

PBJ BOOSTER EDITION

9-25-22

The mission statement that guides us as a church is that we exist to make disciples of Jesus who worship God passionately, connect with one another in caring community and impact the world through word and deed. Worship-Connect – Impact. With hand motions now – Worship-Connect-Impact. WIC. If you are a member here our leadership has sought to convey that we are wanting these very things from you and we are seeking to develop them in ourselves and in you. As part of that endeavor, in Fall of 2021 we kicked off our PBJ initiative. This was linked to our commitment to making an impact and it is designed to focus our attention on those around us who may be unfamiliar with the grace of our Savior. The P stands for Pray – as we commit ourselves to pray for ourselves to develop a heart like that of our Lord – a heart that sees lost people for just what they are and reaches out in love. That prayer then also encompasses the lost folks in our lives, our families, our neighborhoods, schools and workplaces. That is the P portion of the PBJ and it is essential because without the Lord being with us in this endeavor we have no chance. Thankfully, when we cry out to God for help in the mission, we link our impotence with his omnipotence and marvelous things will occur.

Then, we introduced the B portion of our acrostic and our challenge. This stands for Bless. And for the Bless portion we provide a little acrostic rich with ideas – B = Bless, A = Affirm. G = Give or giftings – E = Eat, L = listen. S = serve. The goal here is to become more consistent in following through on opportunities to enrich the lives of others for Jesus' sake. Clearly, this is part of what being a disciple is all about. Galatians 6:**9-10** *Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.* ¹⁰*So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.* Let's do good to all people – when? When we have opportunity. But, we must be intentional about this; otherwise other things will pull us away from this calling of our Lord. And speaking of calling – we all share the same general calling, but our specific callings will differ, based upon how the Lord has equipped us to serve. We have different abilities and we have different motivations. Some of you will love with your mouth, by what you say, that is bless and affirm. Some will love with your wallet—via gifts. Some by your hospitality – sharing a meal. Some will love with your ears – by listening well. And finally, some of you will love with your hands – by serving someone. I hope you keep the BAGELS vision in your mind so

that you are ready to step into the many and varied opportunities to bless that the Father sends your way. We focus on these things because they honor the Lord for sure, but also because they open up wonderful avenues by which Jesus can enter and touch hearts and lives as we speak up for Him in our relationships.

Our gifts and callings are different – but our goal, when we set our Spirit-inspired love on someone, is generally the same. We want them to know Jesus as we have come to know Him. This, of course is the J part of PBJ. Look with me then at I John 1:**1-4** *What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life—²and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—³what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.⁴These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.* When you look at this passage from the pen of the apostle John two things stand out – First is his confidence in the Lord, in the treasure that is Christ, and then, secondly is his longing to include others. Finding the love of Jesus is not like finding a gold mine where the discoveries of others will limit your own. No-no. Our joy in the Lord is only increased when others tap into it. And what expansion of joy occurs when we are faithful to the calling of Jesus to pray and bless and maybe even introduce someone to Christ where they come to know the riches of His grace. Confidence in Jesus and longing to see others join in. May God visit us with both of those things. May they abound and grow among us brethren.

The next two Sundays I am heading for a big trip out west with Beth. Ben is going to take opportunity to train you to grow in confidence and then manifest longing for souls by speaking up for Christ in relationships. My hope this morning is to ground you in the New Testament call to be witnesses and I take you to I Peter 3 to do so. I Peter 3:**13-15** *Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?¹⁴But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled,¹⁵but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.* This last part of the verse I prefer to render in the NIV, which says in 15, “*give the reason for the hope that you have.*” I had a conversation with a young man at a university who was a Christian. He understood what it meant to have Christ as His Lord and Savior. So, I asked him this question, “Suppose

someone asks you why you are a Christian, why you believe in Jesus, what would you say?" You know what he told me? He said he didn't have any particular reasons. He didn't know why he believed and didn't think we really needed to have a reason or give a reason for our faith or our hope. Hmm. Peter seems to think otherwise. John too. Peter says that part of honoring Christ as Lord is being ready to offer an apology, a defense, a reasoning for why we are trusting Him. But the attitude I saw in this young man is not unusual. It is an attitude found in the majority of non-Christians. On the occasions when I have been to campuses or malls to do survey evangelism I ask non-Christians this question: *Why do you think certain people believe in Jesus? What do you think it is that persuaded them?* What kind of answers do you expect I hear to that? They say, "Oh, Christians believe in Jesus because it helps them cope." Think about that statement. It treats faith in Christ as if it were pretending doesn't it? Kind of like – *she believes in Santa because it makes the holiday more enjoyable*. No rationality to it. Another thing unbelievers would say is that Christians believe as they do because that is what they grew up with. Certainly, that does make a difference, but it cannot explain all of us, and does not explain most of us. But again, it presupposes that there is no good solid reason to believe. The unchurched world thinks that we are engaged in a huge project of wish projection and unscientific pretense. Someone defined faith as believing something you know isn't true. Non-believers think we Christians have no good reasons for believing in Jesus, and we have done very little to convince them otherwise. So often, we in the church speak as if our faith is devoid of any rational basis. AW Tozer writes this:

Indeed, faith, as commonly understood, is little more than desire compounded with cheerful optimism. Certain writers make a comfortable living promoting that kind of so-called faith which is supposed to create the positive as opposed to the negative mind. Their effusions are dear to the hearts of those in the population who are afflicted with a psychological compulsion to believe, and who manage to live with the facts only by the simple expedient of ignoring them.

But I'm here to tell you that if you are headed to heaven you are such because you are believing in Jesus now and that belief was not a choice, but an essentially involuntary response to sufficient evidence. That is what belief is. I don't get up in the morning and choose the weather. I believe it's cold because the weather channel and my tender ears both testify of that. My belief is a response to the evidence. Britney Spears recently announced on social media that she no longer believes in God. She is an atheist and she told us the grounds for this conclusion. It is because everyone in her family thinks she is mentally unstable. For her, that is

proof that there is no God and a reminder to us that people routinely misread the evidences of reality. We can't control that. But we can bring the evidence to people, we can point them to our Savior and we can offer the reasons for why we hope in Christ. And we always have reasons. Some of us are not in touch with our reasons. But we do have them. CS Lewis writes this in "Mere Christianity:" *a sane man accepts or rejects any statement not because he wants or does not want to, but because the evidence seems to him good or bad.* I grant you there is more to it than that. We are complicated people, but that is the most basic and true way to put it. So, the notion that faith or belief is somehow opposed to reason is as wrong-headed as it can possibly be. Scripture presents saving faith as a step into the light, not a leap into the dark. Now, faith is contrasted in the new Testament to sight, not to reason, but to sensual apprehension. II Corinthians 5:7 says *for we walk by faith, not by sight.* We believe in One who is unseen. Okay. No problem. All the apostle means by this is that we embrace unseen realities not non-existent or imaginary realities.

Now, how does this all play out in our practical service to Christ? Peter admonishes us to be ready to give a defense for our hope. We claim a confidence that we have eternal life. Can you explain to somebody the grounds for that confidence? Can you show that it is rooted in the promise of One in whom you have placed a well-founded trust? I am not asking if you can give a Ph.D. level apologetic for the faith. But can you give someone any reason for their trusting in Jesus? I hope you can. And if you can't now, I hope you will grow to be able to so. For now, at least, understand that we have a pair of powerful ways to persuade others, to move them toward faith. They are the word of God and the people of God. The word of God and the people of God. You know about the word – faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. That is Romans 10:9. I Peter 1:23 *you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.* It is quite, quite rare for us to be approached by someone who is feeling their need for Jesus and just asking to be introduced to him. I hear stories of that, but it has been rare in my own experience – and less so in 2022 than in 1982. But here is what I do know – some there are who are intrigued, interested in learning what the Scriptures actually say about our Jesus and about the way to life. And, even if they come to the Bible with doubts and cynicism, that good word can open them up. This is why the turning point for so many has been an invitation to a youth group or a Bible study or a

worship service. This is why we offer Alpha and encourage you to pray about whom you may invite.

Then there are the people of God. We had a family of five visit our church recently, after the husband and father attended our father-son campout in the woods behind the church. You know what happened? He saw men who were authentic, and who shared with him a love of their children. Sometimes, we who love Jesus can be off-putting to unbelievers – that is going to happen a certain percentage of the time. There are things about us that worldly people will not appreciate. But, to many, beholding faith, peace, joy and authenticity among God's people will open them up. So, one of our outreach strategies is to create events like we did yesterday with the sporting clays, that you can invite unchurched people into. In doing that we sow seeds the Holy Spirit can water and nourish unto life-change.

So, our passage exhorts us – I Peter 3:15 *Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.* It's a funny thing – ever heard that trying to reason with unbelievers is a waste of time? Folks say, “you can't argue people into the kingdom of God.” Is that true or false? Well, it's certainly true to the extent that argument by itself never saved anyone, but the gospel by itself never did either. The question is whether or not God would ever bless a kind and reasoned argument for the truth of Christ, and I can't understand how anyone could read the New Testament and think He would not. That is what evangelism is. We talk about Christ and supply reasons to believe. If God blesses that, some folks are eternally changed. They are not argued into the kingdom, but they are drawn into the kingdom by Spirit-blessed appeals that get through to their minds and their hearts. Paul reasoned in the synagogue. That was his custom and some came to faith. Listen to how he preached Jesus to the Gentiles in Athens. Acts 17:**30-31** *Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent,*³¹*because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.* Paul is here giving a reason for the hope of which he testified. In fact, he goes so far as to suggest that a rejection of Christ is a rejection of good and sufficient reason. He does. And it is. This is astonishing to unbelievers who think that faith is unreasonable, but we actually hold that unbelief is unreasonable. We don't speak of unbelief with scorn and contempt. Our text in I

Peter calls for gentleness and reverence in our dealing with others. We understand that lost people are blinded and cannot see the kingdom of God, but we do claim the evidence for our Lord to be sufficient, we do testify of his power and loving work in our hearts, and that all are encouraged to repent and bow before Jesus the King.

It is not within our capacities to testify as Peter and Paul did that we have seen the risen Christ. It is likely not going to be effective with the American secularist in 2022 to speak of fulfilled Jewish prophecies. But we can surely bring forth the testimony of lives joyfully surrendered to our Savior. When we do that we stand in a long line of witnesses for Jesus who make the world wonder. I mean, what do you say about guys like Saul of Tarsus who went from persecuting Christians to being persecuted for being one? What do you say about a group of lowly Jewish fishermen who turned the world upset down and wrote the world's bestseller? What do you say about the millions today who can testify that addictions, and obsessions and emotional bondages of all sort have been broken by the power of Christ and His word? What do you say about all the broken marriages set right when men and women called for help in the name of Christ? What do you say about the hospitals and schools and food distribution centers around the world that are paid for and staffed by Christians? Sure, there have been fools and maniacs who have called themselves Christians, but there can be no doubt that allegiance to Jesus has led to more good on this planet than any ten other things combined. And, of course, I wish I could just give you a day to live in my shoes, to know what I know, to contemplate what I have seen and heard and felt, and to know the rich wonder of knowing God as the preeminent, ever-present reality in your life. There are times I have my doubts, I admit it. You probably do as well. But there are far more times when I can no more deny the truth of Christ than I can deny my own existence. And when I do struggle with doubt, the solution for me is found not in a flight from reason, but in deeper thought, honest reflection and evaluation and remembering, because the hope I have is well-founded. The case for Christ is solid and undeniable. Knowing this to be so, it is my goal and I urge all of you who agree with me to make it your goal, that we live in such a way that our lives are inexplicable if Christ is not alive. When we do that we walk in the values of PB & J and we will make an impact for the name of J – who is Jesus our Lord, the one worthy of our devotion, our trust, our service.

Let's close by recommitting ourselves to pray, to bless, and to point others to Christ. This is an individual commitment and a corporate one to for those aligned

with us at North Park Church. II Corinthians 5:**17-19** *Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. ¹⁸Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.* Father, we lay claim to that awesome word. Your testimony to us of who we now are. Made new by your Spirit and called unto Christ and His mission of reconciling sinners to Himself. Give us the hearts for this labor. Give us the wisdom to understand how to go about it. Direct us to those whom you have appointed for us to influence toward the way of faith and live. And glorify your Son, by adding to the number of His choir, His army, His bride and His body. For we ask in Jesus' lovely name. Amen