

Outward Focused Week 3

Forward, Future and Outward Focused

BY Pastor Mandy

As most of you know, I traveled to Israel a couple of years ago. And one of the things that I loved about traveling to Israel was, like the super simple things, like seeing the things that Jesus talked about. I remember one moment on the trip, our guide pointing out the window of our bus, and he was pointing to the mustard plants, and he said, imagine.

Imagine Jesus walking through those yellow flowers with his disciples, teaching about the parable of the mustard seeds. I loved that moment of imagining Jesus there with his disciples, and we experienced on our trip other things like that, such as other trees that were native to the area. We saw olive trees and date trees and fig trees. Now, when Jesus taught, he often used these simple things around him like he knew the disciples would be aware of their surroundings.

He knew his disciples would understand how they had to care for these things. Jesus used all sorts of parables and analogies to help us learn. It is with our passage today from John chapter 15, starting at verse one, Jesus is speaking to his disciples, and he said, I am the true vine, and my father is the vineyard keeper.

He removes any of my branches that don't produce fruit, and he trims any branch that produces fruit so that it will produce even more fruit. You are already trimmed because of the word I have spoken to you. And then he says, remain in me. Now, other translations. Maybe you've heard it as abide in me. Jesus says, abide in me, and I will abide in you.

A branch can't produce fruit by itself but must remain in the vine. Likewise, you can't produce fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine. You are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, then you will produce much fruit. Without me, you can't do anything. If you don't remain in me, you will be like a branch that is thrown out and dries up those branches are gathered up, thrown into the fire, and burned.

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want, and it will be done for you. My father is glorified. When you when you produce much fruit, and in this way prove that you are my disciples. Now I read this passage and three things kind of just jumped out at me in this passage.

First of all, we have to cut what is not working. We have to remain in Jesus or have a relationship with Jesus, and we have to produce fruit in order to prove that we are Jesus's disciples. Now, when I served as the youth director in my ministry, I would teach confirmation. And when I taught confirmation, I would always talk about things that are counter intuitive.

And I used I would I'd asked for a volunteer and I would give the volunteer a piece of tape, and I would tell them to stand against the wall and I would say, okay, put this piece of tape on the wall, but you can't bend your knees. Right? They would jump, you know, maybe an inch off of the ground.

And then I would give another volunteer a piece of tape. And I was like, all right, same thing. But this time you can bend your knees and all of a sudden, they could jump higher. It seems counterintuitive

that the lower that you go, the higher that you can reach. It seems counter-intuitive that for something to grow, you must cut it off.

Now an example is the rose bush. If you just leave the rose bush and just let it be, let it be. It grows inward. It is a mess. It still blooms, but the blooms are not very healthy. And in order to make the rose bush healthy, you have to prune it. You have to cut some of the branches, and you cut the inward facing branches so that the outward facing branch and branches can receive more sunlight, and they can get more nutrients and nutrients to produce healthier roses.

It seems kind of counter intuitive. It seems counterintuitive that Jesus died so that we could experience the kingdom of heaven. When we read this passage for me, I immediately it was like, I need to take inventory of my life. And I'm like, what needs to be pruned in my in my life in order me for me to produce fruit.

Now, bearing fruit means that we are living a changed faith, full life. What needs to be pruned? You know, like we think about our prayer lives, do we have a really good prayer life? Because if not, something probably needs to be pruned from our life. Are we? Are we servants? Are we? What is our outward treatment of others look like?

Do we cut people down or do we build people up when we talk to them in person, online, behind their backs? You know, kids are watching us. Other Christians are watching us. People who are not Christians are watching us. They are watching us. You know us who represent Christ. What am I producing? Like, we have to stop to take inventory of our life to think about.

Are we producing some fruit or are we producing much fruit? Are we producing goodness in the world for those around us, or do we produce negativity that just sucks the life out of the room? When we enter?

Now the disciples, they have already pruned or removed or cut out things from their life. They pruned some of their goals and some of their dreams in order to follow Jesus. But Jesus says it's not just about that. We also have to have a relationship with Jesus. We also have to actively pursue a relationship with Jesus that produces love for God and produces love for others.

Now, today is Pentecost Sunday and Pentecost Sunday is a Sunday where the church we celebrate the birth of the church. It's the church's birthday and we celebrate the presence of the Holy Spirit. Now some churches will invite everyone to wear red. I happened to wear red today. I didn't even, like, put this together until I was sitting in the men's group today. I was like, wait, I'm wearing red? Some churches will be like, wear red to symbolize the little flame over the head. When the Holy Spirit came to the church, other churches might be talking about the church, how the church grew from the birth, right? How the church grew and took off because of the spirit and because of Jesus's command to be witnesses from Jerusalem to Judea, to Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

That's Jesus's command to us, to the church. But what if, instead of celebrating the birth of the church, what if instead of celebrating the expanse of the church, what if we talked for a moment about the church dying now, the biggest threat for, a small C church is to become insider focused, like a rosebush that's turning inward.

Now, Horizons couldn't have started 27 years ago. If it was an insider focused church. Horizons had to be outsider focused. Horizons had to bring the word into the community to others. the disciples likewise had to be outsider focus, to witness to the world and to produce fruit.

Now, for thousands of years, there has been this argument within the church, even in Scripture, right there is this argument in the church, and there's kind of two sides of the argument. One side is that we can't move outward until we've grown up again. We need to mature as disciples at first like we need to have more classes. We need to have more Bible study so that the Word of God changes hearts. And then we can serve the way Jesus asks us to serve. Now, the other side of this argument is we know the command to love one another.

So now let's go do the work. Jesus said, go and do likewise about the same Maritain who stopped to help someone. Jesus showed us what it meant to be a servant when he washed the feet of his disciples, serving others. This this argument, this side will say, let's focus more on getting outside and doing the work of loving others.

But it really comes down to this whole chicken and the egg scenario, right? What comes first is it's selflessly serving like, Jesus, or is it knowing the Word of God? And can it be both? Because God, it was not that God so loved the church that he gave his son, but God so loved the world that he gave his only son.

Now both the vine that we read in our Scripture passage today, and the fig tree that we read about a couple of weeks ago when Jesus cursed it because it wasn't producing fruit. Both of these images represent Israelites. This is Old Testament, examples of Israelites, the vine and the fig tree. Now, there are a lot of fun facts that you can find about fig trees. I went on fig nut.com and I found this, pruned figs. Fig trees have a shorter lifespan.

Now Horizons is building a legacy. It has changed countless lives and we want to continue to change countless lives. But becoming insider focused is like slowly dying. But being outsider focused is risky. Being outsider focused means it changes the dynamics of things. Here. And if we truly believe what our value states, that everyone has a place at the table, we can't get too comfortable, or soon there will be no more room at our table. Jesus doesn't say, do whatever you need to do to be comfortable. He says, do the work of cutting things out that doesn't produce love in abundance.

Now he's listening to this podcast the other day and it was Todd Bowles singer. He wrote a really good leadership book called Canoeing the Mountains, and he said this quote, he said, leadership is disappointing your own people at a rate they can absorb.

I heard it, and I like 10s, you know, I listen to it again and I was like, what? And then ten seconds I listened to it again, like, I don't want to disappoint people. Like when I felt called into ministry, I knew that it would be challenging, but not once was I, like, great. who will I disappoint today? Right? Who will I make angry after my sermon today? But leadership is recognizing that the world is changing around us and understanding that if we if that will no longer exist, if we don't adapt. Leadership is about movement and growth. Jesus says to his leaders. It's about producing things. It's about producing fruit.

Now Kodak, I asked my 20 year old yesterday. I'm like, you know, you know what? Kodak is, right? And he's like, no. And I was like, oh. And then I said, Kodak camera. And he's like, oh yeah, I've heard of that. But Kodak right. For most of us we know exactly what Kodak is, but it doesn't exist in the same way as it did before. In fact, it declined and it filed for bankruptcy and they didn't adjust to the changing landscape of the photography business. They, they didn't want to disrupt the film business. They missed opportunities to step into the digital era of digital photography category. And they lacked any foresight or strategic planning or innovation to look at anything but within themselves. They didn't look outside of themselves. They were insider focused and they failed.

In John chapter 15, we get this, this both and kind of things like on the one hand, faith is about remaining and abiding and staying, rooted in Jesus and who Jesus is. But at the same time, we are called to produce fruit, to be active, to be vibrant in the world.

Now back to Todd Bowles, singer. He has this other quote. It's also hard to hear. And it says, until you realize that to build a church for the people, we love who do not know the God we love, means messing with a church that people have loved a long time. It means that things might change if we want to be a church in the future.

Now, one of our goals with our vision statement is to produce fruit. It's not just a fun statement, it's a statement that hopefully will cause us to move. And as we wrap up this sermon series on our new vision statement, like our work is just beginning, after this, we are going to be moving our mission forward through our vision statement.

It's not going to be easy if we do it right, it's not going to be easy and it's not going to be comfortable, but we're going to connect with our neighbors to live God's love. That might mean making changes in the church. It might mean making changes in our own lives that make us uncomfortable. That is when we will successfully share the love of Jesus with others.

Now I want to show you a video of someone. Some of you might remember him, but this is a video of somebody who is a branch off of Horizons rooted in Jesus. But someone who is out in the world producing fruit. he's a funny guy. So take a look at this video.

Pastor Trevor Rook:

(takes a sip of coffee) Oh, that is disgusting.

Who made this? It's from yesterday, you know.

Hello, Horizons. I'm so glad that, we are able to connect in this way. my name is, Pastor Trevor Rook. I'm a pastor in northwest Lincoln at a church called, Neighbors Church. But a long time ago, I was a member of, Horizons Church. I used to make comedy videos and things like that and be kind of a silly guy and all that kind of stuff.

I'm a pastor now, so I don't do any of that stuff anymore. But I do want to, I'm honored, actually, that you asked me to answer some, some questions here. I've got them right here with the questions. how did Horizons impact your faith? Well, you know, I did a lot, I was just exploring, Christianity.

Seriously. And my faith and all that kind of stuff. But when I first started attending church, I really felt like, you know, the Christians were up here and that I was down here, when I went to Horizons,

the people that I met there, truly accepted me. And, they just shared, this, this loving heart, and I felt like I was on their on their level.

I felt like all, I finally understood that Christians are just normal people. We're just people. And, we're not high and mighty and all that kind of stuff. I always thought church was way, you know, up on high in a high hill or something, and, Horizons didn't, it's funny that the name is Horizons, because it really sounds like you.

You are on a hill, but, you know, you treated me. Welcome. You welcomed me and all that kind of stuff and helped me explore my faith. and it's really that's where the seed planted there. I even did some, sermons there as I went along. thanks to, the people there that just believed in me, I got to kind of test the waters and, found, kind of my calling to be a pastor.

And so it all starts really, with, with you guys, with Horizons. And I'm appreciative of that. the next question is, tell us about your ministry at Neighbors Church now and how God is working. well, right now God's doing the plumbing. we had a backed up thing, and I'm just kidding. we're at neighbors church here.

We're in Fallbrook, which is, northwest, Lincoln. and this is it. It's we sit in tables and chairs. It's a very casual atmosphere. and the whole idea is to have that welcoming spirit, that welcoming spirit that I had. We want to expand that to everybody that comes in this door. Our mission statement here is to love God, love yourself, and love your neighbor.

We believe that because when Christ was asked what the most important, commandment was, he said, Love God with all your heart, soul, strength and all that kind of stuff. And then he said, and love your neighbor as yourself, which means love your neighbor, but also love yourself so that you would love your neighbor the way that you feel that you would want to be loved. And so we try to, teach that we try and everything that we do,

we live by that, we do mission work and all of that kind of stuff out in our community. But we, we really believe that it's in the heart of each individual to take those measures, that mission, and to do discipleship within their own, area, their own community, to take the mission of loving God, loving ourselves, and loving a neighbor to their own, families, to their workplace, to wherever we go.

We feel like by doing that, we're planting seeds and we're trying to, creates a loving atmosphere. And I do really believe that, with, the love of Christ, we can, change the world even as we do it. One little pocket at a time. it changed me. And it's helped me a lot. Moving on.

How have you been able to be an outward focused ministry? Oh, I kind of just said that. That we go out there and we do the. We focus outward, out there, that I'm pointing to the door now, you can't even tell that. And our mission statement is actually right behind you or. Abby. It's over there, so that's okay.

Moving on. give a closing shout out of what you are excited, for about Horizons. outward focus and vision. The Derek. Right this I'm over 50. Any time that I shout, it's because I've hurt something. I see that you're actually. Your vision statement is, connecting with our neighbors, to live God's love.

And that really sounds very similar to what we're doing. I feel like, in hearing that, I feel like, again, proud to have been from, Horizons, and also feel like we have a neighbor on the other side of, of

town there. it's wonderful that we are doing that. And I think that the more that we love our neighbors, I think we as a church, we have focus so much on, church things throughout our history, throughout time at the church.

Just focus on the simplicity, and the and, the deepness of Christ's love is immeasurable. And to take that out and to share it with one another, that's what this world needs more than ever with our division and all of that kind of stuff. We need to know that Christ is love and that people are lovable as they are. and so I, I give a shout out and I'm shouting, this is as loud as I, I get, to you and to, to the neighbors there also, I you have the best, the best pastor in town. I think that, that Mindy is Andy and that, that Mandy is a wonderful, pastor. I just, we, have known each other for a little while, and so you're very fortunate to have her, in charge of that church. I'm jealous. and, I think that you just have, a really bright future there. So my love to everybody and all of that kind of stuff. And I'm just, I'm just really thrilled and I really just want to thank you.

Pastor Mandy:

Yeah. Trevor, he's a good guy. He's a good guy. Well, as the vision and steering team and the spark team, they are going to continue to meet, and they are going to continue to do the work to help us move our vision forward. And there is a lot of great energy around it about deciding who our neighbors are and some strategies.

This might be kind of hard to see. It's blown out, blown up out there, in the atrium if you want to see it more. And a lot of the squares aren't filled in yet, but there is one square that I'm really excited about. You know, fruitfulness is this biblical metaphor of love. And the vine is not just a figure of judgment at the end of time.

It speaks in the present tense of the present age. Our strategies will help us produce fruit. One of the things that we know that we're going to do is start the Good Neighbor experiment. This is from an organization called the Neighboring Movement. I'm really excited about this. There's a sermon series.

There's a small group study that will start in July. And there's also a way for you to continue the Good Neighbor experiment. I love it because it's relational, and I love it because it is action oriented, and it's going to involve the whole congregation. I'm really excited that we are able to be able to do this.

If you have any interest in finding out more about the Good Neighbor Experiment, text neighbor to our phone number and you'll get more information on that. Everybody's going to be involved in the sermon series and hopefully the small group. But then there is this cohort that's going to continue the work for us. If you want to know about that, any interest or just want more information on that, text, 402-512-5700

So today is a celebration of the birth of the church. It's Pentecost Sunday. It's the church that stands on the foundation that Jesus is Lord and Savior to all people. And what we're going to do is we're going to prove to Jesus that we're his followers by loving and connecting with our neighbors, we're going to produce that kind of love in our neighborhood, and we're going to do that for the transformation of the world through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let's pray, gracious God, thank you so much for this chance for us to gather together today to be your witnesses by the act of gathering, but also to be your witness out in the world. Help us to produce the kind of fruit that you are looking for. Help us to open our eyes to things that need to be pruned from our own lives. So that we can remain in you, that we can abide in you. Help us to prune the fruit, the things, the branches that are not working here in our community, even if that means a little bit of change. Because, God, what we want is we want more people to know about community. We want more people to know about the love of Jesus. We want more people to have their lives changed. Help us, guide us, lead us. And we say all of this in Jesus's name, Amen.