

NEXT STEPS AT NORTHWEST

(From Jeff Harrison)

LAND SALE PROCEEDS

Now tonight is a very different kind of annual meeting. For starters, a much more delicious one, so a big thank you to Jack and Sue Biros for leading and to Genesis, Dulce, Paola, Margarita, Diana, Marta, Linda, Pam, Landry, and our Youth Ministry for the wonderful food!

So, tonight we're not talking about the leadership candidates, minutes, roster, or budget. Those items have already been addressed.

To get us started, did you know that twenty-two people became members of our church family this year? We're very grateful to God for these brothers and sisters, and I'd like to introduce the ones here tonight.

The new members are: Jim & Karen Kahrl, Joe & Liz Page, Christopher & Allison Pailes, Whitney & Jessica Sattler, Tyler & Barb Seidler, Joel & Kari Tyree, and "Chappy" Dave & Sandee Walden
Not present – Edgar & Trish Herrera, Thomas & CJ Howard, Ron Key, Carl Moulder, Michael & Anna Von Fange

Land Sale

Introduction

Praise God for His amazing provision through the sale of the property!

Now, as we think about our next steps with the land sale resources, we'll start tonight by listening to God's Word.

We'll look at two passages and see three applications. We'll start in Ephesians chapter 3 (ESV), where we're called to prayerfully depend on God.

A Church on its Knees

I'll read starting in verse 14, which is a prayer Paul prays for the church of Ephesus. It says:

¹⁴For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. ²⁰Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Now in Scripture we see a variety of prayer postures, but I'm struck by the image in verse 14 of bowing our knees before God.

As we steward the land sale proceeds, let's be a church on its knees. It's a posture of reverence and of our dependence on God, setting aside self-agendas and depending on God to lead in and through us as we pray.

As I heard Todd say it a few months ago, in ministry the question, "Can we do it?" is always the wrong question because there's no right answer. If we answer, "Yes, we can.", we depend on our own resources rather than God's power. And if we answer, "No, we can't" we may not enter into the calling God has for us.

The question, "Can we do it?" has the wrong subject, "we." The right subject for our land sale questions is God.

For example, a question like, "What is God doing in our midst, and how does He want us to join in?" That kind of question takes us to prayer as we depend on God's leadership as we steward these funds.

As Paul prayed here in Ephesians 3, we need God's Spirit strengthening us.

- As we struggle against sin and the brokenness of the world, we need God's Spirit working in and through us.
- As we face an enemy who wants to stir dissension over this money, we need God's Spirit working in and through us.
- As we lack wisdom on what to do or get too focused on ourselves, we need God's Spirit working in and through us.

And we also need Jesus' love. Like verses 17-19 say, let's ask God to help us experience the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Jesus, a love that surpasses knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fullness of God.

As with any relationship, growing with God takes time. So, let's be a church on its knees, taking that time to experience God's empowerment and love in prayer.

Over the rest of 2017, that's our main focus for the land sale proceeds. Praying on our own, in small groups and ministries, on Sunday mornings, and together in special monthly prayer meetings. The first one is this Tuesday from 6:30-7:30pm in the church coffee shop, so come join us if you can.

The only other plans here in 2017 are to refresh some things in the building that look poor, like the carpet upstairs and to upgrade a few things we think will enhance our ministry, like an expanded church kitchen behind the coffee shop.

I share those building updates because the elders want you informed, but please don't lose sight of the emphasis on prayer. Look around you, you are surrounded by people indwelt by God's Spirit. So, let's together be a church on its knees.

To paraphrase a quote from Pastor A.C. Dixon:

When we rely upon organization, we get what organization can do; when we rely upon education, we get what education can do; when we rely upon eloquence, we get what eloquence can do; when we rely upon money, we get what money can do. But when we rely on prayer, we get what God can do.

And as Paul says in verse 20, we are praying to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or even think. So, Northwest, let's be a church on its knees.

A Church Walking in Unity

We see our second application in chapter 4, starting in verse 1, which says:

¹I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Verse 1 urges us to walk in a manner worthy of our calling. Chapters 1-3 of Ephesians describe our calling as being blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ - adopted as children, redeemed and forgiven by God, reconciled to one another, given hope and a glorious inheritance, able to ask God to fill us with His empowerment and love.

As Paul transitions here in chapter 4 to living out that amazing calling, he starts with our unity. Verse 3 says to be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit. That's our second application, to be a church walking in unity.

And if we live out verse 2, we'll walk in unity. For verse 2 invites us to relate with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.

Now I don't think this will come as a surprise, but we haven't even received the money yet, and I've already heard a variety of opinions on stewarding it. To be clear, the ideas have been God-honoring and they have been communicated in a good way, so way to go!

But we do have an enemy who would love to see us squander this money and grow divided over it. And it's still a victory for him if we invest the money well, yet go about it in an ungodly way, like a family disputing over an inheritance.

Imagine. One person is excited about more people taking "next steps" with Jesus here, and so they suggest we fund more ministry initiatives, hire additional staff, and expand our facility so that we can do more evangelism, discipleship, and justice ministry locally. Imagine that person in conversation with someone passionate about unreached people groups. This person thinks we should give all the money to missionaries pioneering among tribes overseas and translating the Bible into new languages.

Both are completely fine ideas that could be done in a way that honors God and advances His kingdom. But Satan would love to twist that conversation into one where each thinks their ideas are not only better, but more godly. The conversation shifts to where each person's word choice, tone, and posture grow a little hostile as each takes it a little too personally when the other isn't convinced of their ideas.

And if enough of these kinds of conversations take place, we could be tempted to place everyone here into the ungodly categories of allies and competitors.

Verse 2 invites us to a much better way, engaging that conversation with all humility.

Each open to the possibility that maybe my idea isn't the best or maybe it's great but just not the direction God ends up leading our church. Each open to the reality that when we humbly listen to each other's ideas that often what God brings about is better than the thoughts of any one individual.

I've seen that happen many times on teams here at Northwest.

And verse 2 not only calls us to all humility, but to all gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another in love. Isn't that how we want to be received as we share our land sale thoughts?

I'm reading Pastor Eugene Peterson's memoir, and he tells the story of asking his girlfriend's father for permission to marry Jan. Peterson is nervous and stumbling over his words and Jan's dad puts his hand on Peterson's shoulder and says, "Eugene, you don't have to go through with this. Let's have a cup of coffee." Peterson goes on to say, "He rescued me. An act of hospitality. I never did have to ask him. Over coffee we were able to have an easy conversation in which he gave both permission and blessing. No interrogation. No conditions. Welcome to the family."

Wouldn't it be great to experience relating with this kind of spirit as we discuss the land sale? After all, we're family too, brothers and sisters of our Heavenly Father.

So, let's walk in unity. Listen to all the "ones" in verses 4-6 that remind us of our unity – one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.

What we share in Jesus is inestimably greater than any differences of opinion about the proceeds.

And it's greater than how each of us anticipate God leading through the decision-making process, whether that's in an obvious, direct sort of way, or through a consensus emerging over time as we pray, fast, and talk through things, or something else.

Walking in unity isn't easy, which is why we started as a church on its knees. For as we experience the Spirit's empowerment and Christ's incomparable love, we'll have hearts filled with love for our brother or sister even if they express their disagreement in an unkind way.

A Church Stewarding to Hear “Well Done”

So let’s start on our knees, walk together in unity, and finally, steward to hear “Well done”.

For this application, we’ll turn to Matthew 25. Here Jesus talks about how we should prepare for His return. He tells the parable of the talents to encourage us to be faithful stewards. We’ll start in verse 14, which says:

¹⁴ “For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. ¹⁵ To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶ He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. ¹⁷ So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. ¹⁸ But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master’s money. ¹⁹ Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.’ ²¹ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ Like the servants in the story, Jesus entrusts us with things to steward. Now everything we have is ultimately from Jesus, but as we heard the land sale story from Todd, it sure feels like this is a five talent stewardship straight from the hand of Jesus.

So, to be clear, the land sale money isn’t “ours”, it is Jesus’. Not, well, 10% of it is Jesus’ but we can do whatever we want with the rest. Not, well this land sale money can fund our current budget for 5 years, so let’s all scale back our giving, or even stop giving in the meantime.

Those are not the thoughts of a steward, or of the kind of church God delights to make a God-sized impact through. Rather, let’s keep remembering that the land sale money is all Jesus’.

And our Master has graciously entrusted it to us so that we can participate in His kingdom work.

And so, we think good stewardship views the land sale money as separate from our general fund. In other words, we’re not counting on this money to pay the utility bill or current ministry expenses.

Rather, we view this new stewardship from Jesus as an amazing, likely once in a lifetime opportunity to make an impact that lasts for decades here at Northwest and around the world, all the way into eternity, to God’s glory.

Who knows how many we might see start life changing relationships with Jesus, how many marriages saved, how many hurts, hang-ups, and addictions overcome, how many under resourced people resourced, how many missionaries equipped, how many more language services, or church plants, could launch, how racial divisions could be healed, how many people here could grow up into disciples who keep taking next steps with Jesus and helping others take next steps with Jesus, the people impacted growing and growing on a multiplication basis.

I find it interesting the two good servants in the story didn’t just place their talents in the bank, but that their stewardship included them working to multiply the talents.

And so, as we seek God together for how to steward the proceeds, there’s a very good chance some of us will need to deploy our gifts in fresh ways as we deploy these funds to help more people take next steps with Jesus.

Jesus is so gracious. He did all the work to save us, and then He gives us His talents so that we can work with Him to bless people, and then He wants to celebrate His victory with us as He tells us, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your Master.”

Think of it, Jesus Himself celebrating with His bride here at Northwest and then rewarding us beyond our wildest dreams for serving Him, even though He rescued us from our sins and He gave us the talents and the Spirit to empower us in the first place.

What a Savior, so let's be a church stewarding to hear His "Well done".

Conclusion

On that day, when we, the people of Northwest, are before Jesus, Lord have mercy if we're trying to explain why we thought depending on our wisdom, strategies, and this money was a better idea than prayerfully depending on Him.

God forbid that we're trying to explain how the church eventually split after arguing and bickering over these funds. Or trying to explain how we squandered or selfishly used the funds, having lost sight of our Master's interests.

Rather, may we be a church on its knees, walking in unity, and stewarding to hear, "Well done." A church able to enter fully into the indescribable joy of Jesus Himself, and then rewarded out of His limitless riches.