

WD January 15, 2024

“Aiming At Heaven To Bless the Earth?”

Today I want to consider what the Christian life should aim for. Jesus’ teachings aim at heaven to bless the earth. What do I mean by this. Simply put seeking first the kingdom of God brings also everything else. C.S. Lewis is quoted in his book, *Mere Christianity* as saying, “Aim at Heaven and you will get earth ‘thrown in’; aim at earth and you will get neither.” Civilization is not saved through social agendas but by pursuing a life of faith that is line with Jesus’ teachings.

Countless places speak of aiming for heaven to bless those close to us. Consider the Sermon on the Mount in Matt 5-7. For example, Jesus speaks of loving your neighbor as yourself instead of harboring anger or lust. Love will bring people closer. Anger on the other hand, turns into something divisive at best and destructive at worst. Harboring anger can become bitterness even hatred. Once hatred sets in nothing heaven oriented will result. Jesus spends a great deal of time urging His followers to guard their hearts carefully so that the fruit that comes from the heart may glorify the Lord in heaven. Especially important is a heart that is humble before the Lord. Multiple scripture passages speak of the destructive nature of pride. Many times, the disciples themselves fought about who was the greatest disciple, which always carries the notion of getting more than others at the expense of others. We have seen how destructive this has become in our own national leaders. Pride quickly becomes a dangerous game of king of the mountain. In humility however, Jesus follows the Father’s Will, Jesus aims for heaven and blesses the world with His sacrifice on the cross. Whenever we act in humility or love or grace, we are aiming for heaven but blessing the recipient that humility, love, and grace are aimed at.

This year at Grace we are beginning the process of looking for a new pastor. Pastor Kischnick will retire in a year and a half, July of 2025. That time will go fast. It’s a big change for a church that hasn’t called anyone since I was called to Grace in 2001. But what are we aiming at? Several have already suggested names to consider which communicates that they who suggest the names imagine a certain person to fill the role for Grace. One of those names may be the pastor we want to call. Not only that but in this suggestion is a hope for Grace to thrive with such a person. But what I am hoping most to accomplish in this call process is to aim at heaven first so that the congregation may be blessed. And so, I naturally wonder who will serve the Lord best and what will he bring with him that the Lord would integrate into the Congregational life of Grace. Whomever we call I pray that we will glorify the Lord first and then everything else will be added. The character of a pastor should aim at two basic things; being faithful to the Word and Sacraments and love people. This is where we hope to start looking. Aim at heaven and bless the people.

To aim at heaven to bless the earth is part of our natural calling as Christians as a whole. Aim for the truth of the Gospel and the truth sets people free. Aim at being a person of integrity and people will respect your ‘yes’ as ‘yes’ and your ‘no’ as ‘no.’ Invest in the treasures of heaven where moth and rust cannot destroy. Be generous without making it about yourself being noticed. Forgive as the Lord forgives you. Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her. Wives submit to your husband as to the Lord. Love your kids and bring them up in the Lord. Jesus, repeatedly, teaches us how to aim for heaven to bless those around us.

Aiming for heaven is easy to distinguish from aiming at earth. Aiming at the earth is often self-serving like refusing to volunteer to wash the feet of the other disciples whom Peter may think are not as good at being disciples as he is. So, in his stubbornness he sits and waits for someone else to do it. Meanwhile seeking only to please His father Jesus puts on a towel and washes the disciples' feet. Jesus also turns it into a teachable moment for all of them. If you want be great, become like little children. Learn to serve one another as Jesus has served here.

Our aim at Grace is to attempt to serve likewise. Like the disciples we get rowdy. We don't always get it right. We are not always at our best. We are not a perfect church. Our aim is not to be all things to all people nor to be the biggest thing in the neighborhood. Our hope is to remain faithful to Jesus with what we have been given. Prayerfully we also try to keep it simple too. Relationships. Relationships. Relationships with Jesus and with each other.

So, why do I mention this now? Because our calling process is getting started in earnest. By the end of this year when the country is unhinged about the elections; as the world keeps fighting, plotting, scheming, and playing king of the world; As many yell and carry on about the environment and regulations, world markets, and the economy; we in our little corner will be looking for Pastor to help us serve our Lord on our volatile planet.

We've seen it before. Joseph and Mary in a volatile time and place aimed for heaven in righteousness and obeyed the Lord. John the Baptist preached in a hostile climate both geographically and politically but His message was heard by the all of Judea and Jerusalem. The Apostle Paul was hotly pursued, harassed, and thrown in a Roman prison and yet many around the empire came to know the Lord in His missionary journeys. Point being: While many kept aiming at the earth seeking their own ambitions and glory, the people of God in scripture were aiming at heaven and blessing the earth as they did so. I can't think of a better strategy for Grace Lutheran as it begins to seek a new pastor. May the Lord bless our aim so that we hit the mark for the sake God's people.

Pastor Matthew Woods
John 3:30