

## Becoming a Ripple-Maker

September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2017

I was spending a little time at a lake in Randolph recently... reading and praying... just spending some time with God.

- And while standing at the waterline, I remembered all the times, when I was a kid, trying to skip rocks at Van Saun Park.
- It was always fun trying to get that rock to skip as many times as possible,

But, the truth is, every now and then boredom would take over and I'd search for the biggest rock my 5-year-old arms could carry.

- I'd then walk over to the water and throw it as far as I could, **watching the ripples travel out** to the center of the lake.
- If I had to choose between a skipping rock and a massive splash that sent ripples into the lake,
- Well, I'd choose the massive splash any day.

You see, there's something in us that **inherently longs to create wakes and ripples...**

- Something in us that **genuinely desires to make a difference** in the world around us...
- To live lives whose ripples can impact other people who can then impact others.

Well, this morning, I want to continue this series we've been in, on "Passing along the torch of faith"...

- Passing along to others what's been passed down to you.
- And this is important because **the very reason we're here** this morning is because,
- from the **time of Abraham till now**, somebody passed along the torch of faith to someone else who passed it along to someone else.

And so, if you've got your Bibles, go ahead and turn to Genesis, chapter 12, where this whole **ripple effect** really began.

- But as I read it, let me know if you can tell which part of this passage may be a little "off" a bit from the original.
- Ready? Ok, here goes...

- **"The Lord had said to Abram, 'I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you can keep all these blessings to yourself.'"**

Can you tell which part is a little off? What God actually said was, "I will make you a great nation... I will bless you... I will make your name great..."

- "So that, through you, all the peoples of the earth will be blessed."
- Make no mistake about it... God wants to bless you... and He **wants you to continually live in & experience** His blessing.
- And yet, at the same time, these blessings **come to you** so that they can also **flow through you** into other people's lives.

You see, each of us has this calling on our lives to give away what's been given to us... This calling to be ripple-makers this world.

- But, what attributes would mark those who would live as ripple-makers?
- Well, before I answer that, let me share two things that aren't required in order to be a ripple-maker.

First of all, being a ripple maker does not require perfection.

- You don't have to be a monk or missionary in order to be a real blessing in someone's life.
- Whatever your track record is, **if you're willing to fully surrender to God**, then God can use you.
- Just look at the kind of people God has used to be a blessing.

Abraham was a liar. Jacob was a deceiver. Moses was a fugitive. Gideon was a coward. Samson was a complete mess.

- Eli was a bad father. David was an adulterer. Elijah was suicidal. The disciples were all people of little faith.
- James & John were status seekers while Peter denied Jesus three times and cut a guy's ear off!

And yet, in **2 Corinthians 12:9**, Paul said it was *precisely when* he felt most inadequate that God said to him...

- "My grace is sufficient for you, Paul, for My strength is made

*perfect in your weakness."*

- You see... being a ripple-maker is ultimately about **God's grace, not about your talents or mine.**
- So, it doesn't require perfection. If you're willing to fully surrender right now, then you're eligible!

Secondly, *a ripple maker has nothing to do with what might be called bumper sticker Christianity.*

- It's not about advertising to the world, on the bumper of your car, that "*My Savior's a Jewish Carpenter,*"
- It's not about "**changing the world through FB posts.**"
- It's about **getting out of the crowded bleachers** and into the game of life where we can **genuinely modeling Jesus's love** to the people around us.

I've seen a bumper sticker several times that says, "*In case of rapture this car will be unoccupied.*"

- In other words, when the Jesus comes and takes me *and not you*... the very best you can hope for is a 17-car pile up!
- But then "they" came out with another bumper sticker that says, "*In case of rapture can I have your car?*"
- It's like the Jesus fishies. I mean, **we put Jesus fishies on our cars...**
- than they put on the **Darwin fishie** (with legs) that eats the Jesus fishie. Where does it end?
- More importantly, **what does it accomplish?**

You see, **ripple-makers know** that it's not about posts and tweets and t-shirts and Jesus-fish.

- They know how the world is growing **tired of Christians who are mainly known for...**
- bumper sticker Christianity rather than doing what Jesus actually said to do in **being a light to this dark and despairing world.**

Jesus is pretty clear about this. This is from the Sermon on the Mount in **Matthew, chapter 5...**

- and I'm taking this from Eugene Peterson's translation called,

*The Message.*

- Here is what Jesus says to you and to me from **Matthew 5:13-16**:

*"Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness..."*

*You're here to be light, bringing out the God- colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand.*

*Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand – shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven."*

You see, what Jesus said is what He actually did. Whatever you think about Jesus... whatever you believe about the authority of Scripture...

- it's a simple historical fact that no life has ever had as much impact as the life of Jesus.
- So, in the rest of this message, we're going to look at the greatest Ripple Maker who ever lived...
- and let Him teach us what a *ripple maker* actually looks like!

**And that begins with a willingness to let our hearts be broken as we really step out into the world around us.**

It was so encouraging watching vast numbers of churches so fully engaged in Texas this week.

- It wasn't enough for them to feel empathy... they were drawn to action.
- There was one pastor who was going from one flooded car to another, making sure no one was stuck in their cars.
- I watched my friend, Michael Palandro, the pastor of the Houston Vineyard, helping to clean flooded houses.

It's a **striking thing about Jesus**. Over and over there is a word the

Bible uses to describe Him. It's that word... **compassion**.

- One time a leper approached Jesus and asked to be healed. The text says, in **Mark 1:40-41** that...
- **"With compassion, Jesus reached out His hand, touched the man. 'I'm willing.' He said, 'Be clean.'"**
- Or another time a whole crowd of people filled with the suffering and sick... came to Jesus.

It says in **Matthew 14:14**, "*Jesus had compassion on them when He saw them and healed their sick.*"

- Why? **"Because they were harassed & helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."**
- His love allowed Him to see what was below the surface... His compassion moved Him to answer their cries.

Jesus consistently and deliberately put Himself in places where He would see human suffering, and it truly touched His heart.

- He felt it so deeply... He identified with it so fully, that He said,
- **"When you see people suffering, whatever you do even for those who seem to be the least important, it's like you're doing it for Me.**
- *When you see human suffering and you do nothing, it's like you're doing nothing for Me."*

**Martin Luther King** once said that "*Every man must decide whether he will walk in the **light of creative altruism** or in the **darkness of destructive selfishness**...*"

- He said that "*History will have to record that the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was not the strident clamor of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people.*"

You see, the hearts of Ripple Makers will be moved by these words.

- Or, **at the very least**, these words will challenge them to re-engage...
- to **more effectively balance the weight of their focus** between themselves and those suffering & sick around them.

Most everyone in this room probably knows about an organization called *World Vision*.

- I'll tell you how they get started over 65 years ago now. A guy named **Bob Pierce** traveled around the world preaching the gospel of Jesus.
- He was in China, and a little girl heard that message and received Christ.

But when she went home to tell her family, **her father disowned her** and kicked her out of their home.

- **Bob Pierce wrote on the inside cover of his Bible, "Let my heart be broken by the things that break the heart of God."**
- That's how *World Vision* got started... with one broken heart willing to respond to whatever Jesus puts in front of him.

**Then a second mark of a ripple maker is *not just* generosity... but sacrificial generosity.**

As I look at history and the world, there is no doubt that Jesus Christ is the **most unselfish, most generous** Person who ever lived.

- Even as He faced the most unselfish, most sacrificial act in history, we're told in **Hebrews 12:2** that it was for the "*Joy set before Him that He endured the Cross.*"
- In **2 Corinthians 8:9**, Paul said this about Jesus: He said, "*Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor.*"

I'll ask myself sometimes, "*What motivates my **servicing**? When I give my **time and money**, is it flowing out of a compassionate heart or obligation?*"

- This is what the apostle Paul wrote. He said, "**Each of you should give whatever you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, because God loves a cheerful giver.**" (2 Corinthians 9:7)
- And why? Because that's the heart of God. Because God Himself is a cheerful giver.

Because Jesus is the most sacrificially generous Person who ever lived, **servicing & giving didn't weigh Him down**. In fact, it filled Him with

joy.

- Those people sacrificing down there in Texas... they'll look back at all this,
- and **they'll reflect on the honor they were given to have been able to serve** other people.
- You see, real serving, while it can be exhausting, **brings life to the soul...** because we were made to be ripple-makers.

So, I ask myself... does my giving bring joy? I mean, God is really serious about this.

- And yet, listen... If you don't want to give, then just stop giving.
- If *in your heart*, you want to just quit giving & keep everything you acquire and use all your time for yourself then honestly...
- Just go down that road as far as you need to go down that road.

But from time to time as you go down that road, stop... and ask the question...

- *"Has my keeping everything for my own immediate family given me a more joyful heart? If it does, just keep going down that road.*
- But what Jesus would say is, *"You know, real smart people with lots and lots of acquiring capacity have been farther down that road than you ever have, and what they found out is that it's a dead end."*

The question here is this... When I compare myself to other people, **do I compare up, or do I compare down?**

- *Am I measuring my life against those with more stuff than I do, (which can feed the "I need to hold on to more" mentality)*
- *Or, am I looking at people who have so much less... to those who need something that I might be able to provide?*

You see, ripple-makers are always developing a heart for people with less so giving becomes something their heart is engaged in...

- Because **as little as you have**, there are **always those with less.**
- We've seen this in Texas all week... how people who have lost everything, are still out there helping others.
- You see, Ripple makers always live with a growing sense of

sacrificial generosity.

**Another sign of a ripple maker is that, *Ripple makers live with a sense of what might be called sanctified dissatisfaction.***

You see... there is good discontent, and there is bad discontent.

- Ripple makers live with what might be called *sanctified discontentment*. Let's do this...
- Turn to the person next to you and tell them the worst sin you ever committed. No, don't do that!

But, you know, I'm going to tell you about **what I think would probably be my worst sin...** at least in general terms.

- It would be **selfishness**. Are you disappointed?! It's my propensity to put *me* at the center of my little agenda...
- My life... where my life centers around the **pursuit of my own hopes & dreams**.

Isn't it interesting all the language we have to describe all that? "*Follow your dreams!*" "*You're living the dream!*"

- So, when I get out of high school, all I want to do is get into my dream school so that one day I can have my dream job
- and then I can drive my dream car and that will help me attract my dream spouse.

Then we can live in our dream house. Then we can have some dream kids.

- Then we can go on our dream vacation to get away from those dream kids.
- Then we can have a **401K** so that one day we can live our dream 401 retirement.

Then I will die and have a dream funeral. Get tucked away in my dream casket. Buried in a dream plot of dirt.

- Because if I follow *my* dreams, see, that's where *your dreams* will always end up.
- And the sad reality is that **this whole "me-centered" attitude** is reflected in the lives of Jesus followers all the time.



In fact, when Christians **think of God's job description**, right up on top, many believe that His priority is the fulfillment of *their own* dream.

- *so much so*, that, if it's not happening... if I **don't get in to my dream school** or get my **dream job**
- Or my **dream car** or the **dream spouse** or the **dream house**...
- **then it's God's fault!** Then I start getting mad at God because He hasn't fulfilled my dreams.

Guys... as Jesus followers, we need to, once and for all, quit making God the genie who's supposed to fulfill all *our dreams*...

- And instead, **ask God for His help in embracing** a much bigger and better dream...**His dream**.
- And so, we need to ask Him... ***"God, what is Your dream for my life?"***
- ***"God, don't let me be content with anything less than all that is on Your heart."***

Thousands of years ago, some powerless and impoverished men, called **prophets**, changed the world through their words & deeds.

- Over the past two weeks, we saw examples of this in Elijah and Elisha.
- You see, their words & actions painted a picture of God's dream for His people & community.
- And the old Hebrew word that reflects this dream... is the word ***shalom***.

Now, in our day, this word has mostly lost its bite and its edge and its audacity.

- We've turned it into kind of a **greeting card** word. It usually gets translated "*peace*," but it's way bigger than that.
- *Shalom* is where **things are just the way God wants them to be**... physically, spiritually, and relationally and economically.

Now if you believe, as many people in our day do, that **reality is nothing more than a random accident**...

- a cosmic mistake, which is **evolving toward some unknown future**, then ***there really is no*** particular way things ought to be.

- There's just the way I want things to be... and the way you want things to be, and the way things are.
- But the prophets said, "*No, there is a way things were designed to be because there is a Designer.*"

They used pictures, images, metaphors, symbols, and stories to describe the way things are supposed to be.

- In Isaiah 2:4, for example, the Prophet Isaiah spoke of people ***beating swords into plowshares***.
- In other words, instead of using technology for violence or injustice...
- let's just **re-forge them into something that can bless**. Let's use it for generosity.
- You see, **they used images that would touch your heart** if you stop long enough to feel what they were feeling.

Truth is, the reason the books of the prophets can be challenging books to get through is because...

- the **prophets felt the pain** of living in the gap between the way things were...
- and "shalom..." the way things were meant to be.

No one lived with this pain more than Jesus. Although He was the most **joyfully generous** Person who ever lived...

- He might also have been **the most dissatisfied** person who ever lived as well.
- Not dissatisfied in His own life or with God... but rather, **dissatisfied with the broken, sin-wrecked world** around Him.

Dissatisfied with the **hypocrisy** and the **greed** and the **misused sexuality** and **exploitation**... the **lack of kindness**, **pride** and **deceit**.

- He confronted it so uncompromisingly that it got Him crucified.
- And now... we too **live between the beauty of *shalom*** and the pain of how things are:

Sex trafficking so bad UNICEF says **every two minutes a child is being prepared for sexual exploitation**. That's not the way things are supposed to be.

Right now in our world, a **billion people in our are desperately hungry.**

- A child dies of malnutrition every six seconds. That's not the way things are supposed to be.
- 50 million people in the US are living in poverty. There are over 65 million refugees in the world today...

There are over 550,000 homeless in the US... **That's not the way it's supposed to be!**

- So where do you feel that burning, sanctified discontent?
- Beyond FB posts, what can you do to address it?
- As a church, what are we meant to do to address it?

For too long the church has defined “sanctified discontent” as their frustration over all the sin that's going on *out there* rather than all the suffering out there.

- And so, the church gains the reputation of being the morality police while doing nothing to help the suffering.
- We saw this perception all week with the attacks against Joel Osteen, some of which I felt was very unfair...
- Though, as a whole, I do believe that the world should be able to expect more from the church.

**That leads to another mark of a ripple maker... A sense of active dependence where we're **living lives fully dependent on God.****

In **John 15**, we read this. And, once more, see if you can spot the inaccuracy here...

- Jesus says, ***"I am the vine. You are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit. Apart from Me you can still do quite a lot because of your natural intelligence and good intentions."***
- Of course, what Jesus actually said was, ***"Apart from Me you can do nothing."*** Nothing!

You know, there are dozens of passages in the Old Testament **about the coming of shalom...** the way things are supposed to be.

- They all share one feature. When describing the coming of Shalom, **no prophet ever says, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if..."**
- No prophet ever says, "Maybe someday..." No prophet ever says, "Might be... Could be... What if..."

The formula is very consistent with the prophets. *"And in that day..."*  
*"And it will come to pass..."* You see, Shalom is coming.

- The kingdom is coming because God will have it so. In other words, shalom is not a human project.
- **Shalom** is God's project... and, *because of that*, it always begins in prayer.
- *"Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."*

In my **body**... in my **family**... in this **church**... on the **streets of this town**... on our **playgrounds**... in **office cubicles**...

- On streets where **little children are running around**... In **houses that are falling down**...
- In **towns that are flooded**... In **communities rattled by racism**...
- **Your kingdom come**, Lord... Your will be done with those people on earth as it is in heaven.

That's *shalom*, and *it will come* one day because it's God's project. It's not yours or mine.

- So, we ask God to use us as He moves history closer toward His dream of shalom.
- In all that we hope to do as a church, **we can't ever forget** that it isn't our project... but His.
- That **we're not inviting God to empower and bless** what we're hoping to do...
- but rather, **we're responding to His invitation to join with Him** in what He is already doing around us.

It's His project... and, therefore, **ripple makers** don't get overwhelmed by the size of the problem and decide to give up...

- giving into discouragement because of the scale of the problem.
- It's simply not an option because it is NOT our project. **We're**

**not the ones who will make it happen.**

- We pray, “*God, use me! Use us... let us be a part of this dream of Yours as we live in active dependence of Your Spirit in our lives.*”

**The last mark of a Ripple-Maker that I’d like to talk about this morning is, Inconvenient servanthood.**

In **Matthew 20:26**, Jesus tells us that “*Whoever wants to become great among you must be a servant.*”

- And then He says, in **verses 27-28**, that “*Whoever wants to be first must be slave of all just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.*”

In **Isaiah 52:7**, in speaking about the coming of *shalom*, the prophet writes, “***How beautiful on the mountain are the feet of those who bring good news.***”

- As you can imagine, in the ancient world, feet were not considered the most beautiful part of a person.
- I mean... a lot of people simply didn’t own shoes or sandals...
- but even if they did, **a short walk on those dusty roads** would leave their feet completely filthy.
- And yet, **even the feet** of the one who brings good news of *shalom* are beautiful. So... how beautiful are your feet?

A man named **Shane Claiborne** spent some time working with Mother Teresa in Calcutta.

- Whenever they went to church, he found that it was customary for everyone to take off their shoes.
- Well, he noticed, one time, **how deformed Mother Teresa's feet were.**
- They looked so bad that, at first, he actually thought she might have had leprosy. He was afraid to ask.

Then one day while talking to one of the other sisters, the subject came up. The **sister asked Shane**, “*Have you noticed Mother Teresa's feet?*”

- She went on to explain how they get donations of shoes in

- Calcutta only once in a while...
- How there were rarely enough for each person to get a decent pair.

And so, when Mother Theresa needed shoes, **she would only take from those that remained**, which were nearly always too small for her.

- **Mother Teresa could have had the best of what came in those containers... But she always gave the best away.**
- Truth is... **we don't live in a world** that appeals to that part of the human heart.

You know, as followers of Jesus, we talk about being *the Body of Christ*... how we're the hands and the feet of Jesus.

- But **we can't forget how**, *for the sake of the world around Him... how His hands and feet were scared...*
- How **His side** was pierced by a sword... how **His heart** was broken for all of us and all those around us.

*Though He was rich*, Paul wrote, *yet He became poor for my sake...* for my sake. He gave His life. He died on a cross so I could live.

- "Now," He says, "You go!" You be My witnesses!
- You be My ambassadors. You care! Let your feet be beautiful!
- **Let YOUR heart be broken by the things that break My heart.**

Go and make ripples in the world around you. Don't just spend your life skipping rocks...

- Find the biggest stone you can and stir the waters of Morris Plains and beyond.
- Everything I've given you... **grace, love, mercy, compassion...** give all those things away to those around you.
- Be part of what I'm doing to bring life and peace to the people you pass by each and every day.
- **Live in all the rich blessing** that I have for you... but remember to go and *"be a blessing"* to the world around you.

**Let's pray:** Now Heavenly Father in this moment in this silence, we just allow Your Spirit to speak to us with open hands and open hearts. We often distract ourselves with other realities, God, but we remember right now the brokenness, the hunger, the suffering all around us in this sad world. We remember every aching life is one that is completely loved by You... that throughout this week, there isn't a single person we'll meet or pass by for whom you didn't die for there on the Cross of Calvary.

You have blessed us, God. Though, we live in a part of the world that just tells us to keep trying to get more and more blessing and to hold on to those blessings for our own benefit. God, forgive us and help us to die to small and petty dreams and offer our little lives into Your dream for the world around us.

Would You speak right now, God, to every heart? However it is You want to call people into a life of being a blessing for Your world, would You call us right now. We say "yes" to You. We as a church, God, say "yes" to You whatever the cost, whatever the price because of what Jesus did for us. We lay our lives before You, our possessions, our time, our gifts. We can do nothing else in the presence of the crucified One. We pray in His name, Amen.