

Sermon for March 2nd 2014
The Radical Experiment
West Valley Presbyterian Church
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I don't know if any of you heard the news. 714 new planets have just been discovered – some the size of earth, orbiting around a star, like we orbit around the sun, just outside of our solar system. (IMAGE)

These new planets were detected by an instrument called The Kepler photometer which is basically a kind of Schmidt telescope design (IMAGE)– for those of you who might know about this sort of thing.

Anyway, as you might imagine this machine is a remarkable invention – powerful in its ability to record new realities in the vestiges of the universe that we never knew existed...and scientists are on the edge of their seat – so excited to see something new – that they have never seen before.

Discovering something new is an exciting process. Seeing things in new ways or seeing things we never saw before, is the process of spiritual growth as well. And often God uses difficult times to show us new realities; open our eyes to things we never saw before; get us visioning in new ways.

Jesus opened the eyes of the blind man, and the first thing he saw was Jesus. Can you imagine that? Having your eyes opened for the first time, and the first thing you see is your Creator and Savior's face looking at you. What an

amazing vision that is. The first thing you see when your eyes are opened is Jesus, where before it had been only darkness.

Spiritually speaking, as Christians we are constantly having our blind eyes opened to see new truths that Holy Spirit reveals to us. It's the process of spiritual growth.

Ever read a familiar scripture and see something new in it even though you've read a thousand times before?

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. A familiar one right? Someone came to me once and said...I've never not known this verse, but I saw in it the other day a new thing. I realized that David was a shepherd himself and in doing that, he also needed a shepherd. And just as he took care of his sheep, so he saw God taking care of him. I just never thought about it that way before.

The Christian walk is full of these kinds of new insight, new ways of seeing. growth enhancing revelations. Right?

Even in every day life we have these kinds of AHA experiences –

Like when you are staring at a math problem...and it doesn't compute...and it doesn't compute...and you go to bed...and you are so frustrated with what

seems to be a kind of stagnation in your own mental processes....and then you wake...and you stare at that problem again...it's the same problem...but you see it in a different way...you discover something new that brings it altogether....and all of a sudden you get an AHA!! I see...you might shout!

This problem now... brings me to a new place...it moves me forward in my capacity to understand and to generalize that knowledge in other ways in the world. This problem, as frustrating as it has been, has also been growth enhancing because grappling with it has helped me not only see the problem, but eventually see things in a new way that allows me to solve the problem.

Now we have had some town meetings recently in our denominational discernment process and we have another one tonight. This has not been an easy process, and session has plans in mind for tonight that I have heard about that I think will be helpful for all of us to make things clear. Session has been working really hard, so please honor them in their efforts. You are all invited to attend – I want to encourage you to attend.

But I want you to be aware that in this process, this Presbyterian/democratic process that I love as hard as it may be, we must also come at this with a clear vision – have our eyes opened so to speak. And recognize that as we grapple together, we too will be brought to a new place. As I said it is often

hard times that open our eyes in new ways – give us that AHA experience to let us see things we didn't see before. But there are some things we need to do –call it a radical experiment of faith...that will allow God to open our eyesI call it the SRE method for clear vision. **Surrender, Remember and Endeavor.** Here it is...

1. **SURRENDER IN PRAYER:**The first thing **We are called** to do is to **pray**. Pray for our eyes to be opened to what we need to see. Don't pray for the person you disagree with that that person will come around to your side. Pray for your own eyes to be opened to see new things. Now that might not sound very glamorous but I promise you that as you pray, one thing, and one thing for sure, will be made very clear to you as it was for me.

WVPC is not your church; it is Gods church.

Carrol you are sitting there and I know you built this church to the glory of God so many years ago. This church was built to be God's church.

So I am challenging all of you to commit to praying through this process, allowing the One for whom this church was built and stands here for his glory, to take charge, of this process.

We need to submit to God's will for the future...not our own.

Have you noticed it has been raining around here recently? How many of

you can control the rain? Even in Silicon Valley with all of our technology and interconnectedness, and success and we can't even make it rain.

We are less in control of a lot of things than perhaps most of the time we want to admit. When it comes to God's church, WVPC, our surrender to his will empowers us.

Paul says, *"For this reason I kneel before the Father..."* Then here's my prayer. *"I pray that out of his glorious riches..." "...he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith."*

And I'd like you all to take this verse to heart and in the next week actually *get down on your knees*, like this scripture says, and pray for WVPC if you are physically able to do that.

When we get down on our knees it is a physical posture that mirrors an attitude of our hearts; that attitude says we are, most surrendered, most dependent, most submitted to the One for whom this church was created... it's when we're in this posture in our hearts that we open ourselves up to be channels for God's strength and God's power and God's energy and God's love. It's a physical posture that says *God, this is not my church...this is*

*your church. And God you are faithful...and I submit my will to your will...
I put fear and anxiety about the future on your shoulders...you are in
charge...*

I believe that as you do this, you will receive the Holy Spirit and be strengthened on the inside, that you will receive a way of looking at all of this denominational stuff or your own personal struggles in a new way, and that his power in you will help you to carry on as I know some of you are feeling depleted and frustrated today.

One favorite story is about a strong man at a circus. At the end of his act, he used to squeeze all the water out of a sponge and then offer \$100 to anybody who could squeeze one more drop out of that sponge. Nobody ever collected, such was his strength, until one day he made the offer, and a skinny, geeky little guy wearing glasses walked up, took the sponge, and squeezed an entire glass of water out of it. The strong man was stunned.

"Who are you?" he asked, "and what do you do?" The little guy said, "I work for the IRS." *Unseen power in the most unexpected place – found in our weakness and surrender.*

You have access to that kind of power through prayer – and again I ask you

to kneel so that it is a prayer done in humility and surrender.

2. REMEMBER WHAT BEING THE CHURCH MEANS The second thing we are called to do is to **Remember what it means to be the church.**

Our vision can get really cloudy about this sometimes and its so important to see clearly on this one...so I am going to tell you a story

Once upon a time there was a lighthouse that had been built at the end of a long rocky ledge that jutted out into the sea.(IMAGE)

It was a glorious lighthouse and its light was bright and strong, and when ships were in trouble it would guide them into a safe harbor.

Many people from the village would gather in the lighthouse and be on the alert for people in trouble who were in vessels and they would manually steer the light so that it would create a safe path back to shore for those in distress. Sometimes it meant the villagers had to stay awake all night rescuing a battered vessel. As the ships drew near they would go out in the wind and the rain and throw out life preservers and pull half drowned seamen into shore. It was taxing and exhausting, but it was worth it, because lives were saved.

The light from that lighthouse saved many lives in fact, and when sailors and fishermen would see the light as they were being battered by the waves in a storm, it would bring hope to their eyes and they would regain the courage they needed to bring their vessel safely into port.

But after many years the light began to grow dim in that lighthouse. The villagers still gathered there, but they began to be so comfortable among themselves that their focus turned inward.

The sacrifice involved in staying awake all night, replacing the lamp in the tower so it would shine brightly, steering the light into the darkest places on the sea, going out into the storm...became more and more of an inconvenience.

Rather the group began to play cards together down in the kitchen, and have meals together, and talk about times gone by. The lamp in the top of the tower eventually went out altogether and people couldn't remember after awhile why they were meeting in a lighthouse...just that they had always done it this way.

Ships in need of that great beacon of light from the shore were lost. Because the purpose of the lighthouse had been forgotten. It still was a great

gathering place...in fact it was comfortable. There were leather chairs down in the living area and it was always warm and friendly. However, ships lost in the darkness of a raging sea were not even noticed.

The very meaning of the gathering place in which they all enjoyed each others company had been lost. They didn't really need to meet in a light house anymore. Starbucks or someone's living room would have been just fine.

Do you get the point?

Friends when we gather here under the cross, that cross is a reminder of our purpose,our mission our call. You see...

We are not simply a social club of relatively good people trying to have a good time.

We are not a philanthropic organization dedicated to promoting humanistic concerns by own efforts acknowledging God on the side.

We are not simply a gathering of good friends from bygone years that have known one another forever - although that may be the case for some of you – we are much more than that.

We are not an institution that exists for our own good pleasure and comfort, by our own efforts.

You know who we are?

We are a group of broken people, sinners, who rely daily on the saving grace of our living risen Jesus Christ..

with a mission, a purpose, a reason to exist.

That reason? **To Know Christ and Make Him Known**, no matter what the cost. That's what the cross reminds us of.

When you look at the life of Jesus, **what did Jesus value the most – his mission or his survival?**

It was his mission. He was called to a purpose. The timing of these denominational discussions, that are happening at the same time as the Service Worship conference this Saturday gave me pause to think. I said *Lord, couldn't you have spread this out a bit? It is kind of intense right now.* And I think the meaning of these two things coming together is perhaps to remind us of who we really are. To remind us of why we exist and what this whole thing called church is about. Its not about our comfort; its about

sacrificing out lives – dying to ourself - so that others can know Jesus Christ no matter what the cost.

Jesus did not go through a gruesome excruciating death, get buried in a tomb, get raised to life again, and cause the Holy Spirit to come in power on the disciples at Pentecost, so that on Sundays you and I could gather and have fun with our friends. Its not that you shouldn't do that, but the mission and purpose of the church is something quite different and far reaching. Its so that people who are lost can find God – can find salvation.

Jesus knew his mission. Right at the beginning of his ministry Jesus states his mission, his purpose...**“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted, to open the eyes of the blind, to set at liberty those who are bruised, to proclaim that this is the acceptable year of the Lord.”**

That's what the SW conference is all about. We have nearly 500 people who will be there... We are focused on mission and purpose, on being the church - feeding the hungry and lifting up the downtrodden – making Christ known in word and deed . Because real Church happens when people full of the Holy Spirit take Jesus' call seriously and sacrifice whatever they've got to make Christ known.

This table reminds us that Jesus was willing to die to have his mission accomplished. Living the good life and getting what he wanted so that he could stay comfortable was never what Jesus did.

Our purpose is to make Christ known friends, no matter what the cost to us.

3. ENDEAVOR TO TRUST THAT GOD IS ABLE The disciples who gathered around this table had to sit and listen to Jesus tell them that he was leaving them. That's what their conversation was all about that night – how Jesus would leave them, and what they were supposed to do after – and how the Holy Spirit would come and help them. But the disciples didn't like it that things were changing. They wanted Jesus to stay with them in the flesh. They liked him that way. It is what they knew, and they didn't want to lose this amazing companion, his smile, his words of wisdom, the touch of his hand that healed and brought people to their knees. They didn't want to lose their friend and teacher whom they had followed for three years, fished with, went to weddings with, slept under the stars with. It didn't make sense and they didn't understand. Jesus tried assure them that it was better that he go...and that greater things were in store if they would only trust God. Maybe he could foresee Paul writing these words that **“God is able to do exceedingly and abundantly over all that you ask or think.”**

God is able.

The cross seemed like the end, and dark times often do – whether they are with churches or in our own lives.

But God is able to bring resurrection; always has, always will when we put our trust in him.

I pray that God will open our eyes today to see the glorious call he has for WVPC, and that we would be willing to humbly pray, sacrifice for the mission and purpose of this place – to make Jesus Christ known - even when it is hard, and trust in a God who is able to bring resurrection. May we find a way through this tumultuous time to be in synch with his purpose and call because that is the only thing that matters. And may he open all of our eyes to find a way to do the most good, in the best way, in the name of Jesus.

Let us pray....