



MISSION POSSIBLE

By Rev. Will Nelken

Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, CA, on Sunday, January 2, 2022

Our sanctuary is full of the words of God! Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are always with us, because they were inscribed by hand on the four walls of the room during our remodel. The Lord's Prayer, in multiple languages, was inscribed on the ceiling over our heads.

And over the years, many Holy Spirit-inspired words have been spoken in and about this place. Here are just a few:

Giezi Tuyub saw our building supported at each corner by a huge pillar of clear glass, and guarded at each corner by huge angels with flashing light for wings. People were streaming through the doors singing and praising. They themselves were like lights. And the glory of God was strong in the house.

Linda Paz heard the Lord say, "I have given you gifts, a calling. Press forward." Then she saw the roof of the building rising up, propelled by our praises and prayers.

Faye Thompson saw a huge cloth spread above them, of many shades of blue, waving endlessly.

Linda Pierce had a vivid dream while they were staying at Lake Tahoe. She recalls: I felt urgency to rush back to Trinity. God was going to do something. There was a guest speaker, and the Spirit of God was moving among the people. At the altar call, a young boy ran past me, crying, as he went to the altar to receive prayer. The sanctuary was full. I saw people standing up all over the sanctuary and praying for others. A lot of young people were praying with others.

Pastor Paul Schoch used to visit to preach every year or so. He had a notable gift of prophecy. On his first visit he described a vision of our church with people crowded at the front doors waiting to come in for the service. On his last visit with us, he recalled that vision and affirmed that he still saw the church full of worshippers, speaking with one another about Jesus.

Such words and visions linger, their impact continues to work in this place.

Our church was not born yesterday. The church was planted in evangelistic fervor more than ninety years ago, the seed of a revival in San Francisco. It has been tended by more than a

dozen pastors through high seasons and low. Where we are today, how we have fared during the last difficult 22 months, and who we are becoming is the fruit of nearly a century of prayer and Spirit-filled devotion.

And what about those pioneers? Who prayed for our founder, Edith Erickson, to be saved? Who prayed for her as she attended Glad Tidings Bible Institute? And who prayed for her as she crossed the Golden Gate to plant a church in San Rafael?

And what of those in whose heart God planted a vision for a church in the City called Glad Tidings—the pastors and people who carried on that great work for decades?

On and on the river of life has flowed, from the cross of Calvary outside the city of Jerusalem to this present moment in San Rafael, California.

We stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us. And our God is faithful.

And those who come after us will stand on our shoulders. Will they stand taller? Will their foundation be firmer? Will their exploits be greater? Will their fruit be more abundant?

Only if we have done our part. Only if we have taken seriously Jesus' challenge to deny ourselves, take up our own cross, and follow Him. For if we live for ourselves—for the betterment of *my* life and the improvement of *my* standing and the security of *my* future—then, no, we will have failed to do our part, we will have failed to pass the baton.

Passing The Baton

We are all participants in a race. Many have thought of it as a competition, but it is really a relay. When Jesus completed His leg of the race, it was not over, as His disciples feared. But when the Holy Spirit fell upon them on that Day of Pentecost, they realized that they had been handed the baton.

“Timothy, guard the Good News which has been entrusted to you.” (1 Timothy 6:20)

“You’ve heard my message, and it’s been confirmed by many witnesses. Entrust this message to faithful individuals who will be competent to teach others.” (2 Timothy 2:2)

“With the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us, protect the Good News that has been entrusted to you.” (2 Timothy 1:14)

The race did not end with Edith Erickson. Others came after her. And many have gone out from this Gospel center to plant churches and missions and businesses and families around the world.

And when I finish my leg of the race, or you finish your leg of the race, the race will very likely continue after us. Do you run with that in mind? To whom will you pass your baton? Are you investing in your teammates?

May the Lord help us to be faithful to hold on to sound doctrine, not compromising the Gospel message through our speech, our behavior, or our teaching.

May we pass the baton of faith to the next generation without altering or diluting the Word from which it springs.

Current social culture may never again support the Message we have to share, for we are part of a “remnant” foretold by the Scriptures, and the Gospel must be passed from hand to hand—one to one, as a personal gift.

People must know. And you and I must tell them. Will you be contented if you live your entire life without leading even one person to faith in Jesus Christ? I realize the Lord must draw each one to Himself, but who will pray for that engagement? And when He draws them, What then? Who will tell them what He has done for them and what they should do in response?

Somewhere along the line—actually, at many points along the line—people need you to step up and bear witness of the mercy and faithfulness of Christ, to the truthfulness of the Scriptures, to the reality of the life of faith.

Mission Possible

“Your mission, friend, should you choose to accept it... is to tell as many people as you can about Jesus Christ.”

If we’re a startup company, our mission can be whatever we want it to be. But if we’re a church, we don’t choose our own mission; our mission is set by the One who called us to Himself and placed us in this local assembly.

It is based on the saving grace given us by the Lord Jesus Christ, and His commandments:

The Great Commandment – “Love the Lord with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength.”

The Second Commandment – “Love your neighbor as yourself”

This, Jesus clarified in terms of “insiders” and “outsiders”:

Jesus’ First Command: “Love your fellow believer as I have loved you.”

Jesus’ Second Command = “Love your enemies and pray for them”

The Great Commission – “As you go, make disciples from among all peoples.”

Love the Lord.
Love your neighbor.
Make disciples.
THAT is our mission—nothing less and nothing more.

This is what we do. (This is what defines you as a Christian.)

This is what we do, together. (This is what defines us as a church.)

We love the Lord by studying His Word together. By praying together. By worshiping together.
By serving our community together.

We love one another by praying for each other. By keeping short accounts (making apologies and granting forgiveness). By helping each other in practical ways.

We make disciples by engaging outsiders. By meeting needs. By sharing Jesus.

We can do this! Because God helps us.

Empowered

We can do this IF we are empowered by the Holy Spirit. Only then will the Gospel be taken to the ends of the earth.

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes to you. Then you will be my witnesses to testify about me... to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

That is what enables the church to pray, to give, to send, and to go to the very ends of the earth with the Message of Christ’s redeeming love.

Our assignment is global, not just local—inclusive of every nation and people group.

You are part of the ends of the earth. Reaching the world starts with you—your relationships and your personal sphere of influence. Yes, charity begins at home—but if it stops there it is selfish, not selfless.

There are people in today’s world who have never once heard the name of Jesus, not even as a swearword.

There are people in our world who have never read from a Bible’s pages, let alone seen one.

There are cities (not just villages) that do not have a single church meeting within their borders.

How can we rise to the challenge? The Holy Spirit will enable us.

You have been called. You must also be empowered. You must wait for the promise of the Father—the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The baptism with the Holy Spirit is not an experience to be logged in your journal; it is an endowment with holy power—to know the Lord (to feel His presence, to hear His voice), to love as He loves (those you naturally care about, and those to whom you're naturally indifferent), and to extend His Kingdom (to impart His reigning influence) in your world.

Our mission is made possible by the Holy Spirit.

Rejoice! Because you are part of God's plan to reach the whole world with the Gospel!

RELEASE

I considered a number of possible themes for this year to prod and guide our development as a church, but the Spirit led me to repeat the theme from last year, saying we were not done with it yet.

Confronted by the varying circumstances of a worldwide pandemic, we DID manage to see release in various ways—the release of engagement with the Bible, release of new connections within the church, release from the gripping fear of a disease, release from the imagined confinement of safety restrictions, release from indifference toward fellow church members even though we were not in their physical presence, release from financial constraints to keep generosity alive, and a continuing release of the Spirit in ministry to others.

What remains to be released? I continue to ask the Lord to clarify this, but this is what I know so far:

- A greater release of the Spirit in prayer, in worship expressions, in missional fervor, and miraculous favor.
- A greater release of generosity that is not defined by what we have, and of caring service that is not defined by what is convenient.
- A greater release of bold and creative witness in our community that is not limited by personality types, but rather, expressive of them.
- A greater release of hunger and thirst for the kind of righteousness that only Jesus can give.
- A greater pragmatic unity of the churches in Marin—in worship and in witness.

What a year this will be!

Don't wake up every day to ask, "What will COVID do today?" Don't even ask, "What will the Lord do in me today?" Instead, rise up in faith to ask, "What will the Holy Spirit do today, THROUGH me?"

Because, if He does it through you, He will already be doing it in you!