

“All In”

Pastor Luke Ham

June 26, 2016

I want to start out with a confession...

I spent more time thinking about the topic of this morning's sermon than I usually do.

Because this is the first sermon I am preaching as an Ordained Elder.

And I wanted to this to be a sermon that would stretch us a little more...challenge us a little bit more...

I wanted to preach a sermon that had a little edge to it....a sermon that had some risk in it...

Risk of pushing us to talk about things we don't always talk about...

Risk of examining ourselves and seeing just where we stand when it comes to our response to God's love.

Risk of making us uncomfortable....

I wanted to preach a sermon that requires us to think about what it the fact that we might just need one another more than we thought...

That we might just need God's grace and forgiveness a little more than we thought...

In the Bible, there is a group of people that are called prophets. These are the people who spoke up for God. Prophets are truth-speakers.

The interesting thing about Prophets in the Bible is that many times they were met with some hostility from the people. Prophets rarely say the popular thing...

Prophets rarely tell you what you want to hear.

Jesus even said that a “prophet is never accepted in their own town...”

I share this with you because I am hoping to be a little prophetic today.

And Lucky for all of us, I Live in Walnut Creek so I'm not technically in my hometown right now so we should all get through this ok.

But this morning, I am hoping that I can call us back a little bit to examine where we are as a community of faith.

To think about the things we are doing well.....and to think about the things we could do a little better.

Because It's good to talk and think of such things every once in a while....after all we are all partners in ministry together and partners should check-in with one another.

There is a word we have for the idea of partners talking about what we are doing well and what we need to change or work on...and that word is Accountability.

Now I will be the first to admit that “Accountability” is not the most exciting word in our vocabulary.

No, it's not something we wake up thinking about each day.

But ironically, it is one of the most important things for us to consider and hold in our daily lives.

And that's because even though we spend 1-hour together a week in worship and perhaps an hour or two in small groups, there is a total of 168-hours in a week.

160-plus hours when we are out in the world on our own. 160-something hours where we have to make serious decisions.... Decisions that either strengthen our relationship with God....or strain it.

Decisions around:

Where we spend our money.

How we treat our spouse or children.

How we respond when someone cuts us off in traffic.

How to respond when that person who just drives us crazy...walks past us and we want to say something about them as soon as they are out of earshot to our friends.

Certainly, it can help us to make better decisions in these situations when we know we have some accountability in our lives.

One definition I have heard says that accountability is loving someone enough to tell them the truth.

To love someone enough to be truthful about the impact they are making in family life or work life or the community.

To help them become aware of the influence they have and even maybe the responsibilities they have as they live within the boundaries of who they are and what their witness is and the overall effect that they are having.

And of course, accountability goes in two directions....it is one thing to love someone enough to hold them accountable and it's another thing to give the people around us permission to love us enough to hold us accountable and speak accountability in our life.

And we see in our scripture readings this morning that there is a lot to live up to! Jesus isn't messing around when it comes to following him.

For Jesus...the work of the kingdom is not something you just drop in on when you feel like it. It's something you commit your entire being to....Perhaps an apt analogy in our community culture is that it is the equivalent of having a child on a travel youth soccer, swim, baseball or volleyball team!

For those of you who don't know....That's a commitment!

Jesus expects us to live in a way that we honor both God and one another...and a live in a way that make the reflection of God shine more brightly into the creature around us.

God has given us the resources...God has given us talents... and It matters greatly to God how we live...how we invest our time, energy and gifts.

If you at one point in your life have said the vows of membership in this church you acknowledged that you have a gift to share. Whether it is something tangible like monetary donations....or something a little less tangible like providing encouragement or support to someone who is going through a hard time in their life.

Because we believe that God has invested in the lives of each and every person here.
And because we are all given worth and talent and dignity by God...we all have a responsibility....a responsibility of being held accountable.
We need to hold ourselves accountable because there is work to do

We are living in a world full of hurting people.

They are empty

They are trapped in past mistakes.

Some Trapped in cycles of poverty and others self-sabotaging behavior.

And these people need help.....they need to know they are forgiven.

They need to hear that they are loved.

They need the systems that keep them oppressed torn down...they need second and third and fourth chances....

And the resource that God has planned for this mission is us—you and me. We are God's trusted possession. We are God's hope for transforming the world.

So we need to ask one another: Are you holding back when God is needing you to do something? To get involved? To move forward and not look back?

When a person takes or renews the vows of membership in the church they acknowledge that Christ's Church is open to people of all races, ages, genders and background...

And When you go through the Discovery membership class at SRVUMC you quickly find out that we aren't messing around when we say "All means all." Because we strive to welcome everyone!

And we understand that when we work to make a community of those who are older and younger....progressive and conservative...Rich and Poor, Light skinned, dark skinned and every other skinned in between it can be tough.

At annual conference this week, it was announced that Campbell UMC in the south bay had won the Bishop Talbert award for their efforts to bring together a congregation of Caucasian Americans, Newly Immigrated African Americans and Second Generation Korean Americans all under one roof....worshiping and missioning and pot lucking all together...

And one of the pastors accepting the award compared it to a growing family...he said the more and more you add to the family the harder and harder it gets...but out of that difficulty...you become stronger and stronger and stronger and the love you have for one another multiples over and over again.

Indeed, being serious about following Jesus requires sacrifice...But that sacrifice can make us stronger.

In our gospel story this morning, people who are wanting to dedicated followers of Jesus are immediately slammed with the reality of their decision. Jesus calls one to not worry about his father's funeral....Jesus tells one that if he's serious about coming on the journey there is no looking back and saying goodbye to his family.

I don't know about you but when I heard Jesus saying that it makes me feel uneasy....
We don't hear about this Jesus too much in Children's Sunday school growing up do we?
The more I read this passage... The more I am beginning not get so focused on the particulars of the story...For me, it's not about getting focused on the particular act of burying a loved one or saying goodbye to family...

Those specific examples are not the lesson...

The lesson in this teaching is that following Jesus and working to bring the kingdom of God to the world today takes personal sacrifice. Whatever that may be. For the characters in our story it was the funeral arrangements or saying goodbye.

It could be something different for each one of us in this room.

But...the reality is that when we choose to follow Jesus something has to change. Something in the way we prioritize our lives has to change IF we expect to change the world.

And as many of you know...the mission of the United Methodist Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the TRANSFORMATION of the world.

Changing the world is in our DNA as a church. It is one of the core reasons this community of faith exists.

So...if we are to live out our mission with any success that means something in our lives are going to have to change....we are going to have to give something up. We are going to have to rearrange our priorities and maybe let go of those things that are most important to us.

God is calling us into the game. God is calling us to get involved in the world just like he did in the person of Jesus.

God calls us to take action when we hear about groups of people being excluded or persecuted or targeted in violent acts!

God call us into action when we see natural resources that belong to future generations being destroyed.

And yes...those calls require to change our words, thoughts and actions.

There is no doubt that the idea of giving up the way we do some things now can be scary and perhaps seem impossible.... But there is good news.... We are not in this alone!!!

So just imagine what we can be capable of if we all work together...hold one another accountable and welcome the Holy Spirit into our work.

It was mutual accountability that was the driving force behind the Methodist Movement in the first place. John Wesley, the founder of the movement was so concerned with building a righteous fellowship that he devised a series of questions for his followers to ask each other every week. Questions that everyone had to answer so they could hold one another accountable. And these weren't easy questions. Some found this rigorous system of inquiry so demanding that they left.

There is no doubt that our accountability defines a church. And it seems like many times we have let ourselves drift away from loving one another enough to check-in and hold each other responsible while still allowing the grace to restore one another when we slip up.

When we become members of the church, we do so by making a promise...we pledge to faithfully participate in its ministry through our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness.

Do you believe that you have been upholding all of those vows? What would it be like if you had people in our life who lovingly held you accountable for them? How would your life be different?

A few years ago I joined my High School's alumni committee. And with that comes a lot of responsibilities to attend different mixers, fundraisers and reunions.

And it is so interesting to be at one of these alumni reunions....perhaps you've been to one or two yourself...

And the same thing always happens at these events. Everyone sees people they haven't seen in years and the topic of conversation is always the same...it all rests on one question: "So what have you been up to lately?"

And then comes lists of all the accomplishments that each individual has achieved. How great their family is...how they love their job...how successful they are in whatever it is they have been doing.

And judging by these conversations you'd think that I went to high school with 150 self-made millionaire hipsters who invented Facebook, the tesla car and an amazing new flavor of ice cream since they graduated.

But that's what happens. Everyone thinks they need to present their best selves. That the focus should be all on their accomplishments.

And we do that in church sometime....don't we? We think that at church we need to present our best self....we need to hide all the slip-ups and darkness in ourselves and show up clean-up and looking like we have it all together.

But the truth is...very few of us at all have it all together.

We are all hurting....we are all broken...we have all fallen short....

But as long as we all keep covering all the brokenness up and do not allow ourselves to love one another enough to hold each other accountable we will never get anywhere...

The takeaway for us this morning is that we are called to do whatever it takes in order to transform this world more into the place God wants it. And in order to make those necessary changes in our life, we need each other.

I want to challenge you this morning. If you have not connected with someone or a group in this church with who whom you can have mutual accountability you need to seek that out. Join a small group, meet for lunch once a week with a someone you respect...do whatever it takes to develop that relationship and openness.

Share each others burdens, let go of those things in your life and work together for the glory of God.

Lower your shields and allow people into your life who can love you so much that they keep you in check when it comes to your boundaries and responsibilities.

And always remember....when we slip up...because we will slip up.... the system of accountability does not lie in us punishing and judging one another...but instead is about restoring one another with the same spirit of grace we have been shown.

There is a popular slogan for many different sports teams at the high school, collegiate and professional levels. You can find this on T-Shirts and posters at rallies.....It is two little words: "All In."

WHAT do you need in your life to be "All In" to the call of Jesus?

WHO do you need in your life to be "All In" to the call of Jesus?

What is holding you back from being "All In" when it comes to making those words we say every week in the Lord's prayer "*Your Kingdom Come, Your Will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven*" a reality.

Whatever it is....lets work on it together....lets lift one another up to be more than we could ever be on our own...

Let's love one another though the arguments of the best way to do worship or the right way to use our congregation's time and resources or what it means to acknowledge the sacred worth of families that come in all shapes, forms and sizes.

For as the letter to Colossians we had read for us this morning so eloquently said:

"Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other....

Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body....

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

It is my prayer that as we grow together as brothers and sister that we take the risk of giving up what we need to give up and take on what we need to take on....May we have the courage, love and support one another and to be "All In."

Amen and Amen.