

Good morning everyone. Please turn with me in your bibles to Acts chapter 1. This is an exciting day at Rock Prairie. It is a special thing to welcome in new members. It's a big deal. It's a big deal for us as pastors and deacons. These 16 new members that we are Lord willing welcoming in between the two we welcomed in 1st service and the rest at the end of this service mean that we have 16 more souls that we are called to give an account for before God. That's a sobering thing. We don't take that lightly.

It's a big deal for the current members as well. It means that now even more so you are called to love, encourage and guard the spiritual state of these people. And they are called to do the same for you.

That's the beauty of the local church. Within the context of relationship with one another, we keep watch over one another's souls. Obviously each member can't do that for everyone, and that's why the discipleship relationships that we talked about last week are so important. That's why we say that a life oriented toward Jesus is a life oriented toward others.

You're not called to disciple everyone, but you're called to be in a discipleship relationship with some. And it's the pastors' and deacons' job to make sure you are in a discipleship relationship, to make sure that your faith is growing and that your soul is being fed.

So what is happening this morning in welcoming in new members is a picture of why the things we talked about last week in discipleship are so crucial to the life of the church.

And also let me just say to Dustin and Samantha and Ellie, I am so proud of you for making a public declaration of your faith by being baptized. Today is a big deal. Your willingness to stand up here and share your story and declare that Jesus paid it all is an incredible thing. And I'm even praying that there might be some who haven't been baptized who will be encouraged by what you did today and choose to take the step themselves.

Praise the Lord for you guys, and I'm so proud of each of you.

God is good. He is moving. Every baptism, every new member is a testimony to that fact. It's a reminder of the gospel, that we were dead in our sin and running a race to hell, and only by the grace of God in Christ Jesus are we able to be saved. So praise the Lord. It is an exciting time at Rock Prairie, and we are continually dependent on the Lord in prayer, asking him to move, knowing we are helpless and hopeless without the Spirit of God moving and working in our midst.

Today is the 4th and final week in our series called Gathered: The Mission and Vision of Rock Prairie Church.

Next week as a reminder we will have one service at 10:30. My dear friend and mentor Tom Scott will be preaching next week on the role of the pastor and the role of the congregation in the life of the church. And I will be officially installed as the Senior Pastor here at Rock Prairie.

And afterwards we will celebrate with a lunch which is one of the things we do best. Pastor Craig will be smoking a whole lot of pulled pork, and I hope that everyone can stay as we enjoy fellowship with one another.

This week, we're talking about our final piece of our vision, which is to make Christ known Widely. Our mission as a church is to make Christ known from our neighbors to the nations. And the way we want to make Christ known is Truly, Deeply, and Widely.

This morning, we're going to talk about our responsibility at Rock Prairie to make Christ known Widely.

⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." ⁹ And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This

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Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for this morning. Thank you for the opportunity to celebrate new members here at Rock Prairie. Thank you for the celebration of new life in Christ in baptism as well. I pray for Dustin and Samantha and Ellie, that they would be encouraged and strengthened and continue to grow in their faith. I pray for the new members of our church, that they would pursue you with their whole hearts. That they would continue to grow in their faith as I know they are doing. That you would protect them from spiritual attack, that you wouldn't let the enemy discourage them. I pray that our church would welcome them into membership with open arms, and that we would continue to grow in how we love, encourage, and guard one another. We thank you for the church. Thank you for guarding and protecting us. May we be a beautiful bride for Christ. Help us to see how you want us to make you known Widely, so that more and more will have the opportunity to hear of how much you love them, and by your grace be saved. In Jesus' name, amen.

(SLIDE)

In David Platt's book *Mission Precision* he talks about a group of people in the Bible with an incredible passion for sharing their faith. Matthew 23:15 says they were willing to “Go across land and sea” just to make a single convert.

They were zealous about their faith and they did anything they could to get others to join them.

That group of people was...the Pharisees!

They had passion for their faith, but as Platt says they had the wrong message, the wrong motive, and the wrong method.

Having passion for God is great, but it's not enough. We need passion plus precision. We need to be precise in the way we go about doing ministry.

That is, in a nutshell, what this series has been all about. We want to bring precision to the things we are doing as a church, in our message, motive, and method.

Even if we have the right message and the right motive, which I believe we do, if we don't have the right method, we can still miss what the Lord is calling us to do. We will be limited in our effectiveness to carry out our mission to make Christ known from our neighbors to the nations.

We want to be precise about how we make Christ known Truly. We want to be precise about how we grow in our faith making Christ known Deeply. And we want to be precise in our mission to make Christ known Widely.

Turning back to our passage, this is probably one of the two most famous missions passages in all of scripture. If I asked you to tell me what verse you could think of about missions in the bible, probably this one and Matthew 28—go and make disciples of all nations—would be the two that would come up.

In the passage, Jesus is about to ascend into heaven having completed his mission on earth. His disciples ask him a question.

Starting in verse 6:

6 So when they had come together, they (the disciples) asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

Amazingly, even right before Jesus goes back up into heaven, the disciples were missing the point of why Jesus came to earth.

They asked, “Ok now are you going to make Israel a military power again?”

Jesus' response isn't to reject their question. Look at what he says,

7 He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.

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As in, don't worry about that. Jesus has this masterful way of doing what many parents do sometimes of dismissing an irrelevant question and telling them what they need to know. Instead, verse 8:

8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

He's saying you're about to receive the Holy Spirit—something that had not yet happened for all believers in human history—and when you do your job will be to be my witnesses. To be my representatives. To make disciples.

After he said that, verse 9 tells us what happened next:

9 And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, 11 and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

So right now, we live in an incredible time. We live in the time in between Jesus going up into heaven, and coming back to earth. He's coming back. That's our hope. Our savior is coming back. And when he does, he will establish his new kingdom, his everlasting kingdom in the new heavens and new earth.

A new kingdom with no more sin, no more suffering, no more sickness, no more sorrow, but everlasting joy as we live in perfect harmony with God and one another like we were created to do.

Jesus is coming back, but he hasn't yet. So we have work to do. For as long as we have in between Christ's ascension into heaven and his triumphal return to earth, we have a job to do.

And like we said in the first week of the series, that work is to make Christ known to our neighbors, and to make Christ known to the nations.

And the way we make him known Widely is through Missions, Evangelism, and Service.

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Missions:

When we talk about missions, we're talking about sharing the gospel with those who otherwise might not have a chance to hear it. That can take shape in a number of ways. And there's already a ton of work that we are supporting.

For example, we're supporting Rhema, who we just prayed for a few weeks ago, is doing an internship in the country of Georgia for 16 months working with an unreached people group called the Azarians. They're unreached, meaning they've never had a local church presence among them.

We're also supporting the Rusu's, who are working in Romania to train pastors and ministry leaders to do ministry in their own context. Theological training of pastors is a huge need, and they're doing really important work.

The Randolphs work with New Tribes Missions training helicopter pilots to go into remote villages where the gospel has never been preached before. A really cool ministry.

The Butlers who were here a few months ago are starting a school in hopes to reach the families in their community with the gospel.

And the Dunns have recently finished in Ethiopia and are praying about where the Lord would have them go next, and would appreciate your prayers, as would all of these missionaries and the others that we support and have supported in the past.

We believe that all of scripture--from Genesis to Revelation--reveals the certainty of God's plan to redeem people from every nation, tribe and tongue. Every believer has a role to play in carrying out the Great Commission. It's not just for a few. It's for everyone.

Supporting missionaries as a church is a huge part of that.

But there's another piece of our missions support, and that's going ourselves. We want to take opportunities every once in a while to have a group of people from our church go on a short term mission trip to see firsthand what God is doing in different areas.

And so I'm excited to officially announce that next summer we will be taking an adult and family short term trip to Impact Ministries in Tactic Guatemala.

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This is a place that Emily and I have had the privilege of visiting before, and it is an incredible ministry. The reason they exist as an organization is to raise up Guatemalan leaders in the church and to impact North American Christians for missions.

We're going for two reasons. First, to be a help to them. There are things that we can do that are a blessing to their ministry. We're hoping to bring a few medical people to work in the clinic, as well as we'll do some small work projects and help with a VBS.

But we're also going because we want to get a vision for what God is doing among another people in a different culture. And Lord willing he will help each person see what he's calling them to do as a result of what they've experienced.

Like I said the trip is for adults, but families are welcome and encouraged to go together if possible. The minimum age is 14, and if you're still in High School, you need a parent to attend with you.

If you're interested at all in just learning more, we're having an info meeting after church on October 6th. Please be praying about your involvement, whether it's to go yourself, or if you can't attend, to give generously so that others can go.

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Revelation 5:9 says:

And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.'

Like we talked about a few weeks ago, God's plan from the beginning was to ransom people from every nation, tribe and tongue. Our prayer at Rock Prairie is that we have the blessing of participating in the Great Commission's call to bring the gospel to all nations.

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Evangelism:

If Missions is how we make Christ known to the Nations, Evangelism is how we make Christ known to our Neighbors.

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2 Corinthians 5:20-21 Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

That's evangelism in a nutshell. We, as Christ's ambassadors, allow God to make his appeal to others through our lives. When we have opportunity we implore people, we urge people to get right with God.

Like we've said before, the changing of hearts, the response to that urging is God's work. The work of putting the flesh to death is God's work. Bringing people to understand the weight of their sin and their need to repent is something that God does.

But he does it through us. God making his appeal through us. There's no evangelism without words.

Relationship is key-but you can't "relationship" someone to Jesus without sharing the gospel with words.

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Like we said, we firmly believe God has placed us here for a reason, to reach the community with the gospel. But just like with missions, we want to be strategic in how we do that. It won't happen by osmosis, we want to be intentional in the way we go about reaching our neighbors.

As we started talking about these things several months ago on the missions committee, one thing that became clear is that this is too big of a job for one committee.

Currently, the missions committee oversees both global and local outreach. But as we talked, we decided that if we are going to be effective in reaching both our neighbors and the nations, we need to have essentially a "neighbors team" and a "nations team".

So starting in January, that's what's going to happen. The nations team will be responsible for everything that has to do with global missions.

And the neighbors team will be responsible for helping our church develop a strategy for reaching our neighbors.

One thing I love about our church is that there are so many people with creative ideas about how we can best reach out to love and serve our neighbors. I happened to see on facebook yesterday that a couple of students were having a bake sale at the Tipton Farmer's Market to raise money for the food pantry.

That's amazing! I had no idea that was happening. There are so many creative things that people from our church do to love and serve the community, many of which go unnoticed by most people.

So the neighbors team's job is going to be to determine which ways we are going to reach out and serve the community each year. And if there's something that you are passionate about that you think we should do to serve the community, you'll be able to run it through the neighbors team to determine if it makes sense for us to do as a whole church initiative.

I'm really excited about this. I think it's going to allow us to get more people involved, and be more effective in the things that we do choose to do. It's also going to allow more people to use their unique

gifts and passions to serve the community. And ultimately give us opportunities to build relationships within which we can share the good news of Jesus Christ.

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Service:

The body of Christ is a unified diversity: unified under the banner of the gospel, with a diverse set of gifts. I saved service for last because there's no way we can make Christ known widely without utilizing the diversity of gifts within the church.

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1 Peter 4:10-11 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another; as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies--in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

We're called to use our gifts to serve in a number of ways. We're called to care for widows and orphans, we're called to serve those in need among us, we're called to look not only to our own interests, but also to the interests of others.

As your pastor, I love seeing the body of Christ at work. I love when someone has an idea that I would have never thought of, when someone is using a skillset to serve that I couldn't possibly dream of.

Every believer has a spiritual gift. Those gifts are given to build up the body and glorify God. To neglect to use your gift is to deny God the glory he is due for giving the gift. The local church is the avenue God gives to learn and grow in our gifts. We want to use our gifts to serve the body of Christ, the local community, and the nations.

Our church *cannot* do what it's called to do on the backs of just a few gifted people. I cannot stress that enough. We need everyone fully invested in order to accomplish what God is calling us to do.

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That leads me to my final point as we wrap up this series.

For the last four weeks we've been talking about where we're going as a church, and what we're going to be all about. And there is so much that I'm excited about heading into the future.

But I also know that change can sometimes be really hard. Especially when that change is driven by events that no one could have ever dreamt of. So if some of this is hard, I want you to know that's ok. It's ok for it to be hard. It's ok if it takes some time. And I want you to know that I'm praying for you, and I pray almost every week that the Lord would continue to bring healing to our church.

Like I've said many times, we want to be the best, most biblical, most God honoring and God-exalting Rock Prairie we can possibly be. And I firmly believe that this new mission and vision for our church is the right first step in that direction.

When Emily and I were first married we would often say to one another, "We're a good team."

I love that, I should probably start saying it more, because what we meant when we said it was that no matter what happened, we were in it together. We were on the same team.

And that's my request to you, Rock Prairie. Let's be a good team. No matter what happens in the future, let's commit to facing it together. To linking arm in arm and moving forward.

We don't know what's in store, but we know the God who puts the ocean in the storehouse, the one who gathers the waters of the sea in the palm of his hand.

God's got this. He's in control. I love you, Rock Prairie. I really mean that. And Emily and I have only been here a few months, but we're in this with you. 100%. We're a good team.

As we go out as the body of Christ, united under the banner of the gospel and trusting in the one who holds the entire universe together, let's be a people who make Christ known, from our neighbors, to the nations.

Let's pray.

God you are so good. You have been so good to us. You have been so faithful. Your word is true, your promises are sure. We are desperate for you. Even as I pray I'm reminded of the fact that you call us to make you known widely, but you don't need us to make you known widely. You could command the attention of the earth with a snap of your fingers. Our works are futile in comparison. But you call us to honor you in what we do, and you are glorified when we use our gifts to make you known. So we ask that you would bless our work. Help us be the best, most biblical Rock Prairie we can be. And come quickly, we pray. In Jesus' name, amen.