



“So That”
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St. Andrew’s United Methodist Church
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John 6:51-58

It’s an interesting passage of scripture, no doubt one that caused a great deal of controversy when it was first read and heard, no doubt one that continues to cause a great deal of controversy amongst people world wide as they study the Christian faith. But then again most folks who hear this for the first time are fully indoctrinated into society and society tells us, preaches to us, and proclaims to us that “stuff” is what matters. Possessions will save us. What kind of car you drive and what house you live in and the clothes that you wear and the food that you buy and eat, the places you go and see, possessions will save us. But you know some of the wealthiest people in the world will admit to you that it’s not quite there. Possessions don’t have it. You can have all of those things but deep down inside we know that won’t save us. Society will tell us that education will save us. Education is our salvation, that you’ve got to have an education in order to make it in this world and to live and to be redeemed to be fully... and you know as well as I do that some of the brightest people in the world don’t... they know that that’s not enough. To have an education is important. Please don’t get me wrong. I’m not saying that it’s not, it’s very important. I think we ought to know more about our world and know more about ourselves and about those around us. I think education is incredibly important, but it is not our salvation.

Was it USA Today or US News and World Report that ranked Princeton highest in schools this week? Yes, U.S. News and World Report, I believe, said Princeton University is probably the highest level of academic achievement one can get. So if you want your kids to survive, to absolutely make it, send them to Princeton. Don’t worry about the price tag. And yet, some of our most educated people have admitted that education alone won’t save us. It’s not enough.

Society even tells us further that power is really our salvation, that we will be secure as long as we have the might, that we have the power to hold at bay anything and everything, that we have the ability to defend ourselves, maybe even go beyond that, to intimidate others to prevent them from hurting us, killing us, but even the most powerful things in this world won’t save us. No, we’re about something completely different as Christians, aren’t we? We’re about something totally different.

Wednesday night I shared with the group here for communion two words, not “*So What*” but “*So That.*” And I asked the group to think about all of the things that we do as a church, all the ministries that we offer as church, all the opportunities that we offer as a church and I asked folks to think about it in terms of this. We do things *so that* and to answer that – fill in the blank, what does it mean? I think I used the example of Vacation Bible School. We have Vacation Bible School *so that*. We have a music program here at this church with a fantastic choir and a bell choir that is awesome and organists and choir leaders and guest musicians that come in *so that*. We have a wonderful Senior Nutrition Center program that feed sixty to eighty people every day, Monday through Friday *so that*. When we begin to ask those questions *so that*, we begin to understand a little bit more about who we are and when we ask that question *so that* we come back to that real issue, what saves us?

Albert Outler put it best, I think. You all know Albert Outler? He was a professor for so long at Perkins School of Theology, a beautiful brilliant man. He wrote these words. I had to write it down so I would remember it exactly how he said it. He said, “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, *so that* you and I might not perish in some void of thwarted dreams, but that we might

have life in its present and future possibilities now and forevermore.” I want to read that again just because it is so powerful. Albert Outler – “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, *so that* you and I might not perish in some void of thwarted dreams, but that we might have life in its present and future possibilities now and forevermore.”

The world as we know it is broken. It seeks after things that we know are not going to take us where we yearn and long to go in the deepest depths of our souls and our beings. We know that following that void of thwarted dreams toward possessions or the void of thwarted dreams towards education, that if we just had the right education we could get through life and actually be successful and change the world and save our souls and if we just had enough power to dominate and intimidate everyone then everything would be fine and we would finally be where we want to be. We’ve followed those paths, haven’t we? And they haven’t saved us. That’s the world’s point of view and the world is broken. We call it sin. We call it sin. And you know, please don’t get me wrong. I don’t think anybody ever started out wanting to fail. None of us started out failing or wanting to fail. “You know, I think I want to grow up and be bankrupt.” “I think I want to enter into this marriage because I want to get divorced.” “I think I want to...” None of us do that.

Even Paul recognized that that’s a part of the human condition. We fall into that. Paul said you know the very thing that I want to do, I can’t do and the very thing that I don’t want to do is the thing that I do. None of us starts out to fail. The world is broken. Remember some of our best intentions were miserable failures.

Back in the west, not today, but in the west the old wild, wild west, if you will, the days where most of the folks that were going out west were not women and were not families, but just single men going out and they were searching for things, they were searching for that pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. They were searching for whatever they could find. They were looking for a better life, a better way. And they would get out there and you know, guys, when we get together and we don’t have anything else to do to redeem us, alcohol sets in. The biggest problem that we had in the last part of the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth century in the Wild West, in the settling of the west, was alcohol and alcoholism. What do you do when there is nothing else to do but get drunk? And the Women’s Temperance Movement moved along and they came in and there was a movement also amongst the women that they wanted to do away with this sin, this evil, this alcoholic tendency of people and they were trying to redeem society. There was nothing wrong with it and they worked so hard. And they passed that Eighteenth Amendment to our Constitution, you remember that? The one that outlawed alcohol? And it was a great idea at the time, but well you know. The results of it, as history shows, was that it gave power to the mafia like we’d never seen before and it wasn’t just very long ago that that finally was brought back under the reigns of civil authority. They didn’t intend to start the mafia, it just happened. It was the best of intentions.

I think of Karl Marx who looked around and he saw the world as he could experience it and he found that it was so broken that his intention was what if instead of the rich having all and the masses of the poor having nothing, what if we all kind of put it all together and to be able to take care of one another. And this whole idea of a communal lifestyle was a new way of thinking and a new way of doing things. And it was a wonderful idea, but we saw how it played itself out. I don’t think Marx ever wanted the world to turn the way it did and communism to become the evil that it became. That was never his intention in the beginning. His intention was so that everyone would have enough but it didn’t work. He didn’t mean to fail, but the world is broken and the brokenness of the world causes a lot of pain.

Fundamentally, the outer world is really a reflection of our inner world, isn’t it? What’s going on in the outer world is really what’s going on inside us. I remember Linn Bias, you all remember Linn Bias a University of Maryland student, a fantastic basketball player, made Shaquille

O'Neal and Magic Johnson look like amateurs, a brilliant, talented, gifted kid, was ready to graduate college, was ready to sign a contract to be the highest paid professional basketball player ever. The kid had gifts and graces that just were super human. Had it all, he had everything he needed. He had the contracts not only to play basketball but of course all of the endorsements that go along with it. He'd have money. He had an education at one of the top schools in our nation. The University of Maryland is no slouch as far as education is concerned. A fantastic education and he could take a basketball and do things with it that just boggled the mind, but his outer world really reflected an inner torment. All of those things that he had that society says you gotta have... he had youth, too. He was a young kid. He was nineteen years old, not quite nineteen. All those things that society says you really need to have in order to make it, but there was something wrong, something missing, something... and cocaine was what they found in his system when he died. Before he could do any of those things, before he could enjoy any of the things that society says that we really ought to strive toward, cocaine, cocaine.

The world says that power, true power, is nuclear. True power is nuclear. Christianity says that true power is love. The world says that intelligence is Einstein. You know he was a brilliant man, couldn't tie his shoes, but he was a brilliant man. Jesus says that intelligence is that of a child. Unless you come to me as a child, you shall not enter the kingdom. The world says that life is longevity. We want to live longer lives and so we're doing everything we can to prolong life and to keep life going and Jesus says that life is not length, but fullness. And the world says that the center is to be the self and Jesus says the center is to be God focused on others.

The Gospel says it quite clearly. The answer to the brokenness of the world, the brokenness in our own lives, the brokenness that we all experience is the Christ. And so we turn to God and we find hope and we find grace and we find life abundant and full. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son *so that* you and I might not perish in some void of thwarted dreams, but that we might have life in its present and future possibilities both now and forevermore. That's why we are who we are. That's why we answer the call of our Lord *so that – so that*. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen!