

VISION SUNDAY 2023

Sermon Growth Guide

September 10, 2023

Give Them Jesus



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Vision Sunday – Give Them Jesus

Psalm 78:1-7

Key Verse: Psalm 78:6

“...so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born.”

Big Idea: It’s time for us to give them Jesus.

Foundations

Evangelism can be thought of as the act of delivering the message of Jesus to the world around us. While this happens in a Sunday morning sermon, proclaiming the gospel of Christ is not bound to that act alone. It can and should happen in our own everyday lives—to our co-workers, to our neighborhoods, and especially to our family members within our very homes.

The Christian faith has been passed down through the ages, from one generation to another. The psalmist found in Psalm 78 encourages the proclamation of “the hidden things from old—things our ancestors have told us...so that the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born.” At First Pres, we have been—and continue to believe that we are to be—a place where Jesus reaches the next generation through the present one.

As you and I survey the world around us, it’s not difficult to spot an abundance of problems. Headlines breed hopelessness. Lives are becoming more familiar with loneliness and despair. What is the answer? Who is the answer?

Jesus is the answer for our world. Above Him there is no other. As those who have been called into His marvelous light, the time has come for us to give an answer for the hope we have. It’s time to give them Jesus!

Understanding God’s Word

Read Psalm 78:1-7. What stands out to you? Why do you think the psalmist writes with such resolve and conviction?

Applying God’s Word

What are the things that seem to hijack or short-circuit our actions in sharing Jesus with the world around us? Take some time as a group to talk about these things.

Witnessing God’s Word

Think of a friend or a family member who needs Jesus. Pray for this person...but then consider how you will share Jesus with them this week. Then...go do it!

VISION SUNDAY • Psalm 78:1-7 • Tim McConnell • September 10, 2023

On the Sunday I returned from a summer sabbatical, I was surprised with an extraordinary gift. Jamal commissioned a new arrangement of an old spiritual called "Give Me Jesus" in honor of my ministry. I was blown away. What Jamal did not know is the place that song had in my life. When I was two years into being a pastor, 9/11 had just happened, the challenges of ministry were flooding me, and I hit my knees one night in my office with a CD from Promise Keepers playing that song on repeat, tears streaming down my cheeks. "Give me Jesus. Give me Jesus. You can have all this world; just give me Jesus."

Today is Vision Sunday in the year of our Lord 2023 at the beginning of the 152nd trip around the sun for First Pres. What does the Lord have for us? What do we see God calling us to do? Give them Jesus. The world needs Jesus. Give them Jesus. We are going to show this city Jesus. An elder asked me earlier this year, "Okay, Light + Life for the City, but how do we really do that? What are we trying to accomplish? What do we stand for?" I jokingly replied, "What do we stand for? We stand for Jesus!" We really do stand for Jesus. We really must stand for Jesus. Let's give this city Jesus. Church attendance is down. Religious affiliation is down. Marriage is down. Meanwhile suicide is up. Domestic violence is up. Crime is up. Drug use, addictions and overdoses are all up. Loneliness is now a global epidemic. What kind of a future are we building? In a post-pandemic world, Christians are slow to invite others to church. In a politically-charged world, Christians are slow to risk friendships by bringing up their beliefs. What kind of future are we building?

What if God gathered 3,000 mature Christian disciples and said, "I'm sending you into one city, Colorado Springs, with one mission: give them Jesus." God is calling us to step up. It is time for this church to make a difference for Jesus in this city. You might have been here in January when I asked, "How will this city see Jesus in 2023?" How are we doing? Will Colorado Springs know more or less about Jesus because of us this year? Light + Life for the City is a thinly veiled way of saying "Show this city Jesus." Give them Jesus. You have in your bags this little card. Here's how we understand our mission. "Light + Life for the City. We exist to see lives transformed in the power of Christ, shaping believers into Christian disciples who proclaim the Light of the Gospel and demonstrate the Life of Jesus to our City, bringing many to saving faith in Christ and the whole world to glorify God." How are we going to do that? Are the people of our city going to know more about Jesus by the close of 2023? You and I, we are going to have to step it up if we want to give them Jesus.

Show this city Jesus. Do you know the first way we do that? It is nothing flashy and nothing new. We gather for worship. Fruitfulness is the product of faithfulness. Our first commitment is to gather as many as are

willing every Sunday morning to give God the glory. He is due together in worship. Do you worship with passion and joy each week? Does a church gathering for worship make any difference to a city?

Philosopher Carl Trueman has written two magisterial books about how our culture and society grew to a place of such deep confusion about identity, gender, sexuality and politics. He surveys the history of philosophy, the greatest minds, from romanticism to rationalism, Marxism to scientism, Freud, Jung, Camus, Rousseau...he walks us through this great march of human thought until you come to understand, "Oh, that's how we got here. But it's bad here. How can we fix it?" At the end of all that, do you know what he says we should do? Go to church. "Gathering together on the Lord's Day, praying, singing God's praise, hearing the word read and preached, celebrating baptism and the Lord's Supper, giving materially to the church's work—these are things all Christians should do when gathered together. It might sound trite, but a large part of the church's witness to the world is simply being the church in worship. Paul himself comments that when an unbeliever accidentally turns up at a church service, he should be struck by the otherworldly holiness of what is going on. The most powerful witness to the gospel is the church herself, simply going about the business of worship." (Carl Trueman, *Strange New World*) Those words, in 2023, are an echo of the famous line from missionary Lesslie Newbigin in 1989: "The only effective hermeneutic of the gospel is the life of a congregation which believes it." (Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*)

We take worship so very seriously. Every service is a reenactment of the gospel. Your heart is trained, your soul is shaped, by every hour of worship. We worship in power and in beauty. This is not an educational talk peppered with songs. Our worship is not entertainment; it is encounter with the living God. Not information; it is transformation. We leave here more Jesus-shaped. When God is glorified, lives are transformed. Christian leaders try every new trick they can find to no avail, meanwhile the primary tool to build the Kingdom of God faithfully from generation to generation is left behind and dismissed: the faithful, regular gathering of as many as will come to glorify God in worship at church on Sunday morning.

Our worship is a witness. The city sees it happening. Sunday morning feels a little different. Imagine a fleet of 1P magnets filling up the highway. "Does that still happen?" people think. "Do people still go to church on Sunday mornings? Downtown?" Every time we gather, we declare again the realities of God. We bear witness, just by coming, to a God who is worthy of praise, a grace that transforms lives, a Kingdom being built to the honor of Jesus. "Are you saying all I have to do is go to church?" Well, I'm definitely saying don't NOT go to church! Whoever convinced you the best

way to be a Christian is to not go to church, they were wrong. Christians gather and worship.

But you know we are looking for a seven-day a week faith. I need more than an hour on Sunday. We need to walk with Jesus as disciples every day to make a difference in this world. We make disciples. Our second value is Hold Fast. Get into the Scriptures and start learning. The challenge question is this: "Are your priorities consistent with Scripture?" Apply that to any part, every part, of your life. And Keep Growing. The more you know the more you know you don't know. "Are you learning and living the faith with others?" I want to encourage you to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ, to learn to walk in the Jesus way. Are you in a class? Pathfinders, mostly for those in the retirement stage, moved back into the building. Base Camp meets on the fourth floor for Young Adults in their 20s. A new class for parents has emerged called Incline. We have other classes too. Or how about Life Groups? We just launched three new ones. Do you have a place to study the Bible and grow with others? If we are going to show this city Jesus, we need to know Jesus! Make disciples. We do it in the old presbyterian way, do you know? Some ministries reach the heart first. Some ministries change behavior first, they try to alter the will. The old presbyterian way is through the mind. We don't just want a new habit that may or may not stick, or a new emotion that may or may not last. We want to shape your mind after the mind of Christ and let that change your heart and your will. Learn to grow.

We worship. We make disciples. But I want to jump down to another value. "Share Good News. Do all it takes to reach those who do not know Christ." Give them Jesus. We reach our city for Jesus. Challenge question: "Are you invested in someone else knowing Jesus?" Are you invested? Invested means you put something in to get something out. You have skin in the game. You are intentionally postured with personal investment. I want this person to know Jesus. Are you? In a little while, I want to remind you of a few tools.

But now, one of the first places we engage in evangelism is with our own kids. That's a little bit discipleship and a little bit evangelism mixed together. Who do you want to know Jesus more than your own kids and grandkids? What would you do? What would you invest to see your kids know Jesus? We are a family ministry church in the heart of downtown. That's an odd mix sometimes, but it's who we are. First Pres is a great place to raise kids in the Lord. We are celebrating Family Ministries today. We have had made some great strides! For the third time we hosted over 300 kids at Vacation Bible School with about 150 volunteers. This year we heard stories of kids praying to devote their lives to Christ with their leaders. Camp Elim, Upbeat Drama Camp, Orchestra Camp. 45 Middle schoolers went to summer camp together to hear the gospel and respond in faith. Seniors went on a special

trip to prepare to leave home. We are doing the work, church, and we are seeing the fruit.

Psalm 78, we read, says "I will open my mouth with a parable; I will utter hidden things, things from of old— things we have heard and known, things our ancestors have told us. We will not hide them from their descendants; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done." (Psalms 78:2-4) It takes words. It takes teaching. We will tell. We will declare. We will not hide the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord "...so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands." (Psalms 78:6-7)

It takes some parental pressure. I remember a preschool mom coming up to me years ago flustered. She said, "That's it. We are making a commitment to be in church every week." What happened? She told me she was getting her five-year old boy ready for Easter and he said, "Do we have to go, Mommy? Why? We're not a church family!" She stopped in her tracks and realized that even though she loved Jesus, her husband loved Jesus, they thought of themselves as Christians, they had not been to church more than a handful of times in those five years. They were not a church family, they were a soccer family, a hiking family, a football game and pancakes family. It takes an intentional push, but First Pres is here to help you. They will thank you. Do you believe me? It's hard to believe sometimes. They will thank you.

I sat once with a man who was on his deathbed. He was losing a battle with cancer, and we sat to talk and pray and plan his memorial service. I'll never forget what he said to me as we sat in his large, luxurious, well-appointed home. "Tim, I provided for my kids. Monetarily. I thought that was what I was supposed to do to love them. I gave them what they needed. They want for nothing. But I never showed them Jesus. I just never showed them my Jesus. I would take all that money away if they could just know Jesus." Are you saying the words? Are you living out the faith with your kids and your grandkids? They might know you believe certain things and have certain convictions, but have they seen Jesus in your heart, from your heart? This friend said to me, "Tim, do you think you can show them Jesus at the memorial? Can you do that for me?" What would you give to see your kids know Jesus?

It doesn't end with families, though. We have a mission and a mandate. Will this city know more about Jesus by the end of this year because we were here? Over the years we have tried to put evangelistic tools in your hands. There is a difference between being evangelical and being evangelistic. An evangelical holds certain beliefs. An evangelist wants to share

Jesus. Are you invested in someone else knowing Jesus? We have shared a few tools over the years. We brought Dave Runyon here one year to teach us the “art of neighboring.” Do you know the names of your immediate neighbors? Write them down. Remember a few things about them. Get to know them. Hope to give them Jesus. We had Don Everts come and teach us about “spiritual conversations.” Keep track of the conversations you are in and try to be ready to help someone take a next step toward Jesus. Is someone resistant? They may need to know you love them first. Are they exploring? They may need a few questions answered. Are they seeking Jesus? They need a friend bold enough to call the question, to help them walk through that door. Our best tool right now is Alpha. Alpha is a great place to have questions answered, to be loved, to get the door open to Jesus. We need more Alpha hosts and volunteers, but we mostly need to be a church ready to invite someone to Alpha and maybe go with them. We have seen many lives transformed through Alpha. Are you invested? Are you willing to sacrifice? To get someone to know Jesus. The evangelism strategy is to be a friend, and share Jesus. Give them Jesus.

We worship. We make disciples. We reach Colorado Springs, and our own kids, for Christ. Two more things I see changing. Very quickly now. We keep community. We “Love Like Jesus” building into one another sacrificially. We make sure no one hurts alone. In a high-loneliness, increasing isolation society this makes a difference. We make and keep real community. How’s our “linger meter” around here? Do we stay and talk with friends or run to our cars as fast as we can? I want to increase the linger meter and raise the temperature on community and fellowship. I wish I could run a poll on loneliness in church verses out of church. A lot of young people who leave the church these days say it isn’t so much that they disagree with the church, or they lost their faith, but that they just don’t feel like they belong.

Keep community. Finally, we serve. The only way for church to work, the only way for the body to function, is for every part to do its part. This needs to be an every-member-a-minister church. What’s your ministry? Where are you serving? What’s your mission? A few years ago we set a goal of increasing volunteer involvement in every ministry by 50%. We are not there. We need you.

What is our vision? How do we talk about what we see God up to around here? What do you hope to see? Let’s sum it up. We worship. In the First Pres I see coming, worship services are full and transforming, faithful and fruitful, full of beauty and power. Do we have 3,000 members? We should have 3,000 in worship, rocking the heart of the city every week, I-25 flooded with 1P magnets. Full is 3,000. If we get there, then we talk satellites and other sites. Discipleship.

We see dynamic growth, five generations progressing in growth toward Christ with two-thirds of us in Life Groups or classes. What does any of this have to do with showing them Jesus? The more you grow in His likeness, the hotter you burn with His fire, the brighter you will shine. We are like a heart in the middle of the city pumping life blood in and out. We are like a tree rooted next to the stream bearing fruit in all seasons. No root, no fruit! Worship and discipleship every day, every week.

Fellowship events are full, celebrational, motivating, and community-building. The congregation measures less loneliness than the community. Crisis, sickness and death are cared for. The love of Jesus pervades our gatherings. We raise the warmth, the community temperature, and people say “I’m a lot less lonely since I joined First Pres.” People like to linger here. We are part of the family of God.

Evangelism is happening and we see adult conversions every month. Alpha is consistently full. We begin to see more adult baptisms than children baptisms as conversion is just part of what we do. But we reach our kids. We reach our kids for Christ here! Spiritual conversations are shared and supported each week.

Service. Every member knows their ministry. One third of us serve at First Pres during the week. “Where are you serving?” “Where do your spiritual gifts do good?” “Where are you giving?” We have answers to those questions. Our mission partners see First Pres coming all the time. Local missions opportunities happen every month and global trips are full each year. Every member a minister. Every member can name their ministry. Every member can name our partnerships or direct someone quickly to them.

That’s a strong First Pres. That’s a church ready to reach this city for Christ. Ready to be Light + Life for the City. Ready to give them Jesus. What do you need to do to be part of this winning program? You need to commit. Commit first to Christ. Give your whole life to Jesus. He gave His whole life for you. Second, commit to His mission. Jesus said to make disciples of all people. He came to seek and to save the lost. Will we see more lost get found? Will you help? More lost found, more heartbroken healed, more marriages saved, more kids walking with Jesus. Commit to his mission. Finally, commit to His church. The Bride of Christ. Often this is the hardest commitment to make; and it may just be the most fruitful. We have a mission. We have a mandate. Give them Jesus.