brave men and women that we are honoring today. To be those who go when they are called, going into the fire, going towards the danger, going to the places where other people run from.

God is calling the church to run after broken people, hurting people, going after lost souls to tell them about our Savior who suffered, died, and rose again for the forgiveness of our sins. Like these brave men and women who respond to the call, it’s time for the church to respond to the call. And so, we have got to run past the cones, the barriers, the police tape, running into the flames, helping the people, touching the people that other churches don’t want to touch. Because Jesus said, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21).

Today, we’ve got to respond to the call, we’ve got to move out, because there are people all around us who are dying every day without Christ and without hope in this world. Which means that you and I need the power of the Holy Spirit to embolden us, giving us enough courage to run into danger, running into harm’s way, running into the flames, following the example of the ultimate first responder who said, “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

All by himself and without any backup Jesus came running into the burning building of our world that was set on fire because of sin. Without hesitation he responded to the call of his Father and came in with the fire extinguisher of his amazing grace. He walked us down from danger, saving us from certain death, before running back into the building to be crucified in our place. Not only was he the first responder, but he responded at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly (Romans 5:6).

At just the right time, before the alarm went off, before you or I had ever done any wrong thing, God had already determined to do whatever it takes to rescue us. Jesus was there before it all started, he was the Lamb that was slain. And the Bible says, “He chose us in him before the creation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4). There are some of you today whom God is calling you to respond to his love. He said, “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness” (Jeremiah 31:3). And so, he is drawing us out this morning, waking us from our slumber, and calling us to be a church that responds to his love. He has offered his forgiveness to us because he loves us and he’s not okay with leaving you lost, wandering, without hope in the world.

And so, the invitation remains, repent of your sins and be saved, because the kingdom of God is near (Matthew 3:2). Only Jesus can deal with our sin and right now he is inviting you to come to him. He is risen, he is alive, and he is drawing you to himself with an everlasting and unfailing love. Believe the good news, repent and be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God bless you!

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