

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

(June 5, 2016)

Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

Kenya, 101

Introduction: God sightings in Kenya...

To start off with, a story of God at work.

While Sam was with Dean, Bob Hamilton and I were staying at the Savannah Lodge, a 5-star hotel (☺) just outside the small village of Kungundo.

Bob and I had had good interactions with the housekeeping staff at the lodge during the days of our stay, so, on the day before we left, one of the women asked that I give her something that she could remember us by.

I honestly couldn't think of a thing I had that she would be interested in. And then I thought of one thing.

So, on the last day, just minutes before we were to leave, I saw all three of the ladies together, approached them, and told them that I did have one thing to give them.

I proceeded to tell them the good news of the Gospel. I told them that God loved them so much that He sent Jesus, His Son, to offer Himself on a cross to pay the price for their sin. I told them that totally separate from any good works they could do, they could be forgiven for all their sins by turning to Jesus and trusting Him for their eternal salvation.

I asked them if they had ever heard this good news before and they told me that they had not.

They had always thought that they had to be good in order to go to Heaven (a belief that is very widespread in Kenya *and elsewhere*) - and I assured them that there was no way they could ever be good enough to make it to God on their own. They could only be saved by God's amazing grace through faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

I left them with this: ***[John 3:16] For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life*** - a verse that says nothing about good works.

The women all expressed their appreciation for the "gift" of the Gospel and promised that they would think about these things AND that they would read the Gospel of John.

That story is one of many that I could tell this morning where God gave wonderful opportunities to share His message with open-hearted people.

On Saturday evening, June 25th, the Missions Committee will be hosting an evening fellowship in Community Blend where Sam and I will have a chance to share more stories and to interact with you about the wonderful things God is doing in Kenya. I hope you can join us then.

The primary purpose for my going to Kenya was to speak to a gathering of about fifty pastors and other church leaders for a three-day conference.

These men and women, who have tremendous hearts for God but few opportunities for biblical training, were eager, receptive, engaged. The conference went well and we enjoyed wonderful connection with these folks - all of this clear answers to your prayers. So thanks for praying!

I was one presenter and the other was Bob Hamilton. Bob is a great guy, a Bible school and seminary graduate, a recently retired chemist, and a really bright and energetic man who loves the Lord. Bob lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The conference, hosted by Crossway, was held in Kungundo, a small village about an hour and a half outside of Nairobi in Kenya's Central Province.

Bob and I split the teaching time roughly 50/50, giving each of us about eight hours of lecture over the three days. We had been expecting to be translated into Swahili, but everyone present had enough English for us to speak without a translator.

This was a great advantage in both communication and relational connection and also greatly increased the amount of content we were able to provide.

Bob gave the pastors practical tools to help them with Bible interpretation and I focused my time with the group on the themes of Christian discipleship and disciple-making.

Now, please permit me one more Kenya story on the way to recapping the pastors' conference and giving what will serve as the "message" for today's time together.

I have now been to Africa three times. That is three times more than many people, so someone (maybe you?) could be excused if they think that I know Africa.

I don't know Africa.

I have been to a small section of a single province of one nation - Kenya - three times. I have spent a sum total of four weeks of my life there. I do not know Africa. I don't know Kenya. I don't really even know that small section of that single province (Central Province).

For someone to KNOW Kenya would involve knowing something about:

- all forty-two of the tribal groups that live there, each with their own separate language and culture;
- the functioning of the current government, a democracy that replaced the colonial rule of Great Britain (1888-1962) and the ongoing struggles of independence;

- the climate and topography and geography and natural resources of the place;
 - the economy and the growing financial investments of China, which are replacing the dwindling investments of the West;
 - the often awkward and helpful and damaging relationship between the West and Kenya;
- ...and so much more.

Now, I truly love Kenya, but I don't really know it and I don't pretend to know it. So I refuse to make sweeping judgments about Kenya. And when talking with Kenyans I don't tell them what they are doing wrong and how to deal with some of their great challenges.

You can imagine, then, that I was a little taken aback when a Kenyan I had just met - a strong Christian from one of the churches we visited - began to lecture me about America. He instructed me about what America should do to fix its problems. He got very specific about America's moral and political problems.

This man - a good man - knew what he knew about America via the Internet.

He had never been to San Antonio or New York or LA or Denver. He had never hiked the Rockies, been to the Gulf, had never seen the wheatfields of Nebraska or the oil fields of North Dakota. He didn't know the first thing about the culture of the Midwest, the Deep South, the Far Northwest, Appalachia, the Southwest, or New England.

He didn't know America and what's worse, he didn't know that he didn't know. But he had answers.

I tell that story to highlight that it is a very complicated and difficult thing to get to know a people and a place. It takes a lot of work to know a people and a place.

And, it is so, so worth it to do the hard work of getting to know the culture and the stories and the challenges and the values of a people and a place *IF* you are going to be a part of helping that community move forward, overcome problems, reach goals, and thrive.

While I was still in Kenya I decided that this morning I would tell you - in a very shortened form - what I told the pastors during the conference. And I have two reasons for doing this.

First, what I told them is what we talk about around here all the time. I took about eight hours to tell them what I'm going to tell you in the next very few minutes. But these minutes this morning will be helpful to those of you who have been around Northwest for a while and to those of you who are newer. This is who we are. What I'm going to say will help you know this people and this place.

Second, Happy Birthday! Today is the anniversary of the 1982 start of Northwest Community Church. So this is a great day to remember what has been foundational to our past, is the heartbeat of our present, and will continue to be central for our future.

Here is what we are all about at Northwest. And here is what I told fifty Christian leaders in Kenya.

1. Christian vs. disciple

Since my talks centered on discipleship, I started out by defining what a disciple is VS what a Christian is because the two terms are not interchangeable.

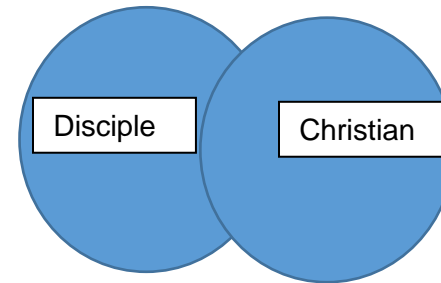
A CHRISTIAN is someone who has received the free gift of eternal life by God's grace through faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

This is the simple Gospel and it is Good News. It is the news of the grace of God offered to sinners at the expense of the death of God's Son on the basis of faith.

By contrast, a DISCIPLE is a learner. When we are talking about a biblical disciple, we mean that someone is learning about Jesus. A disciple may be a Christian and he may not be. Judas Iscariot was always referred to as a disciple, but he was not saved.

A Christian may or may not be a very good disciple. Joseph of Arimathea was a saved man who was a "secret" disciple. The Apostle Peter was a saved man who denied Jesus three times.

At some point along the way, a disciple comes to a crisis of faith and trusts Jesus. She becomes a Christian. He is saved. And from that day forward that Christian is called to grow as a disciple.



I told the pastors in Kenya that growth in discipleship involves growing in the overlapped area so that we are more and more thoroughly committed to the Person of Jesus.

Prior to the start of the conference, in the milling about time, I had already learned of the concern that young people in Kenya were being radicalized by the terrorist group, Al Shabab. For the entire conference, we couched our interest in growing as disciples in terms of "radical discipleship", being "radicalized" for Jesus.

And according to Jesus (Luke 14) radical disciples:

- love Him so much that all of their other loving relationships in life - spouse, children, parents, siblings - appear to be hatred by comparison;
- have given up the right of ownership to all their possessions, viewing themselves now as stewards, not owners;
- have taken up their cross, meaning that they have taken a journey of following from which there is no turning back.

Radical disciples are growing in their commitment to Jesus. They increasingly submit to Jesus and they follow Jesus courageously.

And, no surprise, what is true for a group of fifty pastors in Kenya is true for all of us here today.

Point of application -

All of you here today are disciples. You are all learning about Jesus. It is possible that some here today have not yet come to a crisis of faith. You are a disciple, but you are not yet a Christian.

You have not yet understood that while God loves you desperately, your sin has separated you from this holy God - and you are in need of a Savior.

This Jesus you have been learning about is the Savior you need. He died on a cross as a sacrifice for your sins. He paid the penalty that was due you. He rose from the dead and now stands before you, offering a gift that is free to you, but that cost Him everything.

The gift is eternal life and forgiveness of sins and it is yours when you put your faith in this saving Lord. If that is you, today, please, come to Jesus now. Receive the gift and know what it is to become God's son, God's daughter.

And once you have become a Christian, your Savior calls you to become a radicalized disciple. He sets the bar high and all of us who aspire to be a radical disciple will be growing toward that goal for the rest of our lives. But that is what we are all about here.

We receive what God freely gives, and we respond by faith and obedience and submission, cheering each other on all along the way.

As the conference continued, I spoke about a variety of "marks" of a radicalized disciple. Among them was the mark of servanthood.

2. They are growing in their embrace of the idea of servant leadership.

When the brothers, James and John, approached Jesus and asked for prominent positions in His kingdom (which they were certain was about to be ushered in when they got to Jerusalem), and the other ten disciples became indignant at the brothers' request (no

doubt because the two beat them to the punch!), Jesus knew He had a mess on His hands, with only days left before He would die on a Roman cross.

So, He gathered His disciples together and told them that firstness in His kingdom came by racing to the end of the line. The way to be great - a great thing to be! - is by becoming a servant.

And Jesus Himself served as the greatest Servant ever. Previewing His own sacrificial death on the cross, He said **[Mark 10:45] "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for all."**

I spoke at the Kenya conference about dependence on God and risk-taking faith.

4. They are expressing their dependence to God through prayer and through risk-taking faith.

I told the pastors that God wants us to pray and to not lose heart because He is not like a stingy neighbor who has to be brow-beaten to give bread to his neighbor in the middle of the night. Nor is He like a heartless judge who finally gives a helpless widow what she needs because he's tired of her bugging him.

No, we can come to God in prayer with confidence because God loves us SO MUCH MORE that He will give us what we need (no, not necessarily what we want) at just the right time and in just the right way.

Further, I told the pastors that risk-taking faith is at the heart of following Jesus. Peter saw Jesus standing on the water and concluded that being with Jesus was the place to be; not the apparent safety of the boat.

So, he got out of the rocking boat and at the command of Jesus to do so, walked on the waves to Jesus. To the other eleven, the boat seemed like a good place to be in a storm, but Peter knew that the safest and the best place to be is always the place of obedience to Jesus' command.

Jesus' radical disciples also have a passion to reach out to people who are far from God.

5. They have a vision to reach a lost world for Jesus.

Based on the backstory of four women who are included in Jesus' genealogy, we discern that He never intended to remove Himself from people who sinned (Rahab, the harlot), people who were far from God (Ruth the Moabitess), or from people who were broken (Tamar and Bathsheba).

Jesus was invited to parties thrown by notorious sinners - and He went to the parties. Jesus personally dealt with spiritually unclean victims of demons and socially unclean victims of leprosy.

He reached out to upper class, religious moralists who were far from God (John 3 - Nicodemus, "**the teacher of Israel**") and to outcast, immoral Samaritans who were far from God (John 4 - the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well).

When He looked at lost people He didn't feel revulsion. He felt compassion. He was all torn up when He saw them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

I told the pastors that God really loves people who are far from Him. That's why He sent Jesus in the first place. That's why we often see Jesus hanging with people with very bad reputations in the Gospels. And I told them that this is where He wants His radical disciples to be today, too.

I also told the pastors in Kenya that radical disciples of Jesus have as their goal to love as Jesus loved.

6. Radical disciples love as Jesus loved.

I walked the pastors through the life of the Apostle John, who saw every public miracle Jesus performed and heard every public teaching He ever gave.

John was there in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit fell on the original one hundred and twenty followers of Jesus and he heard Peter's sermon that resulted in three thousand people believing in Jesus. John was there for the church's scattering and exponential growth throughout Asia Minor.

He served as the Bishop of the church at Ephesus for forty years and spent his final years in exile on the Island of Patmos.

And this "**son of thunder**", this call-down-fire-from-heaven-to-consume-our-enemies blustering bigot, has been known for the last two thousand years as "*the apostle of love.*"

Who would have ever thought that would have happened?

But doesn't it make sense that after all he had experienced and all he had seen and heard and learned, the essential message of his final three letters to struggling Christians was, "**Love one another.**"

John got it from Jesus, who told His first followers that the world will know that we are His [radical] disciples if we **[John 13:35] love one another.**

So, you and I are to love one another.

Conclusion:

Due to the constraints of time, I didn't speak at the conference in Kenya about *Building Faith at Home* or *Generous Living and Giving* or *Loving and Living the Bible*.

But aside from those omissions, what I highlighted as essentials of radical discipleship is what we talk about around here all the time. It's what we value and it's what we are all about.

- We are called to radical commitment to Jesus Christ.
- You and I are called to servanthood.
- We are called to expressing our dependence on God through the not-doing of prayer and through risky obedience to Jesus' commands.
- We are called to love people who are far from God - the way Jesus did - so that we all and so that we here become more and more a church that is a home for the least, the last, the lost; a community where those who are far from God can be loved into a trusting relationship with God.
- You and I are called to love each other, to talk with and not about each other; to work through difficulties, not skirt them; to link arms as the brothers and sisters in Christ we are in the great work of God; to take off the masks of pretending, having nothing to defend, nothing to prove, nothing to hide, admitting to weakness so that the power of God can shine through.

Being a radical, sold-out disciple is what we are each called to AND being a thoroughly committed disciple is the best of all possible ways to live.

My Kenyan friend didn't know as much as he thought he knew about America, and I don't know all that much about Kenya. But this is a birthday re-affirmation of who we, the people of God, are.

We are people who learn about Jesus, come to a crisis of faith and trust Jesus, receive through God's amazing grace the free gift of eternal life, and then follow Jesus as a radical disciple. That's the way it works in Kungundo, Kenya - and at Northwest Community Church.