

Sermon #241
Rev. 5:6-14; Acts 2
May 20, 2018 Title slide, slide 1

The Universal Mission

(Slide 2) Multiple languages, different colors of skin, numerous nationalities, various cultures, all coming together in one place at one time. (Slide 3) Tour buses filled the streets and parking lots of historic, spiritual places. (Slide 4) Of all the varied people groups and nationalities, one thing united most all of them, and that was identification with Jesus Christ as their Savior. They had all come to the Holy Land from all around the globe to walk where Jesus walked.

(Slide 5) I am speaking of my recent trip to the Holy Land in April. This was truly an amazing part of my trip to hear all the different languages spoken from all around the globe and to realize that most of them were probably Christians coming for a spiritual experience with their Lord, just like me. I had the privilege of speaking with members of one group from Madrid, Spain in their language. They were staying in our hotel and had come down for breakfast. They were just as excited. Yes, the Holy Land has a way of bringing Christians together from all over the globe. I wrote in my journal, "This is just a little taste of heaven."

(Slide 6) The miracle of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts chapter 2, essentially did a similar thing. (Slide 7) People from all around the globe at that time came for the harvest festival called, Pentecost, just fifty days after Passover. While they were there, a tremendous spiritual movement began. Luke begins the story by telling us that the disciples were all united together in one place praying. It was then that the Holy Spirit blew upon them with tongues of fire in the house where they were staying. And they began to speak in many languages. They were just ordinary Galileans who didn't even speak their own language very well. Yet suddenly, they are speaking the good news of Jesus Christ in the language of Parthians, Medes, Elamites and much more. Most of them were Jews who had been scattered to other countries. It is estimated that on that day 83% of them came from outside Jerusalem, as you see in the graphic. The Holy Spirit was quite strategic and advantageous when breaking into human history.

We can safely say that was the beginning of the era of the church and its mission to the world. There's another passage that in similar fashion, portrays the goal of the mission of the church in uniting people under the name of Jesus, and that is found in the vision of the book of Revelation, the vision that John has of Jesus Christ and the things that will soon take place. (Slide 8) This vision in Rev. 5 may not seem relevant to the story of Pentecost in Acts 2, but I want to suggest this morning that it has everything to do with that, as it shows us the end goal of the mission that God has given to the churches – to our church as well. So, on this day of Pentecost, let's focus on this universal mission to all peoples that God has given to us, his church. (Slide 9) What is our role as a church primarily and secondarily as individuals? And how shall we live in the in between period from the first Pentecost of Acts 2 to the last in Revelation 5?

(Slide 10)

1. We live out the mission by following Jesus.

The mission that we are given focuses on Jesus. He is the central focus of all. Travel with me now to the throne room of God. Open your eyes and see what John saw. We see through an open door that there is a throne which the Almighty sits on with all authority and transcendent power. All the living creatures bow before him in worship, including the twenty-four elders, the four living creatures, and thousands of angels. A scroll is found in the right hand of the one who sits on the throne, but no one in heaven or on earth is found worthy to open the scroll.

We weep with John asking the question, “Who will open the scroll then?” But wait now, we can stop crying and dry our tears, because one comes forward who is worthy, the only one. He is a Lamb. And he looks to be slain. He is standing in the very center of the throne room and all the heavenly beings bow before him. He has seven horns and seven eyes, portraying his almighty power and all-inclusive vision. And his seven spirits go out to all the world.

We watch now as the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders all prostrate themselves before the Lamb. Each one has a harp and they hold golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God’s people. What great assurance that gives us to know that our prayers are not only heard and answered, but that they are a sweet-smelling aroma before our God. Oh, this all-powerful, all-transcendent God loves to hear his people communicate to him all their concerns and all their desires for good.

Now listen to their song. It’s a beautiful song. We’ve never heard anything more beautiful sung in all our lives. They sing to the Lamb who was slain. (Slide 11) “*You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain...*” (v. 9). We pause there and reflect before hearing the rest of the song. This Lamb was slain. That is repeated emphasis. God himself was slain and that’s what makes him worthy of all praise and worship. This Lamb is Jesus, the incarnate God in the flesh who came and lived among us and died a cruel death for us in our place. He is worthy. Therefore, we can truly follow him.

Our mission begins with Jesus, the Lamb who was slain. Do you know this Jesus? I mean really know him? You don’t truly have a mission until you know and follow Jesus. John Wesley wrote about his experience with the Moravian missionaries. He went with them as a missionary to Georgia in the American colonies. He thought he was going to minister to others, but he soon noticed that he had a void, a deficit in his heart. (Slide 12) “I went to America to convert the Indians,” he wrote in his journal, “But oh! who shall convert me?” He really did not know the Jesus of the passionate, Holy Spirit Moravians.

It wasn't until back in England at a meeting at a church on Aldersgate Street on May 24, 1738 when he felt his "heart strangely warmed" as he put it. He went on to say, (Slide 13) "I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for my salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death." Wesley had tried to live the Christian life all on his own, but had failed. Without Jesus, John Wesley had no mission, but with him, he was enabled to go out in his power and see a mighty movement take of God's Spirit work through him.

Without Jesus, we are nothing. He is the truth that changes our lives. He is the one that we follow and the one that we proclaim. (Slide 14) In Acts 2, on the day of Pentecost, Peter proclaimed that "*everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*" And those who repented and believed were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins (2:21, 38). Jesus is our focal point, but what is the extent of our mission? To whom do we go? Who else is involved? We live in this world between Acts 2 and Rev. 5 to include in our mission all peoples everywhere.

Slide (15)

2. We live the mission by including all peoples.

Let's return once more to the throne room worship service. Listen with me as the heavenly creatures continue their magnificent song of praise and joy. We now come to the part of the Lamb's great accomplishment for all humankind. The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures continue to sing, (Slide 16) "*...with your blood you purchased for God members of every tribe and language and people and nation*" (v. 9). Here is the end goal of the universal mission. Members from every tribe and language and people and nation will be ransomed or purchased by Jesus, through his blood, for entrance into the heavenly throne-room as well.

No, this does not mean by any means that all people will be present there, not now nor in the last days when Christ returns. Unfortunately, the rest of the vision of Revelation and many parts of the Bible tell us that many will fall short and will not trust in the power and grace of Jesus Christ. Rev. 21:7 rejoices with those who are victorious in Jesus Christ. But Rev. 21:8 sadly announces all those who will not be there – "the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars."

Thus, our mission is urgent. We look around at each other and declare, "Let this not be on our watch!" We determine to stand pure before the Heavenly Father on that last day through the victory of the slain Lamb, bringing with us many more people ransomed by Jesus as well. We realize now more than ever, that our mission must also include members from all tribes and nations. Jesus redeems people from all people groups, all ethnic backgrounds, all churches, not just the North American clan.

How will we do this? Well, we begin to realize for the first time that this mission includes all of us, not just a select few, the saintly like Billy Graham and Mother Teresa. (Slide 17)

3. We live the mission by all becoming involved.

The mission involves all of us – every one of us. We must all be mission-minded, with a broad world view, using our gifts and talents, and responding to the call of God in our lives. David Boyd, in his excellent book, “You don’t have to cross the ocean to reach the world,” asserts that the call to make disciples of all nations is for all Christians. (Slide 18) “The Great Commission,” he says, “is not something that a few select people get the opportunity to take part in. God expects every believer to be involved and has made cross-cultural discipleship available and attainable to all.”

A ninety-two-year-old lady in a UM church in our conference recently took this call to heart, and began working with children on a Wednesday afternoon kids program, which is still going strong today. She said, “God can still use me.” Yes, he can. He can use all of us with our gifts and passions to reach all peoples.

We don’t necessarily have to go anywhere either. We just begin right where we are. Boyd also affirms that the people groups of this world are coming to us here in America.

(Slide 19)

“Today, just as one the day of Pentecost, we have all the people groups of the known world in our cities, ready and waiting for a move of the Holy Spirit that will transform their lives and give them dreams and visions to take the revelation of God to their own people.”

The key is accepting and loving those who are different from us. We must embrace the “stranger in our midst,” as Jordan preached so well about last Sunday. I am so glad that Dayton is a Welcoming Immigrant city. We have all kinds of people groups coming to Dayton. That is evident in the three international churches also using this building as their ministry home. It is evident in the fact that 17 languages are spoken at Belmont High School. And a new elementary school, the Montgomery Preparatory Academy has purchased the old school building just down from us here on S. Smithville Road. They will have quite a diverse group of students from many nationalities. And they want to partner with us. This is our opportunity. And many of the international peoples here in Dayton are coming to faith in Jesus Christ and following him as well. And many will go back to their countries with the gospel message.

(Slide 20 with clicks)

But we must overcome several obstacles on the way. One, is disbelief that it can happen. Second, is a simple do-nothing attitude. Third is a preservation of the institution attitude. Jeffrey Jones, in his excellent book on Facing Decline, Finding Hope, affirms from his studies that he churches that overcome the maintenance mode of simply keeping up the institution are destined to have a significant future. And finally, we must also overcoming the “us” versus “them” attitudes. We are all together in ministry. Here at Belmont that’s four churches in one.

Right here in Dayton, right here in Belmont UMC, we have an Acts 2 beginning and a Rev. 5 goal of reaching all people that God sends our way. Our communion table

is open for all. Our doors are open for all. We are striving to be a multicultural, multigenerational, and interracial church that reaches out to all.

What will you do to be a part of this all-inclusive ministry? When someone new comes through the doors are you quick to welcome them or do you sit back and judge them or just greet those in your familiar click? I encourage you in the balcony to come down right after each service and greet others. And I encourage all of us no matter where we sit to spend some time with new people. Get to know them. Find out their phone numbers and call them. Invite your friends to church. The children's literacy program and summer VBS programs would be a good time to invite their kids.

(Slide 21 with clicks) We also have many needs for people to get involved. To just name a few, we currently need more greeters to do this important ministry. We also need more ushers, senior adult ministers for pastoral care ministry, and people who are willing to go and greet new people who move into our community. We receive a list each month of newcomers. All you have to do is simply go and welcome them to the community and hand them a flyer about our church. There are many more ways to get involved as well.

(Slide 23)
Conclusion

What a joy it was to hear multiple languages from many people groups around the world while in Israel, knowing that many of these were also followers of Jesus. That Pentecost reality has now come full circle in the heavenly redemptive worship service of Rev. 5. Our mission today involves following Jesus, the Lamb who is worthy, including all peoples in the mission, and all of us becoming involved. Are you getting involved by using your gifts and talents in service? How will you get involved in the mission of Belmont UMC to make new and growing disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of our community and beyond?