



For Lockport

Pastor Jerry Gillis and Pastor Jonathan Drake
February 12, 2017 – Lockport Campus

Pastor Jerry Gillis:

Well, I count it a great privilege to be here with you. You guys really excited about being in this new venue and how much God has done on our behalf? You can let it out. It's good. Yeah, it's really, really big privilege for me to be here with you, kind of in person, as opposed to having a 15-foot head on a screen. Which I don't have a 15-foot head and in real life. I wouldn't miss this for the world. I'm really excited for the new season of ministry that we're experiencing here through kind of the ministry of The Chapel, specifically The Chapel at Lockport. So this part of our congregation's history is a meaningful thing, and I love being able to be a part of it and celebrate it with you.

Now, you may have heard the axiom or the the statement before that those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it. Maybe, have you heard that before? Yeah. So it's really, that's not exactly the way that phrase went. That phrase actually was slightly different than that when it was originally stated by George Santayana in a 1905 book called The Life of Reason. He actually said this. He said, those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. So, either way - those

who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it, or those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it, same idea, right? Of which you're probably saying, this seems to be a very awkward way that you're beginning on such a historical day. Using a statement like that feels somewhat inappropriate. What do you mean by those who don't remember the past are condemned to repeat it? That seems like an ill-timed statement at such a historic moment in the life of our church.

Well, the thing is is that statement is certainly true in some respects, depending on how its applied. But for our purposes today, I actually think that the inverse of that is true. And that's why I would want to mention it to you, because there's a variation of that statement that I would offer you today that I think we need to hold on to its kind of our axiom for this day. And it's simply this - Those who do remember the past can be blessed to repeat it. Those who do remember the past can be blessed to repeat it.

You see, the people of Jesus in Lockport have a past. The people of Jesus in Lockport have a history. And this is important, because I'm not just talking about the the recent past necessarily. Even though it's true that this building was constructed in either 1885 or 1886. I think it was during those two years probably completed in 86. And it's true that the school right across the parking lot, you can see the the kind of cornerstone there, that it was constructed in 1892 originally. So these are historical buildings. But I'm not actually talking today when I talk about our history, I'm not talking about bricks and mortar. In fact, what I would rather think about is the why behind the construction of these

things. As opposed to the structures themselves, which by the way are beautiful. And we're delighted that we've been able to preserve so much of them. They're gorgeous. But really I'd like to think more about the the why behind the construction.

You see, in the mid-nineteenth century in Lockport, which was a very small but growing town, the reason that the town was growing was because of the construction of the Erie Canal. All of these people started coming into this small but yet growing town, and they were coming from all over the world to find work. It's where they came basically the majority of them came as immigrants and we're moving into Lockport to be able to find work. And as a result, of all these churches started popping up in the mid-nineteenth century all over the town of Lockport. You may or may not know this from a historical perspective, but like First Presbyterian of Lockport was constructed in 1823. They started meeting together and serving this community in 1823. And shortly thereafter, Christ Church, which is an Episcopal Church, started meeting together and building their facilities in 1832. And then of course, you had the Lockport Wesleyan Church that came around in 1835. And they had broken off of the denomination because that denomination was favorably disposed to slavery. And they said, oh no, not us. And so they broke off and started ministering to people in that regard.

And then you had the whole slew of Catholic churches that joined the party in the 19th century. You had St. John's, and St. Mary of Namur, and you had St. Patrick's and St. Joseph's and St. Anthony's. And then of course, where we are seated right now - St. Mary's. And what's

interesting about all of those churches is that they were ministering to a variety of different people, mostly immigrants. As you can imagine, St. Patrick's was ministering to Irish immigrants. St. Anthony's was ministering to Italian immigrants, right? And so in some of these churches that's what you had but then there were German immigrants that were coming over, and they were running into a language barrier in some of these churches. And so, that's why St. Mary's was actually built. It was built to reach out predominantly, not solely, but predominantly to those who were of a German immigrant background.

Now, the reason that I get back into this history for just a moment is because the people of Jesus in Lockport were in the mid-nineteenth century endeavoring to reach all different kinds of people. And I think that that's something that we need to remember.

But as rich as that history is, I want to push us back a little bit farther. In fact, a lot of bit farther. I'd like to push us all the way back into the first century. The time where God became a man in the person of Jesus, and was walking around in the flesh, where we had Emmanuel, God with us. The one who was sinless in word, in deed, in thought and action. And ended up going to across to die the death that we deserved as humanity because we were sinful and separated from God. And he went to that cross so that through his death and his shed blood, and then by the power of his resurrection, that we human beings who put our faith in Him could be reconciled to God because of what Jesus has done, not because of what we have done. And after his resurrection and so many people seeing him, then he ascended to the Father.

But prior to doing that, here's what Jesus did. He left his followers, his disciples with a charge - with a commission. And here's what he said to them in Acts chapter 1 verse number 8. He said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." In other words, Jesus said, hey don't try and go this alone, you who are my disciples. Don't try and do this alone. I'm not going to leave you as orphans. I'm going to send my Holy Spirit that will empower you to be able to reach the people that are in your immediate vicinity. And then, it will extend even to the ends of the earth.

Now that probably was interesting for a handful of people to hear at that time. It's not like they had the idea that I can just get on a plane and fly over to these places, and have an opportunity to speak and minister in these grand.. They didn't do that, right? The way they got around were like donkeys and camels, and you know they're Jerusalem cruisers - sandals. You know, that's just kind of what they did. So this was a big statement.

But when you read the book of Acts from beginning to end, here's what you figure out. That that's exactly what unfolded. As you watch piece-by-piece, they start impacting Jerusalem, into Judea and Samaria. And ultimately by the time you get to the book of Acts they are touching what they knew as the ends of the earth at that point. You can see literally the initial followers of Jesus turned the world upside down. That is why we need to dive back into the past. Because when we do remember the past, we can be blessed to repeat it. You see, the same

charge that Jesus gave his original disciples is the same charge he gives to us today. That we have a responsibility in our Jerusalem - Lockport. And then into Judea - into Western New York. Into Samaria - maybe that even constitutes the nation itself. And to the ends of the earth, reaching all the far corners of the globe.

What's so beautiful about that, is that that opens the door for us to think about these big questions that come to our mind when we get a charge or a commission like that. Questions like this: what does God want for the world, and what does God want for his church to do for the world? Those are huge questions.

But you know, when the Apostle Paul who thought about those questions wrote about those questions, he helped us see this very significantly. In Ephesians chapter number three, listen to his words. He says, "God's intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord."

You see, here's what this reminds us of. God has actually always had a plan for what he wanted to do. He's always had in his mind before time as we know it ever began, God has always had a plan for exactly what he wanted to accomplish. And his plan has always included his called out ones, his sent ones, those he calls his Church. And in case you're confused, and I hope that you're not, if you think of church when you think of building, you are not thinking of what the Bible says when it

actually refers to church. This is bigger than bricks-and-mortar. You see, the church meets in the building. The church is not the building. God's plan has always been and always will be that the way in which he wants every man, every woman, every child, to experience his manifold grace, his extraordinary wisdom, is through his called out people. His intent from the beginning was always through his church that he would demonstrate his wisdom to every man, every woman, every child.

And by the way, also demonstrate it to the heavenly realms and the spiritual authorities. That means that angels sometimes scratch their heads, wondering, I can't believe Jesus, that you're actually using these people, these knuckleheads.. some of them. Not you of course. But some of these knuckleheads to be able to accomplish the mission that you have ordained for the world. To see men and women, boys and girls, be exposed to the reality of Jesus Christ, through the witness of these broken vessels, and through the life of these transformed people. This is your plan. And angels scratch their heads, going wow. But so do demons. Demons scratch their heads, wondering what in the world is he thinking? He's using these frail fragile creatures. But God knows in his sovereignty all along that his desire is to demonstrate his wisdom to every man, every woman, and every child, and to demonstrate his wisdom, even to the heavenly created realms that he is sovereignly wise, and he can take the small and the weak and the insufficient, and he can do glorious things by the power of his Spirit through that people. This is an incredible reminder for us in this text of Scripture, because it helps us to understand his many-sided grace.

That's why, ladies and gentlemen at The Chapel, we don't just have some slick marketing phrase to use about who we are as a church. That's not what we're trying to do we're trying to tap into the power of the reality of who we've always been called to be. That if we can remember the past, we can be blessed to repeat it. Because the same charge for his disciples is the same charge for us. And what God wants to do in the world ever since the very beginning of the church, is still what God wants to do in the world right now. That's why the mission of who we are is not just some catchy phrase. It's simply this - it's what the mission of the church is. That we exist so that every man, every woman and every child would have a repeated opportunity to hear, to see, to respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's the job that we have. That has always been the purpose of God, and that is our purpose today.

You know what that means for us? It means that we have the privilege of reaching Italians. We have the privilege of reaching the Irish. We have the privilege of reaching the Germans. But we also have the privilege of reaching Africans, and Asians, and Middle Easterners, and Buffalo Bills fans. And yes, even New England Patriots fans. We have the privilege of reaching out to every man, every woman, and every child for the glory of God. This is what the design of the church is. You see, the church doesn't exist for itself. That's what we get so confused by. In the world that we live in, the church doesn't exist for itself. The church exists for the world. The church is not just a collecting community, the church is and equipping and sending community. That has always been the design of God.

So our mission, ladies and gentlemen, is the same. It's the same as it was in the first century. It's the same as it was in the 19th century. It is the same today. What God desires to support his people, his church to reach out to every man, woman, and child, so that they could have a repeated opportunity to hear, to see, to respond to the good news that they can be reconciled to God through what Jesus Christ has done for them on the cross. So, as followers of Jesus, what we want to embrace his mission. And here's why. Because those who remember the past can be blessed to repeat it.

Video with Pastor Jerry Gillis and Pastor Jonathan Drake:

We believe that the church doesn't exist for itself, but for the world. We believe the church should bring the hope of the gospel to every place, because there is no person, no situation, no city that is hopeless. We believe that God is still changing lives and transforming cities. That's why we started the Lockport Campus almost seven years ago, because we think God cares deeply about this community. And we want to see every man, every woman, and every child have a repeated opportunity to see, hear, and respond to the gospel. That's why we're here. That's why The Chapel exists. We know that we aren't the first local church to care about Lockport, nor are we capable of reaching this region by ourselves. We stand with the Church of Jesus in Lockport, and we honor the long legacy of faith that has gone before us. We also know the church is not a building. It's more than that. But, we're going to leverage every possible square inch of facilities to equip God's people to join God on His mission, and to maintain a visible, identifiable presence in our

community. That's why we have added the use of another building to our church's presence in Lockport. What is now our our new worship center at the Lockport Campus. We're not doing this to make a name for ourselves, but so we can proclaim the name the One who saves and transforms. Sometimes the Church of Jesus has been known by what it's against. We want to be known by what we're for. We are in the city, and we are for the city. We are for Lockport.

Pastor Jonathan Drake:

That's what we believe. And that's what we want to live. We believe that what our community indeed, what our world needs the most is Jesus. And God's plan for people to see and hear the good news of the gospel of Jesus is through his people.

So what would that look like in real time? What would that look like in everyday life? I think the Apostle Paul introduces another word picture for us to help wrap our minds around what that really means. And he says so in 2nd Corinthians chapter 5, beginning in verse 18. He says this: "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation." And then listen to this. "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."

I know that's not maybe a term that we typically associate ourselves with, or even that we would use about ourselves in kind of Christian circles, but it's an appropriate metaphor for us to wrap our minds around. That the Apostle Paul says, we are actually ambassadors for Christ. Think of it this way: a dignitary representing his or her native kingdom in a foreign land. That a dignitary who is entrusted with a measure of authority, a measure of influence, a measure of responsibility, representing both King and kingdom from which they hail. And that's not unlike where we find ourselves, because we know that we have been translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light if we belong to Christ. And so, we actually belong to a different kingdom while we walk around, and the Bible says while we sojourn, on this earth. That we are actually his ambassadors. We are sent to represent King Jesus and his kingdom as we walk amongst the kingdom of this world for a time.

But that even isn't the most amazing part, that's amazing in and of itself, but that's not even the most amazing part of this verse to me. So much as it is who Paul's original audience was, and also how we are included in that. You see, you don't have to be a Bible scholars to understand, okay, this is the second book to the Corinthians, so he's writing to the... Alright, I said you were awake at the welcome. The Corinthians, right? Good. Very well done. Gold star for today. Good. He writes this to the Corinthians.

Now, as we look at the lives of this early church, we understand that they were very gifted church, a very special church, but also a very

immature church. They were very young in their faith. In fact, in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he's writing, and he's actually talking about the spotted past of those Christian believers. And he makes this list. He says, now some of you there in Corinth, man, you have kind of a spotted past. He says, some of you were charlatans, some of you were drunks, some of you were swindlers, some of you were criminals, some of you were sexually promiscuous, some of you have a loose cannon for a mouth, shoot your mouth off at any chance you get. I mean, he says this.

How awkward might that be, because think about when they first received that letter, someone came in and said hey everybody. we're going to get together on Sunday, and I just got a new letter from Paul. Let's see what he's got for us. And they open it up on Sunday morning, and said alright this is from Paul. Some of you were drunks. Hope no one's looking. You know it's like.. Some of you were criminals. How did he know? You know? And so, all of that, that's kind of an awkward moment, isn't it? How would you like your laundry list of sins to be presented? Everyone's kind of feeling shifty-eyed, right? Like are they talking about me? There's probably somebody with.. right? But that's exactly what happened.

However, Paul doesn't bring this up to berate them. He brings this up to remind them that this was the past. Because after making that list in first Corinthians 6, look what he says in verse 11 of first Corinthians 6. "And that is what some of you were." That's the key word there. "And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were

sanctified, you were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." That is what you were. You were these things. But you've experienced the transformation because of Jesus and His residing spirit in your life.

But I think, and maybe this isn't a stretch, I would imagine that the very first response from the Corinthians upon hearing this verse in 2nd Corinthians 5, that we are Christ's ambassadors, I would imagine that the Corinthian believers went back in their minds to thinking, "yeah, but Paul, we used to be those things. We made a mess of life. We still are carrying around some of that the consequences from those bad decisions. We made a mess of things. Are you sure that you want to trust us to be an ambassador? You want me to represent the King and the Kingdom? You want me to be an ambassador? Surely you want someone more qualified."

And we believe that to our own detriment when we think like that. Just like the Corinthians I'm sure had that initial reaction like, are you sure you want to use us? We do the same exact thing, and to our detriment, and to the detriment of the impact of the gospel through our lives, when we think God there has to be a plan B. Surely you want to use someone different than me. Surely you want to use the professionals. Surely you want to use the spiritual elite. You want to use the people with Reverend, Dr., Father, Pastor in front of their name more than you would want to use someone like me.

Maybe you have a specific Christmas tradition like I do, but to get into the Christmas spirit every year, maybe there's a particular movie, film, that you watch to get yourself into the Christmas spirit, and if you don't have that then you're not in the Christmas spirit. Maybe for you that's the Miracle on 34th Street. For maybe some other people that's Home Alone. And we're not going to judge either group okay? That's that's not what this time's for. For me, it's the movie It's a Wonderful Life. 1946, Jimmy Stewart, It's a Wonderful Life. And the main character is George Bailey who comes to a point of despair in his own life. And he's kind of standing on the bridge there and he says things like, I wish I hadn't ever been born. And he's thinking about throwing away God's greatest gift, when he's interrupted. And he meets this guardian angel that's been assigned to him Clarence. And Clarence is just trying to get his wings. And Clarence is assigned to George, and he shows George what life would look like if he had never been born. And George sees scene after scene after scene of how life around him would be different had he never been born. And he sees his younger brother Harry drown in a lake at eight years old, and he sees that he's not able to help many people who couldn't afford their own houses to build houses for them. And he couldn't save his little town of Bedford Falls from the evil Mr. Potter. He sees all of these scenes and then some.

But then in a stirring scene, he's in a cemetery. And he comes across a tombstone that says Harry Bailey, his boy brother. And he sees on the dates of the tombstone, 1911 to 1919. And as he's standing there in disbelief, Clarence speaks over his shoulder and says, "George your

brother Harry, he died when he was eight years old." George fires back, that's a lie! My brother Harry went off to war! He rescued a whole convoy of soldiers! They gave him the Medal of Honor! And Clarence has to correct him in this alternate universe, and he says, no, George. Your brother Harry never rescued that convoy, because you were never there to rescue him. You couldn't save him, so he was never there to save those soldiers. They all died in the war. And then elsewhere, Clarence makes this very sobering statement that I can never forget. He says, it's strange, isn't it George? Each man's life touches so many other lives. He leaves an awful hole when he's not around, doesn't he?

You see, you may not think of yourself as an ambassador. I may not think of myself as an ambassador. I may not think of myself as being significant in God's economy. That it would be better for him to use other people, someone else, someone who knows more, who is more spiritual or knows more Bible or anything like that. And you may find yourself in that place sometimes. And I think maybe the reason the powerful message of It's a Wonderful Life stays with me, is because it reminds me that each person's life, each man, each woman's life, is so critical, touches so many other lives, that we actually leave a hole behind in the body of Christ when we fail to embrace our mission and our calling and our identity as an ambassador. That doesn't mean God can't do what God wants to do. He does. He's sovereign. He's in control. But we certainly miss a significant portion of our purpose in life when we abandon and abdicate the responsibility that he has for us as an ambassador.

And so, even though you may not see yourself this way, I'm far less interested in how you see yourself as I am in how Christ sees you. Because Jesus says, you are necessary. You are critical. You are important to my strategy. That God factored you into his strategy for reaching the world is both a humbling and a sobering reality. That God factored you into his plan to say, I know I've got this man, I've got this woman at that school, at that place of work, in that neighborhood, in that extended family, and I know exactly why I have them there.

So whether we see ourselves that way or not is not my concern, but rather that Jesus says, I need you for this. What if we all believed that? What if each person who is a follower of Christ believed, embraced and lived that way? What difference might that make in our community? What difference like that making 14094? What difference might that make in Niagara and Erie county? What difference might that make in our world?

One scholar put it this way: we've been given the role of an ambassador, not to fix the culture, but to proclaim the message of reconciliation. Changed people who are changed by the gospel will change society. This is our ministry. Changed people who are changed by the gospel will change society. That's our ministry as ambassadors.

So what do ambassadors do? Listen. We announce the treaty of peace that our King has declared and enacted for the world. That's what we do. We announce that peace is available with God, that we can be forgiven and reconciled back to God. That's exactly what Paul says in 2nd

Corinthians 5. We announce the peace treaty of our King to a foreign kingdom. That's what we do as ambassadors. And our lives actually testify to the things that were proclaiming. And our words are informed by the documents of the treaty - God's Word. That's obvious everything that it means to be an ambassador. But that doesn't mean we're asking everyone to quit their jobs and become pastors. No. Instead, that you would be an ambassador first, and your vocation in life second. That we don't want you to stop being a teacher, but that instead you now see yourself as an ambassador who has been given a circle of influence with those who come into your classroom. That you stop seeing yourself first as a CPA, and now first as an ambassador with a circle of influence with every person who comes into your office. That you're no longer just first a factory worker, or someone who shows up to some work a shift at Tim Horton's, but that first you are an ambassador. And then you've been given a circle of influence at your current job. That you're not just a person who stays at home to raise children, but that you are an ambassador who has been entrusted with an eternal weight of raising those little ones to follow Christ one day. That is how we must see ourselves.

So what do we do? We announce that treaty of peace, and we take it to everywhere we go. Because God's design is that every man, every woman, and every child would have those opportunities, without having to come or go anywhere, but that we would go to them. That's why he's given us His Spirit. You see, if we waited for people to come to us, we would be missing out on a huge component of God's plan for the

world. If we waited for people to come to our building, to come to our gathering, to come to our event, rather than seeing that these gatherings, these events, these buildings are to equip us who are His to represent Him wherever we go. That's what it means to be an ambassador.

And leaders and pastors, our job is to equip and release you, not for you to live vicariously through our ministry. Paul said as much in Ephesians 4 chapter 4 verse 11. He said this: "So Christ Himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers.." He gave leadership to his local church for this reason - "to equip Christ people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up." That's what leaders, that's what pastors, church leaders are supposed to be doing. That's our task. And whether that's something you perceive, or that we cultivate, we need to eliminate any sort of power hoarding in leadership and understand that God's design is that leadership would release power, his Spirit into his people for works of service. That you don't live vicariously through me or any other pastor. That our task primarily in evangelism is not come and hear my pastor talk. That's not our first task. That's a good thing. That's not an ultimate thing. Our first task is that we would go and tell. That our lives would be an irresistible influence on the people who see us. And in a power-hungry world, the church should be set apart as one where power is not hoarded, but released and empowering into Christ's people.

But not just Paul's words, Jesus said something to this effect as well. Look at John 20 verse 21. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.

Listen. The God of the universe, God the Father, in eternity past declared to his Son, I want you to go to earth, take on flesh. God in the flesh, the God-man, one hundred percent God and one hundred percent man at the exact same time. The Father said to the Son, I want you to go, and I want you to represent me to the world. No one can see me, so I'm gonna send one that they can see - my Son. So Son, I want you to go to the earth, and I want you to announce to the world that peace is available. That people can be reconciled back to the Father. That does this relationship that was created for intimacy, nearness, proximity to the God of the universe which was severed by sin, can be ultimately restored and it can be restored in you, my son. God said that to his son. And he gave Jesus all the authority, all the responsibility, and the task of announcing that people didn't have to continue on their path of self-destruction, but they could be rescued and redeemed and reconciled.

And in that same way, Jesus sends us. I can't even wrap my mind around that. He says, just as the Father sent me, so I am sending you. He gives us, Jesus assigns to us, the responsibility, the influence, the task of representing him on the earth. Because now he has ascended back to the Father, where we can't see him. So what did he do? He sends the ones that can be seen - his church. You and me. And he sends us to represent him on the earth to proclaim peace to all, that it's available to any who

would come to Jesus and embrace him as Savior. That they can be reconciled and redeemed. That is our responsibility.

And you know what's amazing? We're not alone in that mission. Because he says, I'm gonna send you a counselor, the Holy Spirit, who's going to dwell within you, and carry you where you cannot go on your own. That when you run out of gas, the Spirit of God has only just begun, and he cannot run out of gas. He is the eternal God in the spirit. And he resides within us. And the early church actually believed that. The very first ambassadors, they actually believed that. And you know what happened. They flip[ed] the world upside down with the gospel. They actually believed that the name of Jesus could change the world. So much so that they would be willing to endure persecution, and trials, and torture, and even death for just for the association with that name.

And Peter and John on one occasion even said, we cannot help but speaking of what we have seen and heard. Why? So that others can see and hear. It was for them all about the name of Jesus. And I don't know about you, but I want to be just as faithful as those early ambassadors, the first disciples. I want to be just as faithful, I would be found just as faithful to them. And so I will remind you, that those who do remember the past can be blessed to repeat it. I want to be just as faithful as they were to the name of Jesus. That for them, the name of Jesus could change everything and everyone. I want to believe that, and I want to live that. That's what we're called to.

So I think an appropriate response then is for us to declare and worship that we believe the name of Jesus is the only name that can change us and change this world. Let's stand together as the band leads us in song.