



Prairie Lane Press

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Another Year of Sermons

For the last few years, I've decided to include a review of the past year's sermons in the December newsletter.

In Romans 10 is a passage that reminds us of the importance of preaching. Verse 17 states, "*Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.*" The practice of explaining the Word of God during a time of worship has always been a part of the Christian Church through all history. But, preaching today is a counter-cultural activity. It is a rather "old-fashioned" kind of practice in a fast-moving world of technology.

Yet, we continue to affirm the importance of preaching God's Word even in our world today. In fact, we need it more than ever. We need to escape the voices of our culture and the pace of constant movement that makes deep reflection on spiritual matters rare. We need to hear about our true identity in Jesus and our status as citizens of heaven. And, in an age when people value choice, preferences and relative truth, we need to accept the authority of a sermon; it's not just another opinion, but comes as God's truth.

I hope reviewing some of the topics we have covered in sermons over the past year sparks some memories, and perhaps a specific passage that spoke to you this past year. We can think about what we have learned and how we have grown in 2016.

I'm always happy to hear ideas from the congregation about future sermons. If there is a passage you would like to hear a sermon on, or an idea for a sermon series, please let me know. I may not be able to honor all requests, but I certainly do keep them in mind, and look for opportunities to include them.

HERE IS THE BRIEF REVIEW OF SERMONS IN 2016:

January 2016: The first sermon of 2016 was about our goals for the New Year vs. Satan's goals for us. Satan wants to attack us at our weaknesses and make us fail – to "sift us like wheat", but God's power is greater.

Then, we had a series on the images of salvation. The Bible uses a few important images to help us understand what Jesus does for us. The Bible talks about freedom from slavery, Jesus paying the debt of our sins (financial image), being declared innocent in God's courtroom, and being adopted as God's children. All 4 of those images teach us some important things of what it means to belong to God.

Lent started in mid-February. The theme of this year's lent was on the "Farewell Discourse" in John 14-17. This passage covers Jesus teaching the disciples on the evening before his arrest. A main theme of the Farewell Discourse is that the followers of Jesus will have power and comfort from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit in the life of believers today means that God is always with us.

On Easter, we considered the "power of Christ in me" and used the story of the Chilean miners being pulled up into the light and rescued from the darkness.

For a few weeks after Easter, we jumped around on various topics, without a sermon series theme. We talked about God's calling and our mission. For Earth Day, we had Pat Mingarelli, a Christian nature photographer, come in and talk about lessons from God we see in his creation. On Thursday May 5, we acknowledged the National Day of Prayer with a service of prayer and praise.

For 3 weeks in May we looked at Job's friends. Job's friends come close to the truth, but they give bad advice, and they do not speak rightly about God. They constantly accuse Job unfairly of wrong-doing, but to be an "accuser" is to cooperate with the hateful voice of the devil. This series challenged us as Christians to speak about God in truthful and accurate ways.

Summer: We had a 5-week series in the summer on "David in the Wilderness". We all know the familiar story of David and Goliath and a few other stories of David. But, in I Samuel, there are also many interesting and less-known stories about David running away from Saul. Before becoming the king, David had to mature in his faith and learn to trust more fully in God. We can see how the trials of David prepared him for the calling God had on his life, and the patience that was necessary.

In August, we reflected on the "Olympics in the Bible" as this cultural event in 2016 is one of our shared experiences with people even way back even in Bible times. Paul was a sports-fan who used Olympic imagery in his writings.

Then, moving into a new "ministry year" in September, we had a series of sermons on Revival. What do we need to do in order to mature in our faith and get to the

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next level? The series looked at prayer, confession, using God's gifts, and putting our faith in action. We concluded with 2 Peter 1:3-11. This passage gives us a great example of what spiritual maturity looks like: ***“For his reason, make EVERY effort to add to your faith goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, mutual affection, and love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being INEFFECTIVE and UNPRODUCTIVE in your knowledge of Jesus Christ.”***

Starting at the end of September we moved on to ***“When Life Doesn't Turn Out the Way We Want”***. The sermons talked about moving past our mistakes, the danger of comparing, the importance of obedience and growing through trials. For my 40th birthday I shared a personal testimony: “I thought life was going to be easier, but God is faithful.”

Then, finally—around the time of the elections we were reminded of God's kingship and that we do not want to put too much hope in earthly leaders, and neither do we need to be afraid of the circumstances around us. A relevant passage came from Isaiah 8 ***“Do not call conspiracy, everything this people calls a conspiracy; do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it. The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy; he is the one you are to fear.”***

Congregational Care Update at PLC

What an outstanding fall we are enjoying this year. The same can be said about our congregational care ministry here at PLC. So much has been going on this past year it is exciting to talk about.

This fall we commissioned our newly trained Stephen's Ministers. This team spent their summer training and learning how to better care for all of us. We are busy ministering to several people, continuing to develop out training and looking forward to more care giving relationships in the future.

How can you help this ministry?? Great question, please pray for us and our care receivers. That is the biggest thing you might do for us. Also, pray for God to open your eyes as you have conversations with people so that you may notice if something mentioned that would indicate that person might benefit from a Stephen's Ministry relationship. Then contact me so that I may follow up with the individual. My email is vicki@omahacrc.org.

Our small groups are up and meeting again. I enjoy hearing from the leaders about how the groups are enjoying the time of fellowship and learning more about their faith. We would love you connect you with a group if you are feeling like you are ready.

Again, contact me at vicki@omahacrc.org and together we will find a group for you! We have men's and women's only groups, mixed couples and young adult groups. Please join a group soon-- they would love to see you there.

Deferred Compensation Fund for Pastor

Your Contributions are Welcome Now!

In response to Pastor Dan's contributions to PLC over many years, we established a deferred compensation fund for Pastor earlier this year. We ask that you prayerfully consider donating funds at the end of 2016 to this fund.

While many people build equity in a home and/or a business, these opportunities are rare for Pastors. Therefore, Prairie Lane Church council approved the establishment of a deferred compensation fund. The fund is a restricted use, non-budgeted account. This means that funding comes only from specific voluntary donations from you, the members of our congregation.

One anticipated use of these funds could be post-secondary education for the Steen children. We who have children who are in or have been in college know that tuition invoices arrive sooner than we often expect. Early financial preparation provides a much greater variety of viable post-secondary education options.

The account balance vests based upon Pastor's tenure and continuing service to PLC. This means that Pastor's ownership of the fund will increase over time. His vesting schedule grows by 10% each year beginning at 0% in 2016; increase to 10% on 12/31/2017; and eventually will grow to 100% on 12/31/2026.

Your donations are tax-deductible. To contribute just make your payment to Prairie Lane Church and note “Deferred Compensation”

The Council hopes you will each prayerfully consider this important way in which we can bless Pastor and his family by securing their family's long-term financial future through our financial support at this time.

—Neil Stanley