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**Pentecost 19 B – October 3, 2021**

**“For Generations to Come ... Go!”**

**Read: Genesis 9: 8 - 17/Memorize: Genesis 9: 12**

**Welcome to Good Shepherd on Launch Weekend. We’re launching our ministry campaign, “FOR GENERATIONS TO COME ... GO!” We hope you’re excited to be here. A whole team of people are involved. You can tell who they are by their t-shirts. We hope to give away lots’ more shirts in the coming weeks as you get involved.**

**We’re sharing a Bhag. A big, hairy, audacious Mission goal, a staffing plan and a renovated worship space all coming together, just in time for our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a congregation. We are a congregation of generations. That is somewhat unusual in many Missouri Synod congregations.**

**They’re mostly older people. We have children, parents, grandparents and, even some great-grandparents running around here. In my Pastoral service here, I have served five generations of families. That speaks to the connections we create at Good Shepherd. It also speaks to the continuity that we have been “Sharing Christ, Changing Lives!” for a long time.**

**That’s our shorthand for the mission of the church in Matt. 28: 19 & 20. It’s important for us to know how Jesus came to give that command. Verse 18 gives the reason: “Then Jesus came to them (the disciples) and said, ‘all authority on heaven and earth has been given me.’” So the power for the mission we’re carrying out comes from the authority of God, Himself.**

**Here’s the mission in Matthew 28: 19 – 20 “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”**

**That’s the New Covenant, the New relationship that Jesus establishes with us to replace the covenant His Father had made in the Old Testament. The people of Israel**

had failed to keep that covenant and had suffered because of their failure, just as God had warned. Covenants always include the good news of blessings for obedience and consequences for failing to keep them. At the very heart of God was the good He wanted for His people. He told them about the consequences so that they understood the danger of disobedience.

Some congregations ask their members to sign their constitution. By signing you create a legal relationship. The constitution spells out what you have to do and what the congregation has to do in return. In a sense, it's a contract.

We ask those joining Good Shepherd to sign a membership covenant. A covenant is a document of relationship. It's how we'll get along together. We express that in the very first paragraph of the membership covenant: "Knowing Jesus as my Lord and Savior and having been baptized, and being in agreement with the instruction I have received, I now feel led by the Holy Spirit to unite with the Good Shepherd Church family. In doing so, I commit myself to God and to the other members to do the following:"

So first and most important, a covenant is based on us knowing Jesus as Lord and Savior. Without Jesus at the center of our relationships, things won't go well. Many relationships are transactional. If you do this for me, I'll do that for you. In those relationships we're all keeping score so we don't get behind, doing because we get something in return. That's our human nature at its worst. Actually, that might be our human nature at its best. So often, what we do is just take without giving back.

Jesus makes our relationship transformational. In the waters of baptism, God adopts us into His family; we become brothers and sisters in Christ. That's why a last name is never used in the baptismal service, for now we are the Christ family.

In our family, we inherit the blessings that God intends for us. Among the blessings are salvation by faith through Jesus' death and resurrection. We know the love of Jesus and now share it. That's what disciples do. So what is our mission and purpose? To make disciples who will, in turn, make more disciples. When you become a disciple your life changes. That's why we talk about "Sharing Christ, Changing Lives!"

We also take on responsibilities as part of the family. When we live according to this covenant we will have more fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ who live to make a difference. When we share Him lives are changed by His power.

**Let's talk about this: First, I will protect the unity of my church. We are to act in love towards each other; avoid things that will cause division and follow the leaders whom God has placed over us. First, we love each other. If a church doesn't do that, it won't be a church.**

**Second, I will share the responsibility of my church. We do this by praying, not just praying that it remains as it is, but praying that it will grow. Remember God wants all people to be saved. There are many people around us who don't know Jesus. We know some of them very well. Just as we share Jesus's love with each other, we share it with those who don't know Jesus. We introduce Jesus by our actions. When people see them, it opens the door to invite them to know Him better through worship. That's the second step: we love others.**

**Growth is about more than having more bodies in a pew. As disciples we desire to grow in our practice of the faith; our devotion to God and our use of our gifts of time, talent and treasure to serve God by serving others. When we serve in that way, God enables to do and give immeasurably more when we depend on Him and allow Him to use us according to His purposes.**

**We sometimes forget that sharing Christ, changing lives can be the simplest thing. Jesus once said it is as simple as a glass of water. Just warmly greeting people can have a tremendous impact on their lives. Time and time again, people comment on how welcomed they felt when they came here.**

**Third, I will serve the ministry of my church. God has equipped you with gifts and talents. Some of them you know; some you don't yet know. We'd be glad to help you learn more about those gifts and abilities. Sometimes, we discern your gifts before you do. When we come and offer you a chance to serve, trust us. It may be God's great opportunity for you to grow in your own self.**

**Here's one way of serving we can all work on: developing a servant's heart. When we have a heart for caring and for serving, lives get changed, ours included.**

**Fourth, I will support the testimony of my church. Every time you come to worship it is a testimony to your faith in Jesus. You may be the one who welcomes a guest and helps them feel at home. The more regularly you come, the more likely you are to know that you're sitting next to someone who is a guest. You may be the one offering that glass of water.**

**Part of our testimony is the life we live. As we've heard from James, our actions are a witness to those around us. Perhaps, the most powerful witness because they speak louder than our words.**

**Finally, giving is a witness of our faith. The Bible talks about giving in three ways: time, talent and treasure. It treats them all equally. They really are meant to be seen in that light. What impact could we have if, as disciples of Jesus Christ, we all gave 10% of our time, talents and treasure to the ministry of our Savior? How many lives would be changed by that?**

**One thing Roxann and I have learned is that by returning 10% of what God provides to us to Him through our congregation, we become better managers of the 90% He allows us to use in other ways to serve Him. As a Christian, I am no longer bound to give a tithe. It is not an obligation, but it can be a joy. It can be the beginning of a life of generosity. Whenever you use time, talent or treasure, you are spending the capital God is giving you to serve Him.**

**Just eight weeks from today, we'll be asking you to recommit to these understandings that God has called us to at Good Shepherd. Think of this as a renewal of your subscription to Good Shepherd. When I renew my subscription, or perhaps I should say, when we renew our submission to our heavenly Father, He sends us.**

**That's our campaign: "For Generations to Come ... Go!" God isn't looking for us to sit here. He's looking for us to serve Him, by serving others. They're all around us. There's lots of work to do. Don't be frightened by that. Rejoice in it. It means there's lots of opportunities to be a witness to Jesus. There is no one, right way to do it. So, how do we decide? Allow the Holy Spirit to guide and direct you in witnessing, so that you may bring glory to our Father in heaven.**

**Here's your question: God intends that we share our covenant relationship. How will you share your covenant relationship with others?**