

August 26, 2012 - Behind Enemy Lines

We are just going to spend a bit of time in the Word this morning. I'll give you a bit of advance notice, up front, we're going to do it a little bit different. I'm not going to stand up here for a long time, like I usually do, I'm going to stand up here for several shorter times. I don't want to give you false hope when I sit down after a few minutes and you think: "Oh great! We're all done." I'll be back, so I just wanted to give you advance warning of that.

We're kind of in the middle of a series here or at the end of a series that I didn't intend to be in. At this time of year, we had three weeks that I had no series planned for and so I started thinking and decided, well what should we do and so I planned the first week and the next week kind of flowed out of that and then the next week kind of flowed out of that and before I knew it, there was a series. And so, we're in a series that I ended up calling "Community" and just to give a quick re-cap of where we've been, two weeks ago we went through all these concentric circles here and we talked about how Jesus related to different people. We looked at some stories through the Gospels and how Jesus related to people and how he spent more time with some and less time with others. How some of them he had these deep, meaningful, relationships with and other people he just kind of had these broader more general relationships with. How he kind of interacted with different people in different ways, just kind of based on his relationships with them.

So, we kind of said well, if that worked for Jesus it's probably good for us too and so, we kind of looked at all of these different spheres of influences, we called them, and said "Okay, so how do we fit into all of those different spheres and how do we relate to people as Christians in all of those different spheres. We wound up, that week, talking about our Small Groups this year and how we're going to try in our Small Groups this year, to do different things that meet all the needs of those different spheres of influence and help us connect with different people in ways that fit. Which makes this a perfect time for me to just pause, and say "There are sign up sheets for Small Groups out in the foyer. If you haven't signed up yet, today is the perfect time to do it. Go ahead, write your name on a list. If you have questions about our Groups or what they are for or what the benefits might be, go ahead and talk to myself or Bob or Craig, or one of the Elders or one of the Group leaders, and they would be happy to fill you in on some of that, as well." So that was week one.

Week two, we kind of shifted gears a little bit and we began talking about people's need for community and how we all kind of have that sense, that longing to have a sense of community. We talked about how God's desire is really for community to be something that is built inside of the Church and how the Church is supposed to be a place of community. How God wants that community to be a place where everyone can find a place to belong and how God wants that community to be a place where everyone has a part to play. That's kind of what we talked about last week. Community inside the Church.

This week, we want to kind of turn that inside out a little bit. Because not only does God want there to be community in the Church, God wants the Church to be in the community. So that's what we want to look at this morning. That's not a new or novel concept for anyone, I'm sure. Throughout history, God's people have searched for ways to be part of the community that they are in and yet, at the same time, manage to be somehow distinct from it. Ways of living out the principle, maybe you've heard of this, the common saying: To be in the World but not of the World. And sometimes that balance may have been elusive for us to find. So today, we want to consider, how we can really live out the reality of what Jesus says in John, Chapter 17:14-18. How we can live that out in our modern World. In John 17, Jesus is praying for his followers and he says:

“I have given them your word and the World hates them because they do not belong to the World just as I do not belong to the World. I'm not asking you to take them out of the World, but to keep them safe from the evil one. They do not belong to this World any more than I do. Make them holy by your truth. Teach them your word, which is truth. Just as you sent me into the World, I am sending them out into the World.”

The challenge to be in the World, but not of the World. It is a dichotomy that some would call a paradox, some would call impractical, and others would call simply, impossible.

The movie called Behind Enemy Lines. There is a navy pilot named Chris Burnett and he is shot down out of the sky over Bosnia in 1995 and he crashes on the ground. He quickly realizes that he has found himself in hostile territory. He is being tracked and pursued quite aggressively by the Serbian army. What he does, he attempts to lie low. He attempts to go unnoticed. He attempts to blend in so that no one discovers him. His one goal, is to as quickly as possible, make it back across the border into safe territory.

Well sometimes that reflects the way that a lot of people see the interaction between the Church and the rest of the World. Sometimes it gets based on an 'Us vs. Them' mentality. It is the good vs. the bad. The right vs. the wrong. Whichever side you are on, the people on the other side are the enemy. The Church is on one side over here and the World is on the other side, over there and in the middle, what is being fought for is society. That is what is being fought for. Culture is what is being battled for. That means, if you are a Christian, out in the World, you are effectively behind enemy lines. So your strategy, if this is your paradigm, your strategy must be to keep low. Try not to stand out. Try not to get noticed. Try to blend into your surrounding. Your goal is to get back to safe territory as quick as possible. In this paradigm, the Church becomes a fortress that is designed to keep the enemy out. It is a base from which you can launch your attacks into enemy territory. When viewing life through the lens of this perspective, being in the World becomes a necessary evil, to be avoided whenever possible and escaped as soon as possible. Now, that is how the Pharisees, the religious elite of Jesus' day, viewed their World. They were at war with the World. And the World, for them, included anyone who was not one of them. The group of people that often get referred

to as 'The sinners and tax collectors'. You'll see that phrase in the Gospels quite often. The sinners and the tax collectors, but not just them, because anyone who was sick was viewed as being under some kind of condemnation from God. Anyone with a disease was viewed as being unclean and untouchable and someone to stay away from. Even just the average Jew didn't fit in with their group because the average Jew didn't keep every detail of the Law as meticulously as they did. Especially all the extra little details of the Law that the Pharisees decided to add in. You see, the Pharisees philosophy was: Avoid contact with the World whenever possible. And when entering into enemy territory was unavoidable they would retreat as soon as possible and go through elaborate rituals to wash off the stain of contamination. But Jesus had a different way of looking at things. Jesus spent most of his time with the people that the Pharisees tried to avoid. He ate with the sinners and tax collectors. He spent time with the Samaritans and the Gentiles. He touched those who were called unclean. His actions drew sharp criticism, as you might expect, from the Pharisees and the religious leaders of the day. Matthew records this story in Matt. 9:10-13:

"While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this they asked his disciples "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" On hearing this, Jesus said "It is not the healthy that need a doctor but the sick. Go learn what this means. I desire mercy not sacrifice, for I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

You see, to Jesus, the sinners and the tax collectors, the outcast and the unclean were never the enemy. There is a war going on but it's not between the people of God and the people of the World, it's between God and Satan. It is between the forces of righteousness and the forces of destruction and it is people who are being fought for. It is humanity that is being battled over. And that changes my view of myself because I am no longer on the 'good side' because of my own merits or because of my intelligence or because of my self-discipline, or my: fill in the blank. In fact, what it does, it makes me realize that I am valued by God. Valued by God so much that He is willing to fight for me. And it also changes my view of who you are. You see, you are valued by God so much that He would fight for you as well. That means, that no matter who you are, you are not the enemy. And being with those outside the Church is no longer a foray into hostile territory. It has become, for me, a rescue mission. And thus, every opportunity with my non-Christian friends and co-workers and neighbours is an opportunity to reclaim comrades from the enemy. Therefore, the goal is no longer avoiding contact but making connections. The mission is not to go unnoticed but to live, in fact, in a way that gets noticed. The Church is no longer meant to be a fortress from which to launch attack, the Church now has become a city of refuge for people to escape to. It is the hospital for the sick and the weary and the injured and the scarred. Which is why God's design for the Church is for it to be IN the community. Because God's plan is to put His people in the lives of other people in an attempt to reach all the people. Now, what exactly does that look like? We'll talk about that in just a few minutes.

(Song interlude)

The movie *Pirates of the Caribbean*, starts out with Captain Jack Sparrow sitting in jail. As he's sitting in jail, in the middle of the night, he hears cannon fire outside and he recognizes that it is *The Black Pearl* that has come into Port. Jack's kind of excited about that so he looks out the window and says "The Pearl!" The guys in the cell next to him are not nearly as excited and they come running over to where Jack is standing and they say "I've heard stories about *The Black Pearl*. It's been terrorizing the waters for nigh on ten years and attacking ships and ports all along the seashore and they never leave any survivors." And Jack get's a grin and says "No Survivors? Then where do the stories come from?"

Well, God puts the Church in the community for much the same reason; to tell the story. That's why God just doesn't zip us straight to Heaven when we get baptized. That's why we don't evaporate when we come out of the water. That would also freak a lot of people out. But, more than that, it's because God wants His people in the community. He doesn't want us to isolate ourselves away from the rest of the World permanently. Now, isolating yourself with God for a time, is a good thing, Jesus did that regularly. We should do that as well. But to permanently isolate ourselves from the rest of the World is not God's design. God calls Christians to go out into the World and tell people the story of what He has done. How does that happen? Well, I'm going to get Craig to come share for a few minutes. Craig is here and he was up here last week and made an announcement about youth activity coming up, and so you know that Craig is here as our youth minister. But he is also here giving a portion of his time, to organizing us, as a group, to become involved in our community and so, I'm going to give Craig a chance to share a few stories about "Speaking God's Story Into the Lives of People.

Thanks Mike. When I was 17 my hockey team found out that I was a Christian, by accident. If you know anything about teenage guys playing sports, usually those guys are from a different crowd of people. This group certainly was. We're in the dressing room and before a Game, we're in the dressing room and like most sports teams, they like to listen to music. So they brought the Ghetto Blaster, at that time, I guess we call it a stereo now. They brought a ghetto blaster in there and they discovered, to their horror, they didn't put a cassette tape in. We had cassette tapes too!!! So, the option was, the only radio station we could get in the locker room was country music. Country music, to get excited for a hockey game, they don't seem to mesh. One of the guys on the team was very observant and he noticed that before the game, I had been listening to my Walkman and I had a cassette that was playing through my Walkman. So he pipes up and says "Hey Reid! You got a tape in there?" I said "Yeah, yeah, I do." "Well what is it? Put it in man." "Well, it's kind of not your kind of music." And they said "Well, what is it? What are you listening to?" And I said "Well, it's Christian." "You listen to Gospel music man." And I said "No, it's kind of got a rock and roll flavour to it." It was a band called Petra. You might have heard of them, sort of. And they said "Well, just put it in man, we need something." So before our hockey game, we were listening to Petra. Wake

up Call. From that point on, my nickname on the team was Reverend Reid. It really, it took, it took. The guys actually came to appreciate who I was and the character that I had and that was a really good thing. I was one of the guys who wore one of the Letters on the jersey, so they started to associate, kind of leadership and character and that kind of stuff, so, I mean, it came out.

There was one particular player on our team whom I will never forget. He was our goaltender and was a great guy. We connected. His parents connected with my parents, there was a little bit of a friendship developing there. We had to drive out of the city to a game and so he had his license and a car, I did not have a car, so I got a ride with him. As we were driving out, we started talking about God. We started talking about who God was for me, and who he thought God was. He went to the Catholic School and, our conversation kind of sat there. And this is where I wish it went further. This is one of those things where I now look back and think "Man, if I only had of said more." About three years after that, I was away at school and my mom called me and said that, that young man decided to take his own life. I guess there were things in his life that were really heavy. I just thought, what hope was missing? What hope was missing from that young man's life and how could I have had more of an influence there? But we can't live in the past and so, that's a reminder for me.

Now, there was another time where, a couple of years after that I was in need of some money so I decided that I would tree plant. Tree planting is with another different group of people. These people like to relax with various different substances and so, I had thought "I'm going to do this." So, there were two different companies. There was a company run by Christians and there was a company run by non-Christians. I applied with the Christian company and thought "Well, that will be a safe environment for me to learn how to do this and make money." And I applied with the company that was with non-Christians cause I thought "I just need a job and if this company doesn't hire me, I better make sure I get hired."

The Christian guys took their time. The other company hired me 'like that'. And so, I had given my word that I would work for this company. The Christian company said "We want you to work for us." It came down that I had to make a decision. I really had to pray about the decision. I knew a couple guys that worked for the Christian company and they said it had a good reputation, and so it was tough. My heart of hearts said "There are people who need Jesus working for these non-Christian guys" so I stayed with my commitment and I went and I worked. Well they soon found out, on purpose, that I was a Christian. I didn't hide the fact that, when we went into town on the weekend, the first thing I did was find a church to go to. When we were out talking, and when we were out, I didn't use the same substances that they used. I made an intentional effort to share the love of Jesus. There was a guy names Jimmy. Jimmy had a loud mouth on him, every second word, if not every word, seemed to be a curse word. Jimmy and I did not get along and I thought "There is no way I will ever connect with Jimmy." For some odd reason, Jimmy took a liking to me. He came alongside of me, showed me some tricks on how to make money planting trees and all this kind of stuff. It happened, the second summer that I went to plant trees that Jimmy was back and it was like the second day

I got there and I rolled out of my tent and went to the breakfast trailer and it's overcast and it's raining and it's cold. There's Jimmy, at the other end of the buffet line, getting breakfast, and he hollers over "Hey Reverend, how about you talk to the Big Guy up there! We need it about five degrees warmer with blue skies." "Okay Jimmy." I just thought, "Okay God. You're bigger than all of this. You can do this and if you want to testify as to who you are, then please, do something about this rain." It was a simply prayer. I didn't think much of it. Went out on our pieces of land. We're sticking trees in the ground, everybody's dirty and mosquitoes are getting us. I wasn't too focused on what was going on around me. By lunch hour, I looked up and the sky is blue and I'm taking off layers. Jimmy's over there and I hollered over "Hey Jimmy! Is that five degrees warmer with sunshine good enough for ya'?" Jimmy hollers back "You didn't pray about that, did you man?" And from that point Jimmy and I had a conversation about who Jesus was. I learned that, for me to essentially just live my Christian faith on my own, was comfortable, but for me to step out and share my faith with those who need hope, with those who need Jesus, that got to be exciting! That stirred something in me and to this day, it's a conviction in me that people need to hear.

Am I perfect? No. But is neither here or there and God is not letting me rest. We've been in Saskatoon for three weeks now and I don't consider the play structure enemy territory...but we were there and our daughter has a way of connecting with any little person. She was playing on the play structure and she gets to the slide and there's this little guy on the slide and she's waiting in line to go down and it turns out the little guy's mom and dad were there so I made a comment on how cute he was, and we started chatting and I find out they are from Iran. We're talking, and if there are any engineer's in the place, I have a couple of Iranian engineers who are looking for work. They've been here three months and every job interview says "We need Canadian experience." Anyway, I chatted with them for awhile and now I'm getting E-mails from them. We're working at getting connected. So, just taking that step, just to make a comment, or you can use humour or to ask a question, it's really, I just find it opens doors.

Ben is my neighbour beside me. Ben is a 53 year old man who has moved his family here from the Philippines. He's out there every day and his cars are immaculate. They're spotless, so I always comment on his cars and we have a chat. The other day, his wife, whom I've never spoken to, as best as I know Leah has never spoken to. Leah was in the backyard with Lena playing and Matilda comes and looks over the fence and says "We're having a birthday celebration for our nephew on the long weekend and we'd love for you and your husband and your daughter to come. Just really neat. Really neat, what happens when we step out. When we just are courageous and forget about ourselves and just talk to other people.

I guess, along the lines of what Mike is sharing with us this morning, it's exciting. It's exciting to be able to share Jesus with people and to build those relationships and to make those connections and to be praying for people, because the enemy has his plans too and I know that it moves God's heart when His children come home. So, I hope that these little snippets of my life resonate with you and you're thinking of people that you can be connecting with and

sharing the love of God with.

(Mike again!)

One last little thought to share with you this morning. In Matthew, Chapter 5, in what often get's called The Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says this to his followers: Matt. 5:14-16:

“You are the light of the World, sitting on a hilltop cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, the lamp is placed on a stand where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for everyone to see, so that everyone will praise your Heavenly Father.”

Jesus calls his followers to be lights in a dark World. And we are not just lights for light's sake, but we are lights with a purpose. Imagine yourself in a dark room if you would. Imagine if this room, which has no external windows, what if we dimmed all the lights down and turned them all off. Would this room be dark? Close. Except we've got those big windows in the back on the doors and the sun is kind of shining in there. So imagine if we put like garbage bags over the windows in the door. Would this room be dark? Almost, except even on a black screen, these projectors put off an awful lot of light. And even with that, it would still be fairly light in here. So, if we turned off the projectors, and we turned off the lights and we put garbage bags on the doors, would this room be completely pitch black dark? No! Why? Let's say we boarded up the doors. Would it be dark then? No! because Jolynn's got her Iphone. Boarded up the doors and we take away all your toys. Then is it dark? No! And I'll tell you why. Because there are six Exit signs in here. And if we did all of that stuff and made it as dark as we could in here, there would still be light and it wouldn't just be light for ambiance sake, it would be light with a purpose. It is light that is giving direction. And that's what God wants His people to be for the World. Not just light, for light's sake, not just light to just kind of give a little brightness into a dark World, He wants us to be light, that gives direction. The light of the Christian is meant to give direction to God. To show them the way out of the sin in their lives. To show them the way to forgiveness and redemption. To show them the way to meaning and purpose in life. To show them a way to a restored relationship with their Creator.

Now, you might be thinking “I'm just one person and I'm one little light. I don't really have that much influence in my World. I don't really have that much impact on the people around me. My light seems like a pretty low wattage bulb in a big, big, dark, World. Well, if that's how you're feeling, let me give you one simple thought. I remember when I was young and I would go to Roughrider games. Occasionally I would get to sit in the big area with all the adults. There were a couple of times, in my youth, when I went to a Roughrider game and as you were walking into the game they handed you these cards. Probably maybe, 18 inches by two feet, or something. On one side they were green and on the other side, they were white. On the white side there was a bunch of little writing on it. At different points in the game, the announcer would come on to the P.A. system and he would say “All right everyone. Let's do,

Number 3. So you would look at the back of your card, and you would look for where you were sitting and it would tell you for #3, are you supposed to hold up the white side or the green side? And everyone would do what they were supposed to do and when they did that, all of a sudden this great big message appeared on the stands across from you. And then you would have your turn. Then when they scored a touchdown, which was fairly rare back then, he'd come on and say, "Okay everyone, let's do Number 7." So everyone would look at their card for number seven and the big word would come across the stands (Touchdown) and everyone would think that was wonderful. And yeah! I was just one little 18 by 24" card, but when I put my card together with the other 10,000 cards that were sitting in the bleachers that day, all of a sudden, this great big picture appeared. I used to think that was the coolest thing I had ever seen.....until I watched the Olympics. In the opening ceremonies they did kind of the same thing, they had these big words showing up across all of the audience, except theirs were cool, they were all lit up and they glowed in the dark and not only that, they didn't do these kind of pixelated words, they did like, pictures and they moved and they went around the whole arena and it was just incredible, and so, I did some research. I thought "How do they possibly do that? Is it computer? Is it like C.G.I. that they put when you're watching it on T.V. but in real life it's just black, or what's happening there? I discovered, this is how they did it. Every seat had this little panel on it. 70, 500 panels on each and every seat in the arena. Each of the panels had these 9 little lights on them. When the computer told all the panels to show the certain lights at a certain time, you got these incredible pictures that spanned the entire stadium.

Well, maybe you feel like you're just one little seat in the entire stadium. Maybe you feel like your just one little pixel on one little paddle in the stadium. And maybe for us, as a Church in the City of Saskatoon, maybe you think "You know what, we're not the biggest church in the City. There are a lot of bigger churches that have bigger buildings, that have larger attendances, have higher budgets than we do and so, maybe in the City of Saskatoon we're this one little dot of light out here on Cardinal Crescent. But I thought about it this week and I realized, you know what? We are not just one dot of light out there on Cardinal Crescent, because after we finish here this morning, the light is going to go from here and it's going to go to all sorts of places all across the City. To all different neighbourhoods where all of us live. The people who live around us in those neighbourhoods in those communities are going to get to see a little piece of that light shared with them. And not just in the City. Those of you out in Martensville, in Warman, and Clavet and Corman Park, you guys get to have your light out there too. You just didn't fit on my map and so I apologize for that.

I thought, you know what, it's not even just where I live, my house is one of those stars, most of your houses are one of those stars if I could find it on the map. My house is one of those stars, but it's not just that, because each of you has another place where say, you go to work. When you go to work, maybe it's not a bright light, maybe it's not a huge light, but you can be a little light in the place that you work. This is where I stopped putting stars on the map. I realize, I don't even know all the places where you guys work. I can't find all of those. But then, what if I go beyond that? What if I go to all the schools where people are attending and



the light they can be there. What about the recreational facilities, and the hockey rinks and the parks and the swimming pools that you go to and mingle with people and can be lights in those areas. What about all the stores and the restaurants and the coffee shops that you go in and you sit in and you interact with people. What about when you're being lights in all those kinds of places. Every act of kindness. Each word of encouragement. Every helping hand offered. Every neighbour who is cared for. Each co-worker who is assisted. Each conversation, every interaction, is a moment of light that can direct people back to God.

When you add all of your moments of light, together with all of my moments of light, gradually, we start to see a picture emerge and it is a picture in which God is being revealed to people throughout our community.

I want to end by showing you this video, we saw this one before, I don't remember if it was a year ago or a year and a half ago, but it was awhile ago. As we look forward to the Fall, next weekend is Labour Day weekend, it's kind of kick-off to the Fall for many things. As we look forward to the Fall this year, I want you, as we watch this video together, to consider what kind of impact we as a Church, what kind of impact you as an individual, can have on our community, on our City of Saskatoon in the upcoming year. What can we do that can really and truly make God the God of this City.