

RED LETTER CHALLENGE, Week 6 ~ PENTECOST SUNDAY

GOING

Imagine with me that you are a parent. You're in a very public place with your children. There are lots and lots of people around, and noises. You turn to look, and you don't see one of your children. You've lost your child. Immediately, panic fills you! Your mind is racing. Your adrenaline is pumping. You know the world is dangerous place. And I have to believe that any parent with a missing child will spare no expense and is passionate to the nth degree in searching for that missing child. And we pray that they are found.

I hope that never happens to you. But if you can identify with that kind of situation, if you can feel both immense love and deep concern for a child who is missing, then, do you know what? You are feeling a little bit of what God experiences every day.

God is searching. **God is SEARCHING for his LOST CHILDREN.** God made all people – they all rightfully belong to Him. God loves all people. All people – every soul – belongs *with* God, near Him, knowing Him, trusting in Him. But, the first people – Adam and Eve -- turned away from Him, and all people since then are born into a broken relationship with God. Today, many people keep turning away from God. They are lost. Without hope. Without meaning. Without forgiveness. Without heaven to come. Lost!

Yet, God, because He loves people so very much, and because He is so concerned for each lost soul, as soon as people turned away from Him and became lost, God began to search. God began, might be considered a three phase search and rescue strategy to find his lost children.

1. The first phase was the nation of Israel. God chose Abraham and all his descendants. God singled them out, blessed them, spoke to them, taught them how to worship Him. The plan was that through the nation of Israel all the world would see God's loving character, see God's mighty saving works, and hear God's

truthful Word. Through that people of Israelites God was calling all people back to Himself.

2. Then the second phase of God's search and rescue plan **is Jesus Christ** himself who said *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."* We are lost and Jesus is our way home. God Himself came to us in Jesus to teach us, to pay for all sins of all time by giving His life when He died on the cross. And Jesus' resurrection has opened the way to life eternal in heaven, reunited with our heavenly Father.

3. And then the third phase of that rescue plan **is the Church** – with a big "C". The big "C" means people. Not church buildings or church organizations. People. God's people. Any person who trusts in Jesus as their Forgiver and the Leader of their life. Any person who is a believer no matter what race, or nation, or time in history. That phase of God's rescue plan began on the Day of Pentecost. Today we remember and celebrate the Day of Pentecost. And here, in this city, in your home, in your neighborhood and workplace, you, we are part of God's loving, urgent search and rescue operation.

After Jesus rose from the dead on Easter morning, just before He left them and ascended into heaven, He told His small group of followers: *"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* Acts 1:8 That began the third phase that God has entrusted to you and me. That small group, those humble beginnings, have become the biggest and most important thing ever on this earth!

Recently a couple of guys wrote a book about the appeal of garage stories. Do you know what a garage story is?

Here's one: Bill Hewlett and Dave Packard begin their PC manufacturing company in a one car garage. Now we know it as HP. In another garage, Steve Jobs along with his buddy Steve Wozniak began Apple computers. Michael Dell didn't begin Dell computers in a garage but in a humble dorm room. Mark Zuckerberg began FaceBook in a dorm room.

There are tons of these kinds of stories – stories about people starting what would become big companies, successful organizations or world-changing movements in dirty kitchens, janitor closets or at coffee tables in their living rooms.

But what’s interesting about these stories is that they are often more complex than the way they are told. They usually had an advocate or an investor that came alongside of them to help them get off the ground.

Christianity has a “garage story” too. Except we didn’t start in a one-car garage, we began in an upper room.

It was this stuffy, second-floor multi-purpose room that the disciples retreated to after Jesus had risen from the dead and had ascended to the heavens above.

But like all those other “garage stories” that specific place -- the upper room -- wasn’t the key. And the skill and talent of the disciples wasn’t the key either. After all, these were the men and women who had run away from Jesus when he had been arrested. Talent? Education? They didn’t have much of it.

But Jesus had told them to stay there and wait, *because* they didn’t have what it takes to begin “the Church” – with a big “C.” They didn’t have the insight and skill to start a movement that would turn the world upside-down, shape history for the next 2 millennium, and be the greatest force for good ever. They needed help, they needed empowering, they needed an advisor, a “counselor” who is God, the Holy Spirit.

Today, in this place, in this community, God has chosen us to be the ones who carry on His search and rescue plan. And like the first believers, we don’t have what it takes. We need the empowering of God, the Holy Spirit.

When I was little I watched all the Charlie Brown – Peanuts cartoon – specials on TV. One of the characters was named “Pig Pen.” He was always so dirty that a huge cloud of dust surrounded him everywhere he went.

That character, Pig Pen, reminds me of the first phase of God’s plan to search for and rescue lost people He made and

loves. Through the Nation of Israel, God created a people group who were holy and dedicated to Him. The central focus was on God's holiness. First in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple, there were 4 rooms or areas that got progressively holier and cleaner.

People's sin was like Pig Pen's cloud of dust. That dirt of sin could not be brought into God's holiness. The filth of sin was impurity that could not contaminate what was pure and holy. So non-Jewish, Gentile people couldn't even enter the Temple or the Tabernacle. And only Jewish people who were ceremonially clean could go into the first, outer court. The next holy area was reserved for only priests to enter. That's where priests offered sacrifices to God. Then the Most Holy Place – or "The Holy of Holies" – was the room where God lived on earth. Only the High Priest could go into God's presence, and only once per year, and only after elaborate purification rites, and only with the blood of a sacrifice to pay for his sinfulness.

Through that system all people of the world came to know that God is real, that there is only One true God, who is holy and the maker of all things.

So, in that first phase of God's strategy to rescue lost people the idea is that all people were Pig Pen like sinful. And they had to come to God to be cleansed.

Then, God came down to the human race in Jesus. Jesus is phase 2 of God's search and rescue plan, and Jesus completely reversed everything.

In Jesus, who is true and holy God, came down into the real broken world of our lives. Jesus didn't stay away from Pig-Pen-like sinful people lest His holiness be contaminated. Instead, Jesus brought God's holiness TO people to cleanse them. So Jesus ate with tax collectors. He touched the sick and healed them. He came face-to-face with people possessed by demons and cast the evil spirits out.

And then, going even farther, in the ultimate act of search and rescue, Jesus, who is God, who is sinless and holy, not only

touched our sin and filth, but He *became* it. Jesus chose to go into our sin and filth. He took our darkness into Himself and carried it to the cross. The holy Father in heaven, turned His back on His Son, and condemned Him to suffer hell for us as Jesus gave His life, dying alone, becoming our sin for us. God tells us in the Bible: ***“Christ didn’t have any sin. But God made him become sin for us.”*** *2 Corinthians 5:21* He did this for **YOU!** To save **you!** To bring **YOU** back home to Him where you belong.

Aren’t you glad?

Have you ever been out in the middle of nowhere on a dark, dark night? Then, off in the distance you see one faint light. Maybe it’s from a farmhouse in the distance. One single light can pierce the darkness from such a long, long ways. Light always overcomes darkness.

We are like that dark, dark night. Our lives and our world is dark. We are in the darkness of sin. Jesus came into our darkness to bring light. Set you free from darkness and hopelessness. Jesus is THE rescue light, THE search light into our dark world of sin – into our dark and hopeless lives. Jesus has brought hope and light that our darkness cannot put out.

Seeing one light pierce the darkness is great! What if, however, there were lots, and lots of little lights all shining at the same time? The effect of thousands and millions of lights shining can be so bright!

Have you ever seen looked out of an airplane window at night? You are in a plane cruising at 30,000 feet. You peer out the window, and a city down below glows, giving light to the whole atmosphere!

This is what God has done, and is doing now. Now, in phase 3 of God’s rescue plan, He no longer sends Jesus as the one and only search light. You and me, and 3 billion more believers in Christ Jesus give light to this world.

Phase 1 of God’s search and rescue plan was that the world could see God’s glory in the nation of Israel and only come to Him

after dealing with their sin so that they wouldn't pollute God's holiness.

Phase 2 of God's searching was to send Jesus to bring God's holiness to sinful people and to actually transform them. To forgive them. He came to become our sin and pay for it, removing it forever.

Now, Phase 3, is not just Jesus going into our sinful world. Phase 3 is not Jesus searching alone. Now, today, right here with us, God sends us – all of us – in the Name and place and power of Jesus. This began at Pentecost, and goes on until the End, when Jesus comes again.

Before Jesus left His disciples and ascended into heaven, He had completed His part of God's search and rescue plan. Jesus promised them that THEY would now go out. They would carry the news about God's love and forgiveness in Jesus to all people.

But before these disciples try to do anything on their own power, by their own blundering, Jesus said, "Wait. Hang tight. Wait for the Holy Spirit to come on you, to empower you to take the message to the world." There are 120 disciples that are all in this room together waiting for the day of Pentecost.

As Pentecost arrives, so does the Holy Spirit. It comes upon these 120 followers that are in this upper room together, waiting. We are told that it comes as a mighty wind with tongues of fire resting on the disciples. Whoa! And as a result of the tongues of fire resting on these followers of Christ, they are enabled to speak the languages of the people from all over the world who are there in the city of Jerusalem.

The disciples found themselves speaking in different languages they didn't know how to speak prior to this moment in history. They were empowered by God to Go. GO! Go carry Jesus to a world of people who need Him. And people did come to faith. That very day 3000 believed and were baptized.

Today, we stand in the place of those first disciples. We are not in Jerusalem, but in Amherst, and South Amherst, Vermilion,

and Lorain. And if you are like most Christians, the idea that WE share Jesus with others, brings fear in your heart. You may feel so unprepared, so inadequate. And the idea of you going to search and rescue people in God's plan brings a lot of guilt to you. You may feel you've done so poorly at this. You've chickened out so many times.

Friends, don't worry. God empowered the first disciples, and He will empower and use you miraculously too. God loved and forgave the first disciples. And God loves you. Through Jesus He forgives your guilt too.

On the first Day of Pentecost, the disciples spoke to the folks who came. It says everyone heard them "in their own native language."

Since that first day forward, on to today, sharing what Jesus has done for people is "in their native language." That means, you talk regular talk. You don't need a special degree – an advanced education. Sharing Jesus is not just for specially trained people like pastors. You simple share honestly, lovingly, truthfully what Jesus has done for you. And that He would do the same for them too.

Sharing Jesus is not hard. The Gospel is simple. Not complex. Even a child can get it. It's about: ▪ Trust Jesus as Forgiver. ▪ Love Jesus because He first loved us. ▪ Don't put Him off because tomorrow may be too late. The Gospel is simple.

Because of God' Spirit in you, you / we CAN do this! So, with confidence & joy, we take up the purpose God has us here to fulfill. Through you, God may change the life and the eternity of someone you love. And with God's empowering of the Holy Spirit, let's get going! There's a world needing rescuing. And God's trusting YOU to be the ones who go and speak for Him.

Let's pray.

Lord God, thank you. Thank you that You have placed a high calling on your church. You have placed on us the need and the importance to be your witnesses in this world. Lord thank you, thank you that you love the people who are lost. Lord, grow that love in our hearts as well, that we might share what we have received with those that are in need. We ask that in Your name. Amen.