

I remember as a couple of days before my first message at Horizons, I was all jazzed up and a concerned member of the worship team came up to me or sent me a text and said, Hey, man, I don't know if anyone has told you this or not yet, but I just want to make sure you don't show up Sunday and have a really awkward moment.

But Horizons is a pretty casual community, and so I don't know what you've worn before when you preach, but at Horizons we mostly just preach like jeans and T-shirt, and so you might just want to plan for that. So I was like, Oh, cool. You know, because I used to wear like a robe and a suit under the robe.

And then so, you know, so I packed my jeans and t shirt who showed up. It was awkward because that was new for me. But it was also really just exciting because like that this is the church I always dreamed of pastoring and. And so it was good. I preached in and. Well, it went as well as it did.

And you were there for that. You remember? It could have gone better but it was that day, actually, that we started, like, a new culture and dress code for Pastor Preaching, because I later realized that actually none of the two pastors before me ever preached in jeans. A t shirt I don't know why I didn't make that connection earlier, but like, khakis and a polo, or if it was jeans, then it was a button up dress shirt.

Sometimes a blazer over that, like jeans and T-shirt was not the thing. But that's how that got started. And we've been doing it ever since. When when I first got the call to to be notified that the superintendent and the Cabinet had discerned the Holy Spirit, that my next leadership call was to join Horizon's community church. It was April 17th, 2012, and I checked that date out because that's what came up in my mind.

And it is a Tuesday. And every Tuesday, Sarah, before we were married and I, we would I was in Bellevue and she was in Crete, and we'd drive into Lincoln and have a date night. And, and I remember we met at Charters that night because she was planning to go to the med center and did end up going to the med center.

But when we got married, she was planning on living in my house in Bellevue and it was like everything was perfect. So I had to go and tell her that we're not going to be living in Bellevue and you're going to have to commute for the entirety of your three year program to the med center. Happy marriage. And so we ate at Chatters, and then we drove down to the church, and y'all were having some big meeting.

There was a lot of cars in the parking lot, so we had to kind of be slow. But I remember pulling around that corner and driving around the curve of some of Granger there and seeing horizons for the first time. And my jaw dropped and I couldn't believe it. But I got to this is where God was calling me the Church of my dreams.

I'd been pastoring for four years before that and just kind of imagined what it would be like to to be at a place where, you know, that it really dreamt of. And there it was. Here it was and there. And I knew that the

beginnings of all that would be difficult and challenging, but it was going to be awesome.

I was so excited and giddy. I could not wait to get started here. It's been a good ride. It really has. You have all endured a lot with me as your pastor um, some of you have kind of lovingly referred to me as your kid pastor. Um, I looked like a kid then so much that someone felt it was necessary for me to have this button that says, Why, yes, I am the pastor.

Really? And especially around this, I have worn this every year and jumped up and down and got up and got down and spun around to the song. And this thing has, uh, whacked me in the face on several occasions. And you've put up with my green leadership. I was 31 years old when I was called to be the senior leader here, and I had no idea what I was doing.

You put up with that you endured that with me. You were patient. And when I got up on stage, man, I used to do laps from stair to stair, and I thought, like, the faster I talked, the better I was preaching. And people would say, Pastor, you need to slow down. We know you're excited, but man, you have endured a lot of my trials and errors and experiments and trying things and having not all of them go well.

You have endured some doozies of sermons. The first Sunday that I got here I was so excited about this sermon series I had dreamt up, and I felt like God had put on my heart. Sky was the theme for VBS, so I thought, well, what a perfect way to enter into Horizons and talk about like the limitless of what God's going to do in this ministry in the light of change.

And transition. And so, so I titled the series Skies, Skies, The Sky's the Limits. And I didn't slur that. I actually put Sky's the Limits. And Sarah and I were kind of getting ready. We were like praying over the first Sunday, and I was so proud of the graphic and everything that we've kind of come up with.

And she looks and she says, Wait a minute, isn't it? Sky's the limit. We had a big argument because I was sure that it was the other way. Instead, and finally, like, we Googled it and I was just like, oh, no, I is all over every pamphlet and everything that we publish. The sky's the limit so you endure that the next the second Sunday that I preached, I came out and I said, Well, we are excited to announce we're starting a brand new sermon series called Sky's the Limit.

So I was able to correct some of those mistakes You've endured the constant adorning of costumes. I thought that's just what Cool pastors did. So in tribute of that, one of the staff suggested that I should wear a costume every Sunday. Until it was time for me to go. And I didn't want anyone who was new to get the wrong idea.

But now I figure it's probably too late. So today I'm going to wear a costume. We actually had a superhero series about the normal average superheroes that all of you are, and I wore a towel that we got a garage

sale and that was my superhero costume. So this one actually I bought when I was living in Africa, in Tanzania.

And it says on here, it says Dunya Jana Cereal which means the things of yesterday are not of today, which to me reminds me of God's hope and renewal and capacity to make all things new always. So there we go. Oh, yeah. It's like sock day at VBS. We got this the first Sunday. You got your peppers on there.

You've and we've also in addition to enduring a lot, you and the Spirit of God and all of us together have accomplished a lot we built buildings, especially when we had no money. We still built buildings. God did that. We man, we fixed up the parking lot, and it needs fixing again. But we'll be all right. But we fixed it up and that was huge.

We took care of our property. Our welcome we together we did the impossible in Christ. We paid off a \$1.2 million debt and that was in the greatest season where it probably shouldn't have been done. God did that to us. VVS man just continued to explode until we were packing this house with 600 kids and about 370 or so volunteers.

Like all of you, the children's ministries have always continued to explode as we continue to build and learn and grow. And, and for many of the ten years horizons in the Great Plains Conference of all 1062 churches has often, in many of those years had more professions of faith, more people, young and old, coming to faith in Jesus Christ than any other church in the conference that's how you know there's this river of goodness flowing underneath of everything, the things that we have accomplished man.

There have been at least five families outside of this community that Horizons has reached out to through its generous and private supports to support and to literally rescue in the name of Jesus Christ, in the tens of thousands of dollars. And a lot of people don't know about that because it's not our story to tell the you church.

You've done incredible things we've started new ministries, few churches in Lincoln, a few churches in Nebraska have a special needs ministry that intentionally has space and staffing and vision around our every child. And every family being able to come in here and to feel and experience the name of Jesus Christ and his love for them we have endured a lot.

We've gone through some of the most difficult seasons, covered everything else we have endured the loss of our family members, whether they've moved on to the Eternal Church or have moved on to another church in Lincoln or moved away. We have endured heartbreaking staff transitions, things that seem to change everything. And for for most among all of that, we have built important and foundational relationships.

We belong to each other. As Paul says, I call you my own there's a story about an Ebenezer in the Old Testament when God had done something incredible, they they lifted up the Ebenezer. It was a stone. It was a stone of remembering to say God did this. And through the relationships and friendships that you have offered to me, I have a great big, heavy

Ebenezer you are my Ebenezer singer, my Ebenezer So what we know is that God calls us God calls us to places, and he calls us on God moves.

He moves us to places and he moves among us. And so what I know is that God has called this season and this transition into place because He's doing something and he's doing something big so the words I offer today are from Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus from Ephesians chapter two Ephesians being my favorite letter, I get the right to preach whatever I want on my final Sunday with you.

And we're headed to Ephesians and I love what Paul says to this is to Timothy, but to the church in Ephesus, and this is chapter two versus ten to 13 for we are God's masterpiece, he has created us anew in Christ Jesus. So we can do the good things He planned for us long ago.

Don't forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders. You were called uncircumcised heathens by the Jews. You were proud of their circumcision. Oh, who were proud of their circumcision, even though it affected only their bodies and not their hearts. In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship from the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them.

You lived in this world without God and without hope, but now you have been united with Christ. Jesus once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to Him through the blood of Christ that's our reading for today.

You've probably heard me say this again, but words that I have often found myself saying and celebrating in messages are the ones to remind you that the God breathed horizons in 1997 and even before that is as the behind the thing started churning, God breathed into life a body and a place and a people and a story and the name of Horizons Community Church.

It wasn't an accident that the world didn't need just another church. The world needed a horizons, a unique church that did things like nobody else was doing that horizon sized things to make it their own and their expression of their calling I have said that so often to say that that God has made this church u unique and powerful and important and that it's worth celebrating.

And I believe that. But it is tempting. And I have also done it in my own leadership as well. It is tempting. Yet, no matter how special this place is and unique, it is tempting to look down the road. Isn't it tempting to look at something bigger and shinier and say, oh, that's that's who we need to be?

Like, That's what our church needs to be like, too, if we want to get it right we've got to look like those folks or someone that we love. Goes to another church in Lincoln and we miss them and we think they left because we weren't like that church enough but if you hear what Paul is saying, he says You are God's masterpiece.

God created and breathe life into horizons to be horizons to be unique, to be Horizon East. And that matters because not only was God like Oh,

I'm going to cook up an idea, but God gave this place a name and a being as he brought people to Christ. That's what the rest of that text is ultimately saying, that this is what God is doing as he desired to bring people to him through horizons in a way that some people would never set foot into a church or reach out to Jesus if it weren't for horizons so today, my advice with Paul's words is Horizons the only person that you need to learn to be more

like as you move forward as a church as horizons to learn to be horizons more and more through and through horizons. Yes, I do encourage you to continue to look around and learn from our brothers and sisters who are in the body of Christ and trying things and learning from them. Let us learn from them and join them but I encourage you even more so to listen to the Holy Spirit, his whispering and his guiding to who you are.

This isn't just a whimsical we should just be whoever we want. This is us being who we are uniquely in this spirit, to be horizons and to love it and to not care what anyone else says. My mom used to say when someone would kind of criticize me or make some make fun of me, she would say, Well, they either feel really bad about themselves or they're just jealous.

Don't worry when a friend or a neighbor or a coworker points out something that's different from their church, that's happening at Horizons because they're not Horizons as long as we're following the spirit, we know where we're going and we know who we are.

And so. So now it's time to start saying goodbye when I was brand new here, I was just learning to be a senior pastor. I kept getting emails from other pastors, and we don't do this as much, but the signature line at the bottom, there's always this really cool slogan of like, you know, one life at a time.

We're all for Christ. And, you know, my favorite was probably the best is Yet to come. Like, I just love that phrase because it's really like, no matter how good it is, like God is still doing even bigger and greater things. So I was like, well, as a senior pastor, I got to have my own cool slogan I was 31 but I was like, But I can't be like anyone else's.

And so I took the best is yet to come. And I thought, I know this is only the beginning. This is like exactly like it, but different. And I and that's been the slogan at the bottom of my emails, and that's I've written an email from my phone for the last ten years this is only the beginning. And what started out as kind of just like this, you know, whimsical, kind of cool thing that I thought made me look cool.

Like a good lawyer actually ended up being a very deep and true reminder and when I first announced to the worship team in the early months of this year that God had called me on to a new ministry, I said, But this is only the beginning. In the end, it picked up that momentum again. And it's true. This is only the beginning.

No matter what we've gone through, no matter where we've been, no matter what height we are at right now, it is only the beginning because God is

not done yet and God has never once said, Oh, I'm running out of steam. And I think I think I'm just going to try to get you to the finish line. God says, Hold on because I'm just getting going OK? So I invite you to embrace that this is only the beginning, even though it is a transition into a new faith phase of your life as a body of Christ.

I also leave something else with you. Our brother Brett Ferguson came to me first. He had to spend some time because he had gotten mixed up in some trouble and came to see me, and he asked me if I would pray for him while he was serving and and if I would write to him and perhaps even visit him. And I remember in that moment, like feeling a little uneasy meeting with Brett and but I agreed. So I met with him and wrote letters, and he wrote letters to me and prayed with him, prayed for him, visited him. And I remember watching Jesus break through those prison doors and walk straight into Brett's cell and change his life. This is not just another cliché of what we say it means to be Christian. This is this is real. I watched it, and there's no other way to explain.

When Brett got out, he suddenly, like, got a job and then started his own lawn care business. Then the God brought them together with this incredible gal, Jill. Then I married them and I watched them talk to each other during our sessions. And the Brett that came out of there was not the Brett I had met with before. And I remember when he came up to me one day and he said, Pastor Jason, we're gonna have a big ol fireworks show. And he says, is going to be huge. And he says, I don't want any money. I don't want any recognition. It's going to be the freedom in Christ, our life in Christ, freedom, fireworks show and I was like, That's a really long title. I said, OK, let's do it. And so for several years now, we have lit up the sky and we proclaim the name of Jesus Christ to the neighbors. And besides VBS, this is one of the biggest, like, public, outward facing proclamations of Jesus Christ changing lives.

We are life changed life changes it was Christmas because Brett is a giver. That's his spiritual gift, one of them. And he came to me and he said, I got a I got a present for you. And then this was all wrapped up and he brought this sign in and I was like, That's huge. But then I started like recording videos. Unfortunately, sometimes it was just the ali'i that made it into the frames this hung on my wall and it was like, Yeah, this is actually a beacon. This is cool. I love this. And then when I would be gone for like a week, like, like Derek and the ministry staff would, like take this off of my wall and use it in some other frame or something like that, like it's kind of become like an icon.

And then when COVID hit and all of this other stuff, like, I had to look over at this wall and remember that our belief and our faith is the foundation of our relationship with Jesus Christ. And that this is not just a cool wall. Hey, this is our constant reminder that we we walk by faith that we are in love with Jesus or trust, and that each day we're called to believe even when the circumstances point in every other direction. So I would love to take this with us. It will fit in the moving truck but I'm leaving this here and I have written a note on here to give this to Pastor Mandy, and I'm inviting you to continue to latch on to this, to believe it would go to believe that you are as individuals, but you are as Horizons Community Church.

You are a masterpiece created to do God's works that He saw long ago. You are. And I'm inviting you to believe it and trust it. I'm also inviting you to believe that this season in this transition is exactly what God is doing. This is not a mistake. This is not evil. And this is not the work of humans having their way. This is what God is doing. Believe in it. I also want you to believe that God has called you to horizons you didn't just show up because the music is better or the children's program is better. Yes, it is. You showed up because the spirit's doing things that you don't know in your life and your growth. The Spirit knows that you need to be around some people and that they need to be around you. The Spirit knows that you need to ache with some people, that you need to grow with some people, you need to disagree with some people, and that you need to come together to belong to the body of Christ and do things that only horizons will accomplish and can only accomplish.

If you're here, you need to believe that I know there are very few of you who have this notion on their mind, but if it is a notion in your mind that along with the pastor's departure, so will be your own from Horizons, I want to cash in here that you will be hard pressed no matter where you go to find another ministry as authentic, as sincere, as powerfully breathed alive with the spirits as you will find in horizons. And if you do find that church, it will be through a lot of time and resources given to find that place you have found something that is masterfully woven together, and I invite you to believe in it. As you believe in God. So today I close by saying this is only the beginning and I close by encouraging.

Here the skies are the limits let's pray Gracious and Holy God, you are good. You do things that cause heart hurt in our hearts. You do things that cause us to wonder. And yet you do things that as we watch and we listen and we wait and we believe that we see our incredible you're crafting a bigger story. You're weaving together a bigger tapestry so we celebrate it, we lift it up, and we ask that you continue to reveal clearly to us who we are. Why you have called us to here, and why it matters so much. And we invite you to reveal to us your continued love and yearn invitation to us to to grab hold, believe in you more firmly, and to trust in you and to serve you more joyfully as we continue to do your important work in the world. I pray all this in your name Jesus. And I thank you for this time. I'm in.