

Joining God in seeking Life for All

Good morning church.

In case you weren't aware, **next Sunday** we dive deep "**Into the Life of Jesus**" – a year-long study in the gospel of Mark we're explicitly calling "**Into the Life of Jesus**". Because this is the goal, isn't it? This is the invitation of the gospel – not just to know Jesus and believe in Jesus, but to truly **enter into the life of Jesus** – *personally and as a community*. To be *drawn into the life of God today...*

More on that next Sunday.

But this morning we come again to another core invitation for us this year.

For us, probably like many churches, we always take the better part of September to not only give a little time for people to find their way back from the summer or to enter into our life for the first time. But it's also, more so, a moment in the year where we, as leaders, and I, especially, am praying and asking God,

"Where are you wanting to take us this year?

***What's Your invitations for us as we step into the coming
season together?"***

Which means today – and each of the last 3 Sundays – have been about far more than just God's Word and Invitation for us in the moment – but have been my best attempt to discern and express some of the core invitations of God for us as we look into the coming season together...

1. **"When life gets crazy"** – Naming the reality that life these days can be pretty demanding and relentless – with countless voices clamoring for our attention. And the need and invitation for us do whatever is needed to discern and hear and follow God's Voice amidst the many voices. And in this, we talked about the grace and priority of getting alone with God, as Jesus needed to at times...
2. **"Why we gather?"** – Reaffirming our need to come together in the name of Jesus – because, according to Jesus, there is something of God's presence, grace and ministry that we will only know and experience *"where two or more are gathered in His Name..."*
3. **"The death of the Church"** – Speaking into our persistent dream and deep ache for Christian community, and the reality that what **we need** requires us **to die** – *to die with Christ for the sake of God's greater work among us...*

And lastly, today, we need to come again to **God's heartbeat for the brokenness of our world** and **the invitation** – **God's invitation - for us - to join Him in seeking His Kingdom-Life for All...**

And I'll tell you right now – this is not going to be a **normal Sunday sermon experience** – because I'm only going to speak for about 10 minutes and then, with the rest of our time, we are going to be **led in prayer** together – in response to God's invitation...

But first, let me tell you where this is coming from for me.

I've been here for three years now. Three demanding, stretching, but wonderful years. Janet and I love being a part of you – you are our church – this beautiful, messy and vibrant community called "Lambrick".

And three years ago, in my first season here as lead pastor, I took a Sunday to share a story in the gospel of Mark – **Mark 2:1-12** – that has become for me *a picture of God's dream for us and God's call to us.*

Many of us know the story. It's the story of a time when Jesus was teaching in a home in Capernaum – and so many people came that there was no room left – "*not even outside the door*" we're told.

A bit like we experienced a few Sundays back. The house was **utterly packed** with people eager to hear what Jesus had to say...

But almost immediately *the story shifts* its' attention to a **group of friends** – who bring *their friend* – a man suffering from a profound **bodily paralysis**. He can't use his limbs – they are as good as dead – and so his friends carry him on a mat to the house where Jesus was teaching...

But "they couldn't get him to Jesus because of the crowd".

And so they got creative. Wildly creative, right? They climbed up on the roof and ripped a hole in the roof to get their friend to Jesus.

Why? *Because their friend needed to get close to Jesus – and they knew it.*

The reality of their friends' need burned in them and **compelled** them to do what was needed to get him close to Jesus...

But with this, they were driven/compelled by faith. We're not sure how it happened, but these friends had met Jesus already – in some way – in a way that **filled them with faith – confident hope and expectation** – that Jesus could actually make the difference in the life of their friend... That Jesus could heal and restore and bring life – **real life, Kingdom Life** – to their friend – who'd suffered so deeply for so long.

And it happened. Because of their love for their friend and their faith in Jesus, their friend got to Jesus **and Jesus restored his life...** *more than he ever could have dreamed...*

And I shared this story with us – three years ago this month – as something of a dream for us as a church – that we would live so close to the real pain of others and so close to the abounding heart and grace of Jesus **that our life together would become another Mark 2 story...**

That we would be *willing – eager even– to do whatever it takes* – to help others who need Jesus, **get close to Jesus and find Life...**

Even if it means ripping off the roof of our lives and our church...

And not that this hasn't happened here and there over the last three years.

I'm honestly humbled and inspired by the evidence of God's work and grace among us – and in many of your lives... I have seen people come alive in Christ and be restored by Christ through the grace of our shared life... I am humbled and inspired by the way that I see the heart of God alive in so many of your daily lives – and I mean that. It is an honor to have a front row seat in your lives.

And yet, as I've prayed through this last season with an eye toward the coming days, I've sensed God holding this story and invitation **BOLDLY** before me – and us as a community.

Again, not that these last three years haven't been caught up with **the pursuit of God's mission. They have.** But in many ways, they've also been, necessarily, about **renewing our foundation... Renewing our life as a church – in Jesus and the gospel... Renewing our hope and confidence in God's work and grace among us.**

And with this, in the grace of God, others have been drawn to us – and some drawn back. And the room has filled up again in a beautiful and encouraging way. Through relationship and trust, and through the life of the gospel at work among us...

But about a month ago – I was reflecting on this story in Mark 2 about the *crowded house and the wrecked roof, about Jesus and the paralytic* – and I sensed God invite me to see myself in the story – as one of the characters in the story.

And instantly I saw myself as *the head or the steward of the house...* As
someone responsible for what happens in the house.

Which was full – full of people eager to hear Jesus. *Amen! This is awesome!*

And yet, at the same time, I *knew... I knew* there was a man outside – a paralytic
– a man ravaged by the Curse – *who NEEDED to get close to Jesus – but couldn't.*

Because the house was already **crowded**. *With us...*

And I sensed God asking me: **What will you do?**

As the steward of this wonderfully crowded house – *What will you do?*

And let it be said, I'm not the only steward here. In a way, we all are. Everyone
who calls Lambrick home. Which means the question is for all of us:

→ What will you do?

Will you simply celebrate and rest in the excitement and
encouragement of a crowded house – *or will you do whatever is needed
to help the paralytic get to Jesus? To help those on the outside – the
broken, the hurt and the hurting, the sin-sick, the prodigals and the
pushed-away – those ravaged by the Curse – get near to Jesus – who
alone can bring Life to all?*

Because this is where God's heart is calling us...

This is God's invitation for us...

To celebrate what God is doing among us, *yes and amen!*

But not in a way that would ever allow us to remain here – but in a way that would *lead us to join God in seeking Life for all...*

And I know it said in the email and bulletin that I'd be teaching from Luke 15 today, but over the last couple of days I've become convinced that our need today isn't just to hear *God's invitation*, but *to enter into it*.

And so, for the rest of our time together this morning, **we're going to seek our God whose heart is turned toward the brokenness of the world today... as it always is...** And in this grace, to **pray together** – for our world, for our neighbors and for our own hearts.

First movement: for the world (8 minutes)

To lead us into the first part of this, I want to invite **Simon Goff** – a friend and leader of our Missional Engagement Team – to lead us in prayer for some of the most hurting in our world...

SIMON'S Script -----

As Scott said, *we're going to pray for the WORLD – to seek our God whose heart is turned toward the brokenness of the world today...*

Today has been designated by International Justice Mission (IJM) as "Freedom Sunday", and we have chosen to pray not alone... but in solidarity with 1000s of churches from around the world, to unite with our global brothers and sisters in crying out to the God whose heart is turned to all brokenness.

At Lambrick we have partnered with IJM, in Kolkata, India for almost a decade, as they tirelessly work against Sex trafficking - a form of modern slavery. It is rooted in violence and poverty. It thrives when law enforcement does not protect vulnerable children and women. It is an evil that strips people of their human dignity and self-worth. As we are made in the image of God, it is a vile desecration.

IJM is the largest anti-slavery organization in the world. But there are 40 million slaves in the world, so they cannot work alone... They challenge us by opening up God's story and asking: What if slavery didn't exist and God's church was the reason? God's plan to end slavery begins with God's people.

The work of justice begins with prayer. We pray not because it's something that we should do, but because it's something that we must do. At the end of the day, all of our best efforts at seeking justice would fail because only God is capable of changing hearts, transforming communities and bringing hope.

And so, PRAYER MATTERS. Prayer matters to those who are waiting for rescue and it matters to the God who has created them in his image. Prayer also matters for us; for in praying, we too are transformed as we catch a glimpse of the pain, suffering and joy of others.

Our prayer today will walk us through each stage of the journey from rescue, to restoration, to representation and to repairing public justice systems.

So, let's pray to the God who, we are told:

- sees the trouble of the afflicted. (Psalm 10)
- ensures that orphans and widows receive justice. (Deut 10)
- calls us, His Church, "to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with Him."
(Micah 6:8)

RESCUE

Almighty God, we come to you today and ask that all those who are waiting to be freed from their oppressors experience the reality of rescue. We know that you see millions of people, made in your image, being sold, abused, trafficked and enslaved. You hear their cries for deliverance and their pleas for the violence to stop.

Today, we join our voices with theirs and ask that you would stretch out your hand through your appointed people to answer those requests and bring rescue to those who are waiting.

Move quickly Lord, as some of these you love are in grave danger.

RESTORATION

Compassionate Healer, we call out to you on behalf of those who have been rescued and are now walking the path of healing and restoration. For those who have been stripped of their dignity and God-given worth, we ask that you would grant them the knowledge that you delight in taking the broken things of this world and making them beautiful.

For those who experienced the terror of violence and brutality, we ask that your love would wash over them and restore their bodies, minds, and spirits.

For those who cannot be with their families, we ask that you would place them in communities where they will experience the welcoming embrace of Jesus; a place where they can belong and find acceptance.

REPRESENTATION

God of Justice, you have declared that you are the defender of the fatherless and the oppressed. In our world, there are men and women who deliberately exploit those who have no power.

We ask for courage for those whom you have entrusted with the heavy responsibility of protecting the most vulnerable from this evil.

We ask that the police, courts, and government officials would act with righteousness and stand with those being exploited. May they send a message that the powerful will no longer exploit the vulnerable with impunity!

We pray for justice. We ask that laws would be enforced and that those who have evil intent to profit from the vulnerable would be restrained.

We pray that all people in this world would be safe from those who think they can do all manner of evil to the most vulnerable among us.

REPAIR

Eternal King, we ask that the parts of every country and culture that do not reflect the peace and goodness of your rule and reign would be transformed by your Spirit's work. In every human system that is broken and in need of repair, we ask that you would raise up men and women of courage and conviction who will work to repair inequity and injustice.

Where power is being abused and is self-serving, we ask that you would place leaders in positions of influence who care for their neighbours and for the "least of these".

We long to see your kingdom come and your will be done on earth. For truly, yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory that all of creations longs for.

RESPONSE

Oh Lord, hear now the prayers of your people on behalf of children around the world who are violently abused.

TIME OF SILENT PRAYER.

Take these prayers, Heavenly Father, as our collective desire to see your freedom come to our world.

We pray all of this in the name of Jesus.
Amen

Second movement: Closer to Home – praying for our neighbors (8 minutes)

From praying for the broken in our world, we turn **closer to home** now to pray **for our neighbors** – for the women and men God has placed us alongside and called us to love in His Name.

So, who's your neighbor?

Who is the neighbor that God is inviting you to love and pray for today?

For me, my neighbors are literally *the neighbors on my street*. The people on my street that I am coming to know and be known by... At this point, three years in, I know all of their names, but if I'm honest, I don't yet love them with God's heart.

For you, it may be your neighborhood, or maybe it's your family (immediate or extended) – where you are called to seek God's kingdom and reign...

Or maybe it's your workplace and coworkers, or your school and classmates, or on your dorm or bike-mates.

Who is the neighbor or neighbors that God is bringing to mind for you today?

To guide us in this part of our praying, we'll simply pray through the Lord's Prayer.

1. *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your Name.*

- Let's pray for how and what our neighbors think of God...

2. *Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

- Let's pray for God's purposes and desires to be worked out in our neighbor's lives.

3. *Give us this day our daily bread.*

- Let's pray for God's provision in the lives of our neighbors & for our neighbors to know God as the great Provider...

4. *And forgive us our debts, as we also forgiven our debtors.*

- Let's pray for relational reconciliation in our neighbor's lives – with God and others

5. *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.*

- Let's pray for God's rescuing grace in their lives – thwarting the evil one.

For Yours is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory. Amen.

Final movement: Closer to Home – praying for our own hearts

To lead us in our final prayer movement, I want to invite **Chavon Barry** to come lead us – in prayer for God's work *in us* – in our own hearts and lives...

(8 minutes)

Chavon's Prayer -----

In order to be a church that fights for justice and loves our neighbour well--we need a deeper understanding of the depths of God's love and the importance of repentance. We cringe when we hear the word "Repent" and part of that is because of the word's misuse but, if we're honest, it also because it reminds us that we are not King of our own story. God is and God's ways need to be ours.

Repentance is a beautiful act. It's good and it wakes us up to the heart of God for us and for His people.

Rick McKinley describes it well in his book "A Beautiful Mess": To repent is to say to God: "I'm blind. I don't see, but I want to. Please show me Your heart in everything" So for this phase of prayer, we are going to get honest with God. Honest with a God who already knows us, loves us, and wants the very best for us.

In this prayer, I will provide short spaces of silence that you may speak to God in your own words, from your heart. At a number of points in my prayer, I will speak the words – "**Lord, have mercy on us**" – to which you are invited to speak the refrain – "**Hear our prayer...**" And near the end of our prayer, the cue will change from "**Lord, have mercy on us**" to "**For Your Glory God**" – to which we will say together – "**hear our prayer.**"

Lord, have mercy on us – hear our prayer.

For your Glory God – hear our prayer.

Let us pray...

Father God, Jesus, Holy Spirit.

We confess that we'd rather not confess. That it's easier to judge others and believe ourselves right than it is to examine our own hearts. Lies deceive us daily. We do not always perceive them but the ones we do weigh heavy. We grit our teeth and try to fix them ourselves or we ignore them. God trade both our apathy and our control for deep faith in you.

Lord, Have Mercy on Us – hear our prayer.

In this first silence, I invite you to name **your doubts and to confess the burdens** you're trying to carry alone. Doubts that arise in a long wait where God seems silent. Burdens of unanswered prayer that anger you, a sin that's lived with you too long.

Take a moment to voice these to God.

(Quiet)

Lord, Have Mercy on Us – hear our prayer.

Isolation tempts us. Because forgiveness is hard and loving our neighbours is too. We want to tell the story of transformation through **community** but we'd rather not live it. The real day-to-day decisions in relationships aren't simple or straightforward. Their challenging and sometimes exhausting.

God, flood us with Your love, Your grace, and Your patience that we may grow in community.

*Lord, Have Mercy on Us – **hear our prayer.***

In this next silence, be honest about the challenges of **community**. Tell God where you struggle to connect with others – to love others -- and ask him for the courage to try again.

(silence)

*Oh Lord, Have Mercy On Us – **hear our prayer.***

We confess that we've failed to love you well. Our hearts wander and distractions draw us away. Our obedience has limits. But you gave everything. Your very life that we might live in Your presence.

How easily we forget! Remind us again of who you are and who we are in you.

*Oh Lord, Have Mercy on Us – **hear our prayer.***

In this final silence, allow yourself to be still with God – and to be known by God. *Loved by God.*

(Silence)

*For your Glory God - **hear our prayer***

Pull us into right-relationship with you. Teach us to be honest, to be seen, and to come out of hiding. As we do, you'll transform our stories. You'll enter the darkest pain in our lives and birth hope. You'll break sin's hold and impossible change really can happen. Lead us into continual repentance--for though it's a death and at times a painful one, you hold us tight in it and promise it leads to new life.

*For your Glory God - **hear our prayer***

We need our hearts to break for your world. Because kingdom-life is right here and now. People are hungry for Hope, for Good News, for Jesus. Let us not miss out on your call to participate. Give us the bravery to say 'yes' and the faith to believe you go with us. Multiply Your love in us and among us and through us - that we may see and be changed. Truly changed.

*For your Glory God - **hear our prayer.***

In the Name of Jesus, we pray, Amen.

- Sing: **Multiply Your Love**

(lyrics on next page)

Multiply Your Love

Multiply Your love through us to the lost and the least
Let us be Your healing hands, Your instruments of peace
May our single purpose be, to imitate Your life
Through our simple words and deeds
Let love be multiplied

Multiply Your love through me, To someone in need
Help me Lord to freely give, this grace that I've received
Let my single purpose be, to imitate Your life
Through our simple words and deeds
Let love be multiplied

Let us see Your kingdom come
To the poor and broken ones
Let us see a mighty flood
Of justice and mercy O Jesus
Let love be multiplied
Let love be multiplied

Multiply Your church through us, to the ends of the Earth
Where there's only barrenness, Let us see new birth
Use us as Your laborers, working side by side
Let us see Your harvest come
Let love be multiplied