

New Hope Sermon – Global Christian

Introduction

Our theme today is being a Global Christian. The Bible is full of references to God's control of the world, and purposes for the world. A Global Christian is someone who makes God's purposes their own. But what passage do you use? I chose Psalm 145. Here is someone who has the heart of a global Christian: they

1. Celebrate God's wonderful works, mighty acts, and compassion
2. Tell others of God's reigning power
3. And are kingdom conscious in daily living – God's kingdom is where God reigns, where God's priorities are lived out, where justice is being won and oppression stopped (Amos 5), where despair, heaviness and anxiety are turned to praise (Isa. 61) at God's interventions, and wailing is turned to dancing (Ps. 30). And where God's provision for all living things – that includes all people, all creation – is celebrated.

Notice too that such a person is in community, sharing God's goodness from one generation to another, proclaiming together God's might—notice the global perspective: “so that all people can know God's mighty acts (ps. 145:12).

That's the big picture. Now let's translate this into daily living. I want to start with a story from one of my dear friends named Stephanie, who is a mission researcher focused on God's work among Muslim people in the Middle East. She partners with her husband, Larry, in a mission agency called OC, the same mission agency that Boloroo has worked with since her graduation. Larry and Stephanie are currently based in London. Their daughter Katie is also in London, and her life work also revolves around Muslims. Here's the story from Stephanie's prayer letter last week.

“As I stood at the dusty stove, browning cauliflower florets in hot oil, I wondered how it came to be that I was preparing Middle Eastern food for Syrian refugee workmen in my daughter's torn-apart kitchen. There were so many things wrong about this scenario.



First of all, the place was a mess. Katie had taken out a mortgage for a big, old, dirty, run-down house in South London with the dream of turning it into a place of rest and refuge for overseas workers. Her humanitarian aid experiences in hardship assignments had moved her to try to create a space where exhausted field staff could come to decompress and re-balance. The mortgage stretched Katie to her limit, so Larry and I were helping with whatever we could to get the house livable. Katie also tried to contract help as affordably and purposefully as possible – hence the presence of a Syrian carpenter and electrician running wires and taking up rotten floor boards with me in this filthy kitchen. I should not have been cooking there, but we were all hungry.

Disintegrating floor boards,
rotted joists, debris everywhere...
it was not an easy day to be
cooking in this kitchen.

Secondly, I was no pro at making Maqluba, a traditional Palestinian dish with cauliflower, eggplant, onions, rice, and meat. I had helped Katie cook it a few times, but I had never done it solo. Katie was delayed at the hardware store, so the only way to get lunch ready was to coach me via text messages about the proper order to layer the ingredients. Dirty stove-top, splattering oil, slippery phone. Not good! Finally, even if the kitchen had been pristine and I had been an Arab culinary expert, the

likelihood that my Maqluba would be judged adequate was very low. Syrians are devoted to their mother's cooking. No matter how skilled a foreign chef might be, there's an impossible standard created by every Middle Eastern mother that holds her children captive: "Nothing beats Mom's cooking." Indeed!

So, it was nothing short of a miracle that, an hour later, we all sat at the outdoor picnic table with hot maqluba and a bowl of cucumber yogurt salad before us. Larry prayed a blessing in English, and the Syrians responded with "Ameen" ("Amen" in Arabic). Then they asked, in Arabic, "Is the meat halal?" Halal? Goodness, in all our construction frenzy we hadn't even thought about whether the chicken had been slaughtered in the approved Islamic way. We answered, "We don't know." They said, "Malesh" (which means, "Never mind. Don't worry.") "We will just eat the salad." "No, no!" we insisted. "You must have a heartier meal." So Katie went in and made them scrambled eggs. All my stove-top fussing was for naught. Their frustration and shame, however, was likely much greater than mine.

It is not always easy to know how to help and support refugees...Their English is often poor. Their foreign ways can be off-putting. They can seem indifferent and even hostile. But our Lord has called us to welcome them with love. It can be hard. Please pray for us to do it well. Love, Stephanie"

Katie's purchase of her house, her hiring Syrian refugee workers, and Stephanie and Larry's help with that house, in addition to their sum global research work, is a family example of being global Christians. Let's pray.

Sermon

Now let's jump across "the pond" and relate this to our church. Part of our vision at the church is that every member become a global Christian. What is that? My definition of a global Christian is someone whose priorities, job, time, finances, and relationships are aligned with God's heart for the world.

I think we will understand this best if we look more closely at alignment through several graphics. Picture #1: Alignment is when people are all moving in the same direction.



It doesn't matter what their culture is, race, money, status, background. They have the same goal and are all pulling together to accomplish that goal – in our case as a church working together for God's kingdom agenda.



Picture #2 When my father was at Harvard as an undergrad, he was part of the rowing team. This sport is based on alignment. It involves 6-8 people racing a boat (racing shell) on water using oars. In the crew, the coxswain (or simply the "cox", or "coxie") is the member who sits in the stern (except in bowloaders) facing the bow and the rowers in front of him. The coxswain is responsible for steering the boat, and coordinating the power and rhythm of

the rowers. He calls out the speed and time to pull on their oars in unison. In some capacities, the coxswain is responsible for implementing the training regimen prescribed by a team's coach during practice. If one team member decides to do his own thing – row at a different speed or put his oar in the water at a different angle, this will break the forward movement of the boat. It may also break the oar of the person in front or behind him. A rower is not independent; he is part of a team effort. Independence destroys the alignment needed for the team to go forward for victory.

Applying that analogy as a Christian, if we're in alignment with God's heart for the world, it's the Holy Spirit who is our coxswain. The Spirit is the one who helps us know how to pray; the Spirit is the one who helps us know God's word and writes God's Word on our hearts so it becomes part of our passion. The Spirit is the one who reveals God's agenda to us corporately, not just individually. The

committed Christian life is NOT simply a pious relationship between an individual and God. It is always, from a biblical perspective, a life lived in community under the lordship of Jesus Christ. This is why we worship together. This is why we witness to God's work to one another. This is why we sit under the teaching of the scripture together. This is why we pray together. We are choosing to be a biblically-based community under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, all heading in the same direction, patterning our lives and priorities after God's heart for the world.

Picture #3. Here's another example of alignment – this time from nature. In the fall and spring you may hear honking in the air. It is of geese flying south or north in migration. They fly in a V because of alignment. Did you know these facts?:



Fact 1: In the *V formation* as each goose *flaps* its wings, it helps to lift up the wings of the birds that follow. *So it's an aerodynamic formation.*

Fact 2: When a goose falls out of *formation*, it loses the lifting power of the bird in front of it. It discovers the problems of flying *alone* and moves back into *formation*. – *Ah an immediate lesson in teamwork*

Fact 3: The bird at the front of the *formation* experiences the most wind *resistance*. When it tires, it moves to the back of the *formation* and another goose takes the lead. (*As our church vision says, the whole body ministering to the whole body*)

Fact 4: Geese flying in formation *honk* to *encourage* those ahead of them to keep up their speed. (*The role of encouragement is necessary in a team*)

And finally, Fact 5: If a goose gets sick or *wounded*, two other geese drop out of *formation* and go down to the ground with it. They stay with that goose to *protect* it until it recovers or dies. Then they join another group of geese flying overhead or catch up with their original flock.

Isn't it amazing? All this is what God has built into geese instinctively. It is those behaviors which enable them to migrate and be protected and cared for by their flock and get to their goal together. There's so much we can learn from nature and what God has built into fish like the salmon, the basis of my book, or geese that fly across continents, etc.

However, if we are not in alignment, maybe it can look a little askew, like these circles falling a bit off the line. Some of that will come from diversity and various communication styles or values. We understand that and work together for unity.



But a more serious problem is pictured by these ducks. It says in the Bible, in Isaiah, that the definition of sin is *each one turned to his own way*. (Isa. 53) Like the ducks one facing front, one facing sideways, one facing back. They are not just a little off line; they are going in different directions.



Paul says *The time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will*

gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths." (2 Ti.4:3-4) Going in opposition to God's heart and God's truth.

The most serious problem in a church happens when people are moving in the opposite direction of what God has given. Let's say the front duck is following the Holy Spirit, but the back duck isn't listening and isn't going in alignment with God's heart. He is going his own way.

Jonah, in the Bible, was like the end duck. In Chapter One, God says to Jonah, “*Go to Nineveh.*” He was to preach there, because God “*saw the great wickedness of the people*”, and God wanted the people to know a different life. Jonah said “No” to God, and immediately went in the opposite direction of Nineveh. You know the story of the fish and God’s rescue of Jonah out of the belly of the whale. That’s chapters one and two of the book of Jonah. Chapter Three starts with God’s call to Jonah a second time to go to Nineveh, “*that great city,*” and preach. Jonah went, but he begrudged God’s goodness when the people repented. He was a very self-centered, disobedient, ethnocentric prophet. It’s important to remember that he appears in the Bible not as a positive model for our behavior but because the Bible is about real people – who choose to obey or disobey God. As Jonah pouts and chastises God, we see his small heart, definitely not in alignment with God’s heart. But listen to what God says to him, “*And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left--and also many animals?*” (Jonah 4:11). God knew exactly how many people were in that city. God cared that they were basically lost. They couldn’t tell their right hand from their left hand. And God wanted them to find the truth of life that would put them in alignment with God’s heart. He doesn’t want *any to perish or be condemned for their wickedness. He wants all to come to repentance* (2 pet 3:9).

I don’t know if Jonah ever got into alignment with God, but we see in this simple story God’s mercy, God’s desire that everyone turn from their brokenness, their lostness, their destructive self-centeredness to come drink from Him at the fountain of life. This is why Jesus came, to make us right with God, and to put us in alignment with God’s heart for the world, so that everyone can hear the good news and come to wholeness in Him.

Through the support and encouragement and prayer and even admonishment of one another, we can go forward together aligned as a family, a Body of Christ, to be all God wants us to be. Global Christians together. That’s the vision of our Church. Let us pray.