



**VILLAGE
CHURCH**

Presbyterian (USA)

Hope, Glimpse by Glimpse

SCRIPTURE:
Matthew 13:1-9,
Deuteronomy 34

November 13, 2022 — Sermon by Rev. Tom Are, Jr.

If someone asked you, “Hey, you go to Village. Tell me about your church.” What would you say? Would you talk about worship? About these musicians who inspire us every week?

Would you talk about our signature missions like Reconciliation Services and Thelma’s Kitchen?

Would you talk about our First Decision Mission: The Kansas and Missouri Mental Health Initiative bringing mental-health resources to needed areas?

Would you talk about the way we practice friendship and compassion at Wednesday Family Dinners or Stephen Ministry?

Would you talk about the children? Or how our youth spend their spring break on a mission trip in the Dominican Republic?

Would you talk about how, in an age when young adults are staying away from church, we have a vibrant and honest ministry with young adults?

Would you talk about how we are one church in two locations?

Or would you say, “Village is a collection of ordinary but caring people who are living toward God’s promised day. It’s a day we have never seen and a day that is almost impossible to imagine, but it is a day we trust, for it is the result of God’s undying love and we base our lives on it.”

If someone said, “Tell me about Village,” what would you say?

Moses preaches a long sermon before the people leave the wilderness and enter the promised land. It’s the entire book of Deuteronomy. (You thought my sermons were long!) The people reach the promised land, but Moses does not. He dies at the edge of the land. But before he dies, God leads Moses up Mount Nebo to make sure Moses sees the land that God has promised.

Moses spent his whole life living toward this land. Leading these people who grumbled and murmured. Admittedly, they did so when they didn’t have things like food and water. We are Presbyterians, so we murmur when we don’t have the right condiments.

After Moses spends a lifetime as the scout leader on an unending wilderness camp out, saying to his people every day, “It’s out there... the land of promise is out there. Surely, it is waiting for us.” And then, in his last moment, God drags Moses up Mount Nebo and says, “Look! There it is. Everything I promised you. It’s all there. Gilead as far as Dan... all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea... it’s all there. It’s all true. Everything you based your life on is all true.” Moses got a glimpse of the promise of God.

I don’t know about you, but that’s why I give money to the church. Because every now and then, we get a glimpse of that promised day—that day we are basing our lives on. Sometimes it happens to me here in worship. Sometimes in a Session meeting. Sometimes at our Food Pantry or playing kickball with an 8-year-old in Thwake, Kenya, and I feel like the floor drops away and my feet are planted on Nebo. And I get a glimpse of the gospel promise. I imagine you have, too.

Moses called it a promised land. Jesus called it the kingdom of heaven. It is that promised day when justice rolls down like waters and swords are beaten into plowshares. It’s a promised day when the grumbling noises of hungry bellies are replaced with songs of table blessings. It’s a promised day when our children grow up “to be neither the destroyers nor the destroyed.”¹ We have never reached that promised day. But if you have eyes to see, once in a blue moon you might find yourself standing on Nebo getting a glimpse, and God whispers in your ear... “See, it’s all

1 Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams* (1990) p. 299.

true. Everything I promised you is true.”

The ministry we share as a church is like that. Every day we live toward a day we have never known, but trust is out there... and now and then, we get a glimpse. But we should be honest about this: Those glimpses are not often overpowering. The glimpses of God’s promised day are always a result of love and love is a power, but admittedly, a fragile power. It is a vulnerable strength and the victories of love are often modest.

The parable of the sower is told in Matthew, Mark and Luke. Lately, I am drawn to Matthew’s telling of this parable. Matthew copies this parable from Mark almost word for word, but he does make one change. Mark says the good soil produces 30-, 60-, 100-fold. But Matthew reverses that order. Matthew says the harvest is 100-, 60-, 30-fold. If I understand the text, I think Matthew invites us to pay attention to small victories, to subtle movement, a more modest harvest. Ministry is the work of love, but victories of love are often modest.

Reinhold Niebuhr said, “Nothing worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime, therefore we must be saved by hope.” I understand that. Time has taught me that ministry is not always 30, 60, 100... sometimes it is 100, 60, 30.

There are amazing things that happen at Village Church. Sometimes 100 fold. Sometimes the redemptive work of God is so palpable it captures everyone in the room. And yet, often the work of God seems modest. Jesus is Lord, but like him, we still live in Herod’s world.

For more than 70 years, Village has endeavored to be a place where all are welcome. Today, many of our neighbors are belittled as their being is called an “agenda.” But not here. All are welcome. In a world where the climate threatens with storm and fire and flood, we strive to pay attention to our own footprint. In a city where gun violence is common, and too many children struggle to read at grade level, and the gap grows between those who have abundance and those who do not have enough... we engage in ministries of justice and compassion every day.

Just yesterday, a friend who works with our Habitat for Humanity team spoke of a house dedication where a Congolese mom and her ten children moved into their first home. Some thought they were in KCK,

but I’m pretty sure they were standing on Nebo and God was whispering, “There it is... everything I promised you is true.” Now and then, we get a glimpse.

But still, when I look at the world, the needs are overwhelming. And I don’t know about you, but I don’t feel very strong. It’s hard to imagine that we, as a church, can really change things. I think Matthew could relate.

If I understand the text, Jesus tells us to trust the seed. In every circumstance, trust the gospel. It will not always work, but trust the seed. Of course, the seed that you and I are called to sow is love. And we know love is a fragile power. Love is a vulnerable strength. But in time, because this exceedingly patient God is also faithful, love will win. That is the hope that saves us. And that hope is what calls us to do the good that is ours to do and let God do with that what God will.

So, if someone were to ask, “Who are you at Village?” We might say, “We keep sowing the seed. Keep trusting that holy love. We do the good that is ours to do. Share the love that is ours to share. And here and there, now and then, we will find our feet firmly planted on Nebo and God whispers... ‘See, it’s all true. Everything I promised you, it’s all true.’”

Reinhold Niebuhr said, “Nothing worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime, therefore we must be saved by hope.” Hope is what causes the sower to sow and the Christian to love.

Yesterday, the Session welcomed our newly elected elders and they shared their faith journeys. Espie Lemon is youth elder. She’s a sophomore in high school and she shared an encounter she had while on a mission trip in the Dominican Republic. Part of our mission is to provide eyeglasses because many in the bateyes do not have access to eyeglasses. So all day they hand over a pair of glasses and hold up something to read. “Good, no?” Hand another pair. “Try these.” Eventually they find the right prescription.

Espie said that she was deep into this process with an older man. After many attempts, he put on a pair of glasses, looked at the page, and for the first time in a long time, he could see clearly. He broke out into a huge smile and then looked at her and said, “Thank you. Thank you. Thank you so much. Thank you. I can see!”

She said, “When you try to do a little good, you

never know.” We do the good that is ours to do and let God do with that what God will.

Whatever reason you might have to support this ministry, know that your gift is doing more than supporting a ministry. Your generosity is making it possible to live toward God’s promised day. And you never know what God will do with the good you choose to do.

I read about Yellowstone National Park. For more than 70 years, wolves had been removed from the park. The result was that the deer population grew unchecked. In 1995, wolves were reintroduced into Yellowstone National Park—31 of them.

The impact was dramatic and far exceeded expectations. Not only did wolves hunt the deer, but they changed the deer’s behavior. The deer began to stay away from areas where they could easily be attacked, namely the valleys and gorges. As a result, vegetation previously consumed by deer, began to regenerate. Not just grasses, but bushes and even trees. Some trees quintupled in size in less than ten years, creating forests of aspen, willow and cottonwood. With the trees, birds returned. And beavers. And with the pools created by beaver dams, increased fish and otters and muskrats, which meant hawks and bald eagles returned. But most dramatic of all, it changed the river. With the banks’ vegetation increasing, the river pathway solidified. All because some folks introduced

31 wolves into the park. It changed the ecosystem.

Jesus told us: Trust the seed. Sow the power of love anywhere and everywhere you can. It won’t always work, but sometimes it makes all the difference. And sometimes God can use a small gesture to change everything.

If someone said, “Tell me about Village,” what would you say? Maybe you would tell them it’s a place where people are cared for. Or perhaps you would say it’s a place where people endeavor to be honest in a culture of deceit. Or maybe you would tell them it’s a community that celebrates beauty in a world that is often broken. Or maybe you would tell them it is a community being saved by our hope.

For we are living toward a promised day. A day when justice will roll down like waters. A day when swords will be beaten into plowshares. A day when all of God’s children will be treated as God’s children.

The needs of the world are overwhelming and we feel small because the only power we have is love. And love is a tender power. It is a vulnerable strength and her victories are often modest. But at Village, we will keep sowing the seed. Keep trusting that holy love. Do the good that is ours to do. Share the love that is ours to share. And here and there, now and then, we will find our feet firmly planted on Nebo and God will whisper, “See, it’s all true. Everything I promised you, it’s all true.”