

The Global Church

President Abraham Lincoln once said that, *"God must love the common people, he made so many of them!"* That saying has been famously re-tweeted by church leaders as, *"God must love the local congregation, he made so many of them"*.

I hope this morning that you would agree with me that the local congregation is important, and that God loves our congregation here at St. Andrew's, and that our congregation is important to God. That the ministries we undertake with children, youth, adults and seniors are important. That our ministries at Inn from the Cold, the Newmarket Food Pantry, and to the residents of Botsford House are making a difference in the lives of those who receive them. That the support and counsel we give to the vulnerable, the troubled, the poor, the sick, the housebound, and the grieving, is vital. That providing our facilities for such groups as A.A. and Al-anon, and Family Speech Therapy, and other community groups, is an important part of what we do.

But since this is the season of Lent, as the cross of Jesus rises before us, and the promise of the empty tomb confronts us, there is something else that we need to say. It's not all about us! As important as St. Andrew's is, as important as the local church is, God's plan extends way beyond our community. Way beyond the churches of York Region. Way beyond Ontario. Way beyond Canada. God's plan extends to the ends of the earth.

God's plan of redemption is not only that people in our community are reached with the good news of Jesus. It's that everyone in the world is reached. So today I want you to get the big picture. To understand that until we have a vision of the Church that includes the entire planet, we have an incomplete God's Church, his plan of redemption, and the mission he calls us to as Christians. Do you remember the great commission Jesus gave to his disciples, and to us, in Matthew 28:19 (GNB)?

"Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age."

The most common rendition of that verse begins, ***"Go into all the world"*** but a better translation of the original Greek is, ***"Go to all people groups"*** or ***"Go to all the nations."*** That command was already implicit in God's call

to Abraham in the first book of the Bible, in Genesis Chapter 12:2-3 (Msg), God said to Abraham:

***I'll make you a great nation
and bless you.
I'll make you famous;
you'll be a blessing.
I'll bless those who bless you;
those who curse you I'll curse.
All the families of the Earth
will be blessed through you.***

Now ultimately that blessing came through one particular person Jesus Christ, but we have to understand that God's blessing has always been intended for all peoples and nations. God's plan is a global plan. Of course, no local congregation, can be everywhere all at once. None of us have unlimited people or finances. That's why there are so many local congregations. So in order to be part of God's mission on earth, we need to think beyond ourselves and in global terms. Here's one perspective on all this from one of my favourite Christian communicators, Anglican Canon J. John. Turn your attention to the video screen:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L6TGxKvSqH8>

Now that video is really about a truth that we often forget, that we are part of a global, intergalactic enterprise. Naturally, as a congregation we are focussed most of all on what happens locally at St. Andrew's, or perhaps within *The Presbyterian Church in Canada.* and our language betrays that sentiment. We talk about "*my congregation*" or "*my denomination*". But, as J. John reminds us in the video, we are part of a "*global enterprise with branches everywhere*" doing all kinds of good work for the gospel so that Christ may be known. So that God's Kingdom may come on earth. And that is the bottom line. To make Christ known. Listen to what Paul writes to Romans 10:12-15 (NRSV):

12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. 13 For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

14 But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? 15 And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

This passion Paul had for spreading the gospel is an essential part of the mission that God gave to the church. Unless we see this – this global mission of reaching out to all humanity, we misunderstand what God’s work on the cross is all about. The task of the Church, the reason why the Church is spread out across the world, is so that in Jesus Name people in every corner of our globe can be reached with the gospel and touched by the love of Christ.

Now obviously we aren’t all meant to be missionaries and travel to other countries in order to do that. There is much to be done at home, right here, in Newmarket and York Region. But it does mean at least two things should be important to us:

First, we should pray for those who are called to be missionaries and who are sent out by the Church to all people everywhere. We should pray for God to bless their work, to make it fruitful. We should pray for the Church in other lands, and especially for the persecuted church. We should stay informed about the global church so we know what to pray about.

And second, we should financially support the work of mission across our country and around the world. For us as Presbyterians, we do that through the line on your offering envelope that says "*Presbyterians Sharing.*" As Presbyterians we share together with other Presbyterian congregations all across this country in supporting the mission of the Christian Church.

This morning our worship service has included prayers, liturgies and songs from around the world. We have done that intentionally to reinforce the truth that the Church of Jesus Christ is a global church, not simply a white European/North American Church. But we’ve adopted a global style of worship today in particular because in a few weeks five of our young people along with Rev. Laura will be leaving for Ghana in Africa to share with the Church there.

But most of all, we have done it, because the cross and the empty tomb belong to the whole Church. We are all on this Lenten journey together. So it is good for us to sing on a regular basis the hymns and songs that Christians in other countries sing. It’s good for us to pray in their words, and not only in ours. Who better to pray for the nation of Syria, than the Christians we live there? Who better tell us what to pray for the persecuted church than the members of those churches? And isn’t singing some of the worship songs of African Christians in our worship a wonderful way to express our solidarity and communion with them?

Why does this all matter? Let me take you to the Book of Revelation, the last words of the Bible, where Jesus' disciple John, now an old man, is given a revelation about the fulfilling of the blessing of all the nations that was given to Abraham in the first book of the Bible. Revelation 7:9-10:

⁹ After this I looked, and there was an enormous crowd—no one could count all the people! They were from every race, tribe, nation, and language, and they stood in front of the throne and of the Lamb, dressed in white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ They called out in a loud voice: "Salvation comes from our God, who sits on the throne, and from the Lamb!"

This is where we are headed! As distant and unfamiliar as churches in India, Africa, South America, the Middle East, and China and in every nation on earth may be, our future is intimately tied to theirs. When Jesus returns to reclaim this world as its rightful King, we will find ourselves praising God alongside Christians from every age and from every nation on earth. So I suggest to you that God's plan for the future ought to effect the way we live, and think, and worship today!

Our liturgies, prayers, and songs do just belong to us. They belong to the whole Church. And their liturgies, prayers, and songs belong to us. They have an interest in people in our nation coming to Christ. We need to be interested in what God is doing in their nations.

So look at the cross this Lenten season. Remember the empty tomb. And remember that both are God's way, in Jesus Christ, of blessing the whole world.

Pastoral Prayer

Almighty God our Creator, we pray for the peoples and the nations of the world.

We pray for North Korea and the tension their nuclear ambitions are causing in the world community. We pray for peace and for wisdom to prevail.

We pray for the nation of Syria, and for the victims of that conflict. We ask for an end to the war and terror that has gripped that nation.

We pray for the refugees of our world, nationless and homeless, and we pray for compassionate nations to welcome them.

We pray for the United States, still deeply divided after its election, and we ask for the healing of those divisions, and for wisdom for its leaders.

We pray for the world's children, for those abused as sex slaves, for those who scavenge garbage dumps looking for food to eat, for those recruited as child soldiers, and for the millions living in hunger and poverty.

We pray for the nations of Africa, and especially for the nation of Ghana, where our mission team will visit in a few weeks. We pray for peace and justice within that nation and for our mission team members to be a blessing to the people they meet.

We pray for the aboriginal and indigenous people of Canada. We pray for truth, reconciliation and healing from the abuse caused in residential schools.

We pray for Christians around the world, who pay a great cost for following Christ but who remain faithful to you. We stand with them, O God as our brothers and sisters in Christ, and confess with them that there is only there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one Spirit and one Church.

And we pray all these things in Jesus name. Amen.