



September 8
Rev. Ben Carver
Shem Creek Presbyterian Church
1 Corinthians 3.5-9

“What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.”

Church planting is usually defined by measurable results. How many people are in your church? When will you buy a building? These are questions that church planters often receive and they often define the “success” of a new church.

However, church planting is primarily about sharing the Gospel with neighbors and inviting others to worship. If you read the Gospel writers and Paul's letters, it's clear that God calls us to faithfully share the Gospel and invite individuals to worship the Triune God with us. Scripture leaves the results to God. The Spirit of God will bring about salvation in the souls of the lost; the Spirit of God will apply the work of Jesus Christ to the hearts of the lost. The Triune God will build his Church and the eternal results are in his hand.

In light of that truth, the burden of attaining large worship numbers or securing a new property for a sanctuary vanish. Results, measured or unmeasured, belong to God. It is his church and he will do what is best. Your responsibility, however, is to be faithful.

Faithful to share the Gospel in your community, with coworkers, neighbors, and others that God places in your path.

As we take the month of September to reflect on evangelism, remember that your responsibility is not to save anyone or scare anyone out of hell. Your responsibility is to declare the good news of what Jesus Christ did at Calvary with men and women who work, live, and play in your community. Leave the results to God.

September 9

Rev. Howard Wheeler

River City Reformed Church

Jonah 4:6-11

Then the LORD God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine. But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered.... God said to Jonah, "Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?" "I do," he said. "I am angry enough to die." But the LORD said, "You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?"

Jonah and the Squash Bug

The word microcosm literally means "little world." A garden is a microcosm – a little world that often poignantly illustrates spiritual truths. Perhaps this is why Jesus often taught about life in the Kingdom of God using parables from gardening. My own gardening ritual is predictable – it begins by checking on my vines: my watermelons and my pumpkins. I find great joy watching these vines grow and flower and produce. They are the first things I check in the morning and the last things I check in the evening. Of all the growing things in our garden, these bring me the greatest pleasure. Yet, just as Adam and Eve had pestilence stalking in their garden, so do I – squash bugs, the mortal enemies of my beloved pumpkin vines, and so my own mortal enemies as well. They are the most resilient of pests, impervious to the most malevolent schemes we can devise. My wife and I have asked around, we have researched on the internet, we have tried remedies both folk and chemical to eradicate these pests. Finally, they are starting to dwindle and to my great delight I found a volunteer pumpkin growing hidden among my sweet potato vines. And as I rejoiced in my seeming triumph over the insidious squash bug, a strange scripture came to my mind – "do you have a right to be angry about the vine?"

Remember how angry Jonah was when the Lord sent a pest to destroy his beloved vine? God's indictment of Jonah was searing – literally! He had loved a vine more than he had loved the lost! He had more care and concern over a vine, than for men and women, boys and girls perishing without hope and without Christ. Then the question came to mind – am I as sorrowful over the destruction of the lost as I am over the destruction of my pumpkin vines? What about you? What daily inconveniences, what annoying trifles, give you more grief than the fact that your neighbor's life is in the relentless grip of sin and desolation? The next time you are in your own garden and you behold the desolation of the squash bug or the corn worm or the scorching heat – remember your neighbor and commit to pray for him, to love him as yourself, and to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

September 10

Rev. Justin Westmoreland

Trinity Pres.

Mark 1:17

"Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Fishing Together

Fishing is awesome. I have vivid memories of dragging catfish on cane poles out of granddad's muddy pond. When the summer heat was too hot to fish, we were watching Bill Dance and Bassmasters on television pull in prize largemouth bass with every cast. In Mark 1:17, Jesus said to two fishermen who later became disciples, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." The gospel reports that immediately they left their nets and followed him.

Most believers hear this passage and feel ashamed that they are not as bold or as assertive or intentional in pursuing neighbors with the gospel. But have we reduced Jesus' fishing calling to something that is both more difficult and actually less productive than what he intended?

Jesus established his followers (particularly these two fishermen) as a society of fishers of men, or a society of evangelists. Fishermen in Jesus' times didn't fish with spinner baits and Shakespeare ugly stiks. Fishermen used nets, not rods and reels. John Leonard in his book, *Get Real*, makes the astute observation, "When you fish with nets, you must fish *together*." He cites the fascinating example of modern Polynesian Island fisherman. They fish more like Peter and Andrew than Bill Dance and Bassmasters. Just as no one fished in the first century in isolation, so fishing in the Polynesian islands is a community effort. The entire population of the island gets together and makes a human net across the lagoon. They line up side by side together, holding palm branches that form a wall, and then they move forward together, closing the net down

so that it packs the fish in tight together. The end result is that the water is black with fish. People on the shore then take nets and scoop up nets full of fish. Alone, it would be impossible to catch that many fish! Leonard says, "But together they caught more fish than they possibly could have imagined." Leonard suggests that we invite our non-believing friends to the party and let the grace that we lavish upon one another spill out onto the nonbelievers among us.

The key word here is "together." Fishing for men is a *together* activity. Young people today champion authenticity, and it is questionable how an evangelist can qualify as authentic unless an outsider can observe how he or she relates to his fellow brothers and sisters. After all, the same Jesus that told a group of fishermen that they would be fishers of men, also told them that the world would know them by their love for one another (John 13:35). Evangelism today must be a community project.

You'll note that Peter and Andrew dropped their nets and left them behind to follow Jesus. American Christians tend to equate this net dropping with quitting one's job and moving into foreign missions. Or if one is not "called" to that level of obedience, one must remain in a secular position and be intentional about weaving the gospel into conversations. But have we missed Jesus' point? Instead of leaving behind our regular jobs, perhaps the nets we need to drop and leave behind are our rugged individualism, our isolation, and our superficial fellowship. We must follow Jesus into "together" fishing and let the grace spill over to the watching world. We can certainly catch more men together.

September 11

In 2013, General Synod of the ARPC passed a statement of willingness to have congregations of the denomination engage in an annual National Day of Prayer against Oppression on September 11. Instead of sending you a devotional today, we would encourage you to use this time to pray.

Continue to pray for the Brunson family, as well as others around the world who are unjustly imprisoned or persecuted. World Relief also has a [prayer card](#) you can use to pray specifically for the displaced and refugees in the Middle East. (www.worldrelief.org/pray)

September 12
Rev. Kevin Carter
Hope Presbyterian Church
1 Peter 3:15

“sanctify the Lord Christ in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you...”

Evangelism can be a daunting task, especially in starting conversations with people. Unlike the Lord Jesus in Luke 18, or Paul in Acts 17, people rarely come up and ask, “What can I do to be saved?” or offer you the floor to present your “new doctrine.” Yet, you are called to “sanctify the Lord Christ in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you...” (1 Peter 3:15 NKJV) While the context of these words is enduring suffering for Christ’s sake, an application of them is evangelism. Every day you need to be ready for evangelism, and here are two keys for this.

The first is “sanctify the Lord Christ in your heart.” Each day, you are to consecrate Christ as Lord of your life. He is directing your steps into each day, for the good you will do, suffering you will endure, and the people you will meet; so, consecrate yourself to his lordship. This needs to be a daily task, a purposeful action each morning.

The second is “always be ready to give a defense to everyone...for the hope that is in you.” It is the soul resting in the hope of eternal life, that is most prepared to speak of the gospel. Hope brings a countenance and comfort to your life that is noticeable, especially when hardship arises. Can you articulate the gospel hope? Does hope reflect itself in your daily life? It is interesting that the testimony of the early church, when it was being dispersed because of heavy persecution, “went everywhere preaching the word.” (Acts 8:4)

Giving thanks to the Lord, acknowledging Christ in conversation, and speaking God’s Word are not daunting when Christ is consecrated, and hope is alive in the heart.

September 13
Rev. Wayne Frazier
Church Vitality Coach
Genesis 18:1-15

¹ And the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. ² He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth ³ and said, “O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. ⁴ Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest

yourselves under the tree, ⁵ while I bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.” So they said, “Do as you have said.”⁶ And Abraham went quickly into the tent to Sarah and said, “Quick! Three seahs of fine flour! Knead it, and make cakes.”⁷ And Abraham ran to the herd and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to a young man, who prepared it quickly.⁸ Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them. And he stood by them under the tree while they ate.⁹ They said to him, “Where is Sarah your wife?” And he said, “She is in the tent.”¹⁰ The Lord said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.” And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him.¹¹ Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah.¹² So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?”¹³ The Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’¹⁴ Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.”¹⁵ But Sarah denied it, saying, “I did not laugh,” for she was afraid. He said, “No, but you did laugh.”

Part 1 – HOW GOD ANIMATES VITAL CHURCHES?

How does God produce vital churches? The beginning of God’s Church in Genesis provides some clues! Today we observe from God’s perspective and tomorrow from the human perspective.

Abraham, our forefather in the faith, received in Genesis 12 promises later confirmed two times. (Genesis 15,18) God produces vital churches by **visiting** them. God visited Abram, a sinful, idolater! So, **pray** for God to “visit” our neighbors with gospel power! God visited Faith ARP in Merritt Island, FL as 40% of new members were by conversion! Prayer is essential for conversions and vitality! Human strength cannot build God’s church! Abraham and Sarah were childless and beyond child bearing years. Yet God “visited” and Isaac was born! The impossible happened! The same is true for the new birth! “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” (Gen. 18:14a) The same is true for your local church!

God met Abraham and Sarah **where they were**- living in a tent by the oaks of Mamre. (Gen. 18:1) The Lord initiated the connection because “No one seeks God.” (Rom. 3:11) Our “pursuing” God said, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” (Luke 19:10) God, the Son, came in a human body to this world where we are. So, we want to initiate connections with our neighbors as God did with us!

God came **vulnerable and needy**. (Gen. 18:4-8) The visitors to Abraham’s tent arrived in an arid desert region in the heat of the day. They needed water for dusty feet, water for thirst, food for hunger, and the cooling shelter of a tree. Almighty God who is self-sufficient, humbly came allowing people to meet the Creator’s needs. Similarly, Jesus,

God in human flesh, came in vulnerability. Be vulnerable with your neighbors. Let them help us too!

Then see how God animates vital churches!

September 14
Rev. Wayne Frazier
Church Vitality Coach
Genesis 18:1-33

¹⁶ Then the men set out from there, and they looked down toward Sodom. And Abraham went with them to set them on their way. ¹⁷ The Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, ¹⁸ seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?" ¹⁹ For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him." ²⁰ Then the Lord said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, ²¹ I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know." ²² So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the Lord. ²³ Then Abraham drew near and said, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴ Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? ²⁵ Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" ²⁶ And the Lord said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake." ²⁷ Abraham answered and said, "Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. ²⁸ Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking. Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?" And he said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there." ²⁹ Again he spoke to him and said, "Suppose forty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of forty I will not do it." ³⁰ Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there." He answered, "I will not do it, if I find thirty there." ³¹ He said, "Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it." ³² Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there." He answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it." ³³ And the Lord went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place.

Part 2 – HOW DO GOD’S PEOPLE RESPOND IN A VITAL CHURCH?

When God visited Abraham he experienced the best Middle Eastern hospitality! Hospitality is essential for evangelism and a vital church! In Genesis 18 Abraham, our forefather in the faith, demonstrated the vitality of a “welcoming” church! That’s a church with an outward focus connecting with neighbors. He was outside his tent. He noticed neighbors around him. He did not wait for them to approach. He **ran** to them. He **pleaded**, “do not pass by your servant.” (vs. 3) That may seem strange to us. Yet this was his heart! He earnestly wanted to **serve** them and he did. (vs. 4-8) Who are we serving? Church members? People like us? Or neighbors who may be different or the next generation? Abraham’s intent was to **refresh** (vs. 5) these travelers. There is no greater need in our hurried lives! Neighbors are often filled with pain and disappointment with no one to help- not even family!

Abraham **made time** and **effort** to give his very best. Hospitality is the mark of a “welcoming church” that connects with neighbors. Friendships are valued! Love people for who they are---made in God’s image. It’s fulfilling the second great commandment, “Love your neighbor as yourself” for God’s glory! Conversions are in God’s hands. Who are we regularly welcoming into our lives?

In verse 1-15 only God **asks questions**: “Where is Sarah?” and “Is anything too hard for the LORD?” But in verses 22-33 Abraham boldly questioned God as he interceded for his neighbors in Sodom when he heard about impending judgment. It is our daily privilege to intercede for our neighbors who don’t know Jesus! That’s a mark of a vital church! That’s a church that connects with its neighbors! And that’s a church that sees the gospel transform lives! The motivation comes from God who said, “Is anything too hard for the LORD?” This is how a vital church responds!