

 **The Bethel Pulpit**

 **Reverand Jeff Quinto**

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 312 Wisconsin Ave, Madison WI 53703

Text: Genesis 12:1-3, Matthew 28 16-20

**“Blessed to Be a Blessing”**

**Introduction**:

**Good morning!** My name is Jeff Quinto, and I am the Executive Director of the Bethel Series. As many of you know, The Bethel Series was founded here at Bethel Lutheran Church sixty years ago. Our offices returned to Bethel Lutheran Church a year ago where I hope we have become a meaningful part of the Bethel faith community.

Thank you for allowing me to speak to you on this Lord’s Day on the Memorial Day Holiday weekend.

I would like to tell you a little about what I see as the Scriptural underpinnings for our efforts at the Bethel Series. And, I would like to share with you some of the exciting things that God is doing through the Bethel Series around the world and here at home.

As for our Scriptural underpinnings, we begin with the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 12:1-3

*Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.****2****And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.****3****I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”*

This is the Abrahamic Covenant – God’s unilateral covenant with Abraham and his descendants.

Many of you will remember it from your Bethel Series training as: “Blest to be a blessing.” It has been called “the interpretive key to the rest of the Scriptures”

Importantly it is “God’s rescue plan for humanity.” But, where do you and I fit into this covenant - this rescue plan?

The Apostle Paul tells us in Galatians 3:

***6****just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”?*

***7****Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.****8****And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.”****9****So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.*

You and I are inheritors of God’s covenant made with Abraham.

What should that mean to us?

We are blessed so that we can be a blessing, But, how might you and I be that blessing?

One instruction for us comes in the form of the Great Commission.

The Great Commission is the only commission that Jesus gives us. This is the resurrected Jesus’ last instruction to his disciples in Matthew.

### Jesus said in Matthew 28,

***19****Go therefore and make disciples of all peoples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,****20****teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

Now, not all of us are meant to go to the ends of the earth as a missionary, but we are meant to make a difference in our world. Christianity is not meant to be a spectator sport. We are each meant in our own way to make the world a better place, to bring people to Christ, and to teach them all that he commands us.

But there is good news, we are not alone. Jesus promises to be with us, to then end of the age.

**At the Bethel Series here is how we work to live out**

**the Great Commission by teaching the Bible all over the world.**

So far, we have taught the Bethel Series to over two million people in 47 different Christian denominations, teaching in twelve languages.

The Bethel Series teaches the Bible in Kenya, India, Colombia, Mexico, South Africa, the United States. . .

and in places that I cannot name where the Bethel Series is taught today in secret at night so that the teachers and students will not be arrested and imprisoned.

Let’s talk about the importance of the Bible –

Martin Luther famously said, "The bible is the cradle wherein Christ is laid."

The protestant reformation was based on the premise that the Bible was the central source of religious authority and should be made available to everyone.

The battle cry of the protestant reformation was "ad fontes" meaning "to the Sources" The Bible being the true source.

The Apostle Paul writes to Timothy in 2nd Timothy 3 that:

*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. . .”*

Paul tells us in Romans 15 that:

*4 For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*

But, the true, clear words of the Bible are often misused, sometimes for selfish purposes and sometimes out of ignorance of the true words of Scripture.

False teaching is everywhere, especially in churches in the developing world where people are often told that God will give them good health, wealth or a good job if only they just give more money to the church.

This is commonly called the prosperity gospel, and it is popular in the developing world. It is also popular here in the United States.

I remember seeing YouTube video of an Indian pastor speaking in English while a translator translated his words into the local Indian language.

As I was listening, I thought wow, this is exciting! Such enthusiasm for Jesus. Then I realized that the things he was saying that Jesus said . . . Jesus never said. It was as if he was saying things that Jesus might have said. Hundreds of people where listening to this man’s every word, but none of it was true. None of it was from the Bible. He was just making it up as he went along.

But who would know that such earnest-sounding and enthusiastic preaching was not based on the Bible?

Like the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8 who was reading Scripture, and Phillip asked him if he understood what he was reading, and the Ethiopian Eunuch said,

*“How can I, unless someone guides me?”*

That is what we do at the Bethel Series - our teaching helps guide believers to the truth of Scripture.

At its best, this teaching leads to an encounter with the Living Christ.

Against this backdrop, we live out the Great Commission by teaching the Bethel Series all over the world, most recently in January in Kisumu Kenya.

1. Christianity is on the ascendancy in much of the developing world
2. The format we use in the developing world is to teach pastors in a one-week intensive seminar giving them the tools to take the Bethel Series back to their congregations.

c. We expected 150 pastors to attend our seminar in Kisumu and 196 came to our one-week seminar

d. The people come in their best clothes.

e. They are excited to worship, dancing and singing at every chance they get.

f. Let me tell you about the multiplication effect of what we do in training pastors.

I will use Pastor Peter Muchoki from the PEFA Church near Mt. Kenya as an example. Peter will be in Madison in August, so you might get to meet him.

Peter and another pastor from Mt. Kenya took a ten-hour overnight bus ride to come to our seminar. He was one of our best students. He was excited to take back his newfound learning to his church.

Over 200 people come to Peter’s church each week. Now that he has taken the Bethel Series training, he is teaching his congregation the Bethel Series. His Bethel Series training has made him a more effective pastor.

Pastors like Peter are the good soil of Matthew 8 and will produce a harvest “*some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty*” times.

Our efforts in places like Kenya are multiplied in ways we cannot even imagine.

It is as true today as it was 2,700 years ago when God told the prophet Habakkuk in Habakkuk 1, “. . *. I am doing a work in your time that you would not believe if told*.”

It is one of the great blessings of my life to see this mighty work that God is doing through the Bethel Series teaching missions in Africa, India and wherever we are called.

**Allow me switch gears briefly and to offer our sincere thanks to Bethel Lutheran Church where we were founded and continue to be nurtured.**

Bethel Lutheran Church has supported us in substantial, important ways for over sixty years. Bethel is our most important partner in ministry.

Many of you here today are donors to the Bethel Series.

The Bethel Lutheran Church Endowment Foundation has given us a significant grant to bring the Bethel Series’ life-changing teaching to pastors in Arusha, Tanzania in February 2020. We expect at least 200 pastors to attend.

Many of you help us by stuffing envelopes for our mailings, and many of you have come with us to the Holy Land over the past two years.

To all of you at Bethel Lutheran Church, I sincerely say “thank you.”

**Upcoming Events at the Bethel Series**

a. Come to our Bethel Series Class Reunion – Saturday, August 17, 2019 at 9:00AM in the Community Room here at Bethel.

b. Attend the Bethel Series Regional Teacher Training Class on Saturday mornings monthly starting Saturday, October 12 at 9:00AM here at Bethel Lutheran Church.

c. I invite you to join us on our third annual Pilgrimage to the Holy Land, January 14-24, 2020. I hope you will be one of the 25 people on this eleven-day trip-of-a-lifetime.

d. For more information on any of this, come to our table in the Emmaus Room after this service.

**In closing, we circle back to where we started in Scripture.**

1. We learn from the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 12 that we are blessed so that we can be a blessing and in us all the families of the earth shall be blessed. This is nothing less than God’s rescue plan for humanity, and you and I are an integral part of that plan.

b. What we are meant to do with this blessing is expressed to us in the Great Commission in Matthew 28 which tells us to:

***19****Go therefore and make disciples of all peoples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,****20****teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

**Please join me in prayer**

Lord, you made a covenant with Abraham telling him that he was blessed so that he could be a blessing and in him all the families of the earth have been blessed. We are inheritors of that blessing, and we are richly blessed. Lord, may we live our lives in such a way that we are each a blessing in our broken world. May you guide us so that we reflect your light in the darkness. With your help, may the witness of our lives lead people to you to join us as your beloved disciples. IJMN Amen