

THE VIEW FROM HERE

Part One *Isaiah 52:7*

1. We are sent...

- John 20:19-21

2. to all kinds of people...

- Matthew 28:18-20

3. with a message...

- Luke 24:46-48

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- Acts 1:6-8

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West Valley Church
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The View From Here¹ ***Part One***

The woman was standing in the gym last Tuesday night with her children, her head bowed low, crying. My wife, Shelly, couldn't help but notice her and quietly slipped alongside her to ask if she was all right. The woman asked, "Do you go to this church?" Shelly nodded her head and said, "Yes I do." The woman then said, "Thank you so much for doing Trunk or Treat for us." She said, "We live in the neighborhood where the young man was shot. It wasn't safe for me to do anything for my children, but I was able to bring them here and we could spend the entire evening in safety. Thank you so much. Please tell your church thank you so much." Shelly told her she would keep praying for her and her children. My wife had the opportunity to be Jesus to that young mom. *YOU* were Jesus to that young mom when you warmly greeted her at the gate, when you smiled and gave her children candy, when you made sure she had ketchup for her hotdog, and any other way that you helped out Tuesday night. *YOU* were Jesus to *every one* of the 2,000 or so people that came through, and you were Jesus to each other.

My friends, this is a perfect illustration of why we do what we do. Most unchurched people in our culture and community won't first respond to an invitation to believe, but they will respond to acts of kindness, hospitality, and love. Through these actions, and our ongoing acceptance of people, the Holy Spirit can work in their lives to lead them to another step, and another, and another, and as they feel they belong here, they will be open to believing the important truth of God's love for them through Jesus Christ. Their next step might be Homework Club, or Breakfast with

¹ Primary sources:

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Santa, or Wednesday Night Life, worship services, Starting Point, small groups, and on and on.

With that in mind, here's just a little highlight video of some of the fun from Tuesday night.

Today we begin a new, three-part series entitled, "The View From Here." God has brought you in your spiritual life to where you are now – to a place where you will get a fresh and new view of the way forward in your life, like a climber who has been hiking until finally cresting the mountain and is able to see the amazing expanse of what lies ahead. I'm praying that God will open to you new vistas of where you can go from where you are. The same thing is true for our church; God has brought this church through the sixty-plus years to this place and time. And with all the amazing things that God is accomplishing right now, we have an incredible view of where to go from here. We want to you to be able to see *The View From Here* at West Valley Church. We are in an amazing place as a church, and we have amazing places to go that are right in front of us. We want to share what it means to be a missional church – that means a church on mission. We are going to see the view of the new and exciting ways we are fulfilling our mission, and we also want to see how you and I can live missionally as Christians in this world. As we proceed, keep in mind that every command Jesus gave in the Bible applies to both the church *and* the individual believer; both you as a Christian and we as a church have an ability to respond – a response-ability to Jesus' Kingdom commands.

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah gives us a compliment as we consider going out on mission:

"How beautiful on the mountains
are the feet of those who bring good news,
who proclaim peace,
who bring good tidings,
who proclaim salvation,
who say to Zion,
'Your God reigns!'" (Isaiah 52:7, niv)

From our current vantage point, God is calling us to bring the Good News of his love and salvation to others. So let's go, you beautiful-footed people! There are mountains awaiting us!

There are four directives that Jesus gave, that outline our missional mandate of our mountains. They challenge each of us with a call to be on mission in every moment of our lives. "Each time Jesus gave a sending command, it was spoken to a group of his disciples. These same commands are still in effect for the church today, his current disciples."²

So first let's remember that³...

² Stetzer and Putman, pg. 30

³ *ibid*, 30-33

1. We are *sent*...

The first of Jesus' sending command comes from John chapter 20. The passage is taking place on the day of Jesus' resurrection. That morning, Mary Magdalene, then Peter and John, discovered the tomb with the stone rolled away. Later that Sunday evening they all saw Jesus. So these are the first words that John records Jesus speaking to his disciples after his resurrection:

“On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’” (John 20:19-21, niv)

The story begins by pointing out to us that the disciples were gathered *behind closed doors* – a place where a lot of churches still are to this very day. Then Jesus gave them a promise of peace. That promise of peace is very important. The disciples were about to be challenged to come out from hiding in their comfortable gathering inside that room behind closed doors, to begin engaging their community for the sake of the Good News.

So he assured them of his resurrection by reminding them of his crucifixion: “He showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.” – they knew it was really Him. By the way, that’s why sharing together in communion like we did last week is so important to us – it’s a way that Jesus reminds us of his crucifixion and resurrection.

Then he again declared peace in verse 21. He said:

“Peace be with you!” So Jesus proclaimed peace, reminded them of his crucifixion and validated his resurrection, pronounced peace again, and then told them, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” (John 20:21, niv)

One author writes, “With that one command Jesus announced two thousand years of direction for the church, still in effect for the churches of today...He proclaimed that we are sent. The church is, and you are individually, God’s missionary to the world.”⁴ West Valley Church is an instrument of God to reach the world, especially in our community. We have been sent to be on mission here in West Valley *today* and we must accept that call, that directive to be on mission where God has placed us.

We are called to engage a culture that is not our preferred culture. If we are going to do that, we must take the gospel to our neighborhoods and not hold on to our preferences.

⁴ *ibid*, 31

As a church, we must think about the preferences of those outside the church, because we are sent to them. This is hard for us, because what drew us to church in the first place was that someone was willing to give up their preferences to reach us through ours. So we begin to think that the church is here to meet our preferences. But now we are called to welcome others through *their* preferences, not our own.

But this struggle isn't anything new. The early church wrestled with this too. For Peter, it was the issue of going to the Gentiles and eating meat. Acts eleven says:

“The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him and said, ‘You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.’” (Acts 11:1-3, niv)

So Peter explained to the church in Jerusalem that when God had commanded him to go to the Gentiles, even *he* said:

“Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.” (Acts 11:8, niv)

But God spoke again – in fact three times – so Peter put aside his preferences and went to the Gentiles and built relationship with them and ate with them.

There is a tendency for us to become comfortable in our sort of Christian bubble. We listen to James Dobson or Focus on the Family to help us raise our kids, we get financial advice from Dave Ramsey, we sing along to K-Love, and Facebook feeds us posts that its algorithms have determined we are prone to. Did you know that? Facebook's computers are constantly tabulating how many seconds you spend looking at someone's post, what stories you follow links to, what things you like and what emojis you use and what things you post, and they make sure only those things that agree with you are what show up in your feed. They also make sure to give you advertising that fits your preferences. So we are constantly reinforced in our preferences until we have what sociologists called a “herding effect.” When you are running in a herd of buffalo, everything looks the same. What we see becomes our reality.⁵ We think that everyone around us knows where we are, and they can come to the church if they want to be like us.

But the view from here is to a different place than where we currently stand. The whole idea of growth and following Jesus means you keep moving as you follow him. So we are grateful and excited for where we've been, but the view is ahead of us – that's where Jesus wants us to go. So that means we are sent...

2. to *all* kinds of *people*...

In John 20:21 Jesus pronounced that we are sent. But it doesn't end there – he gives us more detail in Matthew 28:

⁵ *ibid*, 32-33

“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’” (Matthew 28:18-20, niv)

In the Greek, the words for “all nations” are *panta ta ethne*. We get our English word “ethnic” from the word, *ethne*. When we read Jesus’ command to “go to all nations,” we think countries, but when Jesus said these words, there were no countries like we know of today. Nation-states are a modern invention. In Jesus’ day there were groups of people and there were empires. Jesus meant that we are to go to all groups of people. It meant to go to all the different kinds of people that existed. It still means that today. In today’s world, we as individual Christians and as a church have to remember that we are *still* sent to all different kinds of people. The definition of that means we go to groups of ethno-linguistic people right here in our community. That means that we must put aside our preferences in order to reach out to and worship alongside people who are different than us, or speak different than us. Sometimes we might encounter people who speak English like us but we still aren’t speaking the same language because we are Christians and they are not. Other times, the people we encounter and we welcome may not speak the same language; they may speak English and we speak Spanish, or vice-versa. So we’ve got to find ways to be able to communicate together if we are going to obey this second “sending” command of Jesus to all people.

So here at West Valley Church we’ve been able to do this through our work in the community, speaking their language at the point of their need at Wide Hollow, with the Homework Club, with Science Camps and Science Nights, and through our big events like Wednesday Night Dinners, or Trunk or Treat, Breakfast with Santa, and Upward Soccer. We’ve also been able to do that by sharing languages of Spanish and English.

And now we are going to take all those lessons we’ve learned that have gotten us to here, and obey Jesus as he sends us further out, to the community of Mountainview Elementary. I’ll share more about that in a few minutes. I’m so excited!

We are *sent* to all *kinds* of people...

3. with a *message*...

In the third sending command, Jesus spoke to his disciples, and by extension to us as the church. He clarified even more the message we are to take with us both as we go, and as we welcome those who come to us. It is the purpose of the Great Commission. We read it in Luke’s Gospel:

“He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.’” (Luke 24:46-48, niv)

Jesus said we are sent to all people and we have a message to deliver. We are the carriers of this special message that Christ died and rose again for us, and that there is no other hope for our lives and this world outside of Christ. So *everything* we do, whether in going out to people or welcoming them here, is to expose them to the message of hope in Christ. Since we know how great God's love is, we want to persuade others, too. The Bible says this:

“Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others....For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:11, 14-21, niv)

Everything we do is for *that* purpose and to *that* end as Christians and as a church. Now, I'll remind you what I've said before; the way we do that is different today than it used to be. It used to be that people would hear the message, they would believe, and then they would belong to the church. So Christians and the church's responsibility was to go out and tell people the truth and ask them to believe. The order was first they would believe, then they would belong. But in our culture today that way doesn't work anymore for the most part. Today people won't believe until they know they belong. We must love them, be welcoming and accommodating to them, and *then* they will consider believing. *Evangelism is no longer an event, it is a process.* It *used* to be an event, like in the days of the Billy Graham Crusades. But in today's culture people are less responsive to that. People won't believe it just because we say it. They need to *see* us live and demonstrate it; as well as speak it, *before* they believe it.

Please understand that our work in our community serving the needs of our neighborhood's families, both at the school and here in our building, is not going to see the quick results of an event, like you might've seen in years past; instead, it has been a slow work that has built our reputation of love and acceptance. Our community trusts us now, and they are seeing that we genuinely care for them and have something significant to offer: the message of God's love in Christ! And now they are beginning to respond. This is the same thing that will happen in *your* relationships among your unchurched family and friends. But you don't have to force the “event” – you can keep loving, accepting, and serving, and God will provide the opportunity for you or someone else to speak it into their lives.

As a church, we have found an effective way to prove that we care and that we want to help people and that God loves them. One big way we do that is we help them succeed in school! We've become very good at this, and it's now working so well that the West Valley School District has encouraged us to expand our reach. This has given us an open door to build relationships with families and with schoolteachers, administrators, and staff. And it has opened the way for us to now reach out further to Mountainview, which I'll explain more about in a minute. We have been sent to all kinds of people right here in our neighborhood and community, with a message, and thankfully we are...

4. empowered by the Spirit.

We've looked at the first three directive statements of Jesus – his “sending” statements, but there is one more statement that Jesus made while he was here on earth. In fact, it was his last words here on earth before he ascended into heaven where he will be until he returns one day. He spoke these words to his disciples, and again, by extension, to all of his followers through history to right here with us in West Valley. This is what we are told:

“Then they gathered around him and asked him, ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’ He said to them: ‘It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’” (Acts 1:6-8, niv)

When they gathered together with Jesus, the disciples asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” Think about it – 2,000 years ago and they are saying, “Lord, is the rapture going to happen now?” Two thousand years later, and we are still obsessed with that question!

Here's the point – when they asked for inside information about the end times, Jesus said, “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.” When they were too focused on the end times – a lot like many people are today, Jesus said, “Do not get focused on that!” Instead, he said, “Here's the important thing you need to think about: you are going to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and you are going to receive from him the power you need to tell people about me.” It's very clear that the Holy Spirit – God's very own presence – is given to us so that we have the power as individuals and as a church to tell people the Good News about how much God loves them, and how they can be saved from their life of death in sin to an abundant life in Christ here on earth – a life that will continue on forever even after we die. Doesn't it seem clear from Jesus' sending words that the Spirit would give us power to tell others? So if you or I are afraid to tell people about Jesus, what does that tell us? Either we *don't* have the Holy Spirit, or we are not depending on him and allowing him to do what he came into our lives to do. Either way, if people are not being introduced to Christ around you, it's not for a lack of

power; it's not God's fault. Folks, there are people all around you who have never heard from you how much God loves them. They've never heard it from you!

God has given *you* the power. God has given *you* the resources. God has given *you* a church that *you* can invite your friends to. God has given *you* a church that you can get involved in, in ways that create opportunities to build relationships. God has brought *us* to great heights, so that we can see *even greater* things ahead from here.

Eight years ago this month Shelly and I were praying about accepting the near-unanimous church vote that called us to move here. When God made it clear that he had called us, there were some things that he told me very clearly we would do here. I'm not bragging, I'm telling you this so that you will know that God has done great things here. Eight years ago, before I ever stepped into the pulpit, God told me that we would have a well maintained and updated building that would be open to our community's needs. He told me we would need to change the way we look at missions by entering into a multi-year partnership with a church in another country. He told me that we would partner with Wide Hollow Elementary in order to help meet the needs of children in our community. He told me we would become a multi-generational, multi-cultural church – not a church that was a group of English-speakers in one room and a group of Spanish-speakers in another room, but a true multicultural church worshipping together – a reflection of West Valley. To be multicultural is a foretaste of heaven, when we are all gathered around God's throne singing praises in Spanish and English and in every tongue from every tribe and nation, according to Revelation 7.

Eight years ago God told me that we would have small groups meeting in the neighborhoods of people in our church. And God told me that we would get this church out of debt so that we could spend more dollars on ministry instead of a mortgage. He told me that this would be church of health and growth, where people would find healing from so much hurt in the church and in their lives, and be in healthy relationships.

Eight years ago He said we would become a church that had multiple locations, with satellite campuses in other locations around the valley and beyond.

Eight years ago, who would've thought that today our facility would be used nearly every day of the week, sometimes multiple times a day, by groups in our community. Who would've thought that our foyer would undergo a \$120,000 renovation that was paid for in cash within a year? Eight years ago, who would've thought that today we would have so many small groups? Who could've told you that we would have the incredible blessing of worshipping bilingually with such dear, dear, brothers and sisters in Christ as our Spanish-speaking family (It brings tears to my eyes!) Eight years ago who would've told you that today we would be a year away from finishing a church and community center in the middle of a town in Guyana, South America – and that we would've sent over \$100,000 in just three years? Who would've known that we would have such abiding and deep relationships with the people of that village and that they would teach us so much about life and work and prayer and death and grief and joy and worship?

Eight years ago would you have guessed that people here today would love each other so deeply, pray for each other daily, and gather together in their homes in small groups all over town? That we would care for each other the way we do? Did you know that last week a chaplain from Memorial Hospital met with Pastor Arden and me to ask us how we take such good care of our people? We were told that no other church in town has more contact with people in hospitals and nursing homes. None! That's because of the great work of Pastor Arden, Maxine Lydin, our other volunteers and our small groups and our pastoral team. And who could've told you we would have such an amazing team of pastors today?

Would anyone have known eight years ago that we would open our church to *thousands* during Halloween and Christmas and Easter? That Upward Soccer would have over 500 children involved – and that is *after* we reduced the ages involved to try to control the number!

Who would've told you eight years ago that we would be where we are? Let me tell you folks, God has brought us to a great place!! And better yet, *the view from here is amazing!*

Let me help you see something a little more clearly – something that is right on the next horizon – if you look with your heart you will see it.