

# “Do We See the Opportunities When Challenged?”

*The Rev. S. Shane Nanney – October 10, 2021*

*Mark 10:17-31*

In 1269, Kublai Khan sent a request from Peking to Rome for "a hundred wise men of the Christian religion . . . “And so I shall be baptized, and when I shall be baptized, all my baron and great men will be baptized, and their subjects baptized, and so there will be more Christians here than there are in your parts.”

The Mongols were then wavering in the choice of a religion. It might have been, as Kublai forecast, the greatest mass religious movement the world has ever seen. The history of all Asia would have been changed.

But what actually happened? Pope Gregory X answered by sending two Dominican friars. They got as far as Armenia, could endure no longer and returned home. So passed the great missionary opportunity in the history of the church.

Life gives us challenges and opportunities. How we deal with the challenges, opens or closes for us certain doors. Each closed door sometimes provides us with new options, if we are willing to be open to them. Do you think that when Jeff Bezos started his online bookstore that he would one day go into outer space? I never dreamed that as I was praying to God to get me off the farm, that I would one day end up here. How about you? What did you dream of when you were young? Where did that dream take you? What opportunities did it open for you?

The church is living in the midst of the greatest challenge it has ever faced in our lifetime. How do we live with Covid? The headlines tell it all. “States are rolling out vaccination plans.” “Death tolls hit 700,000.” “Mask mandates.” “White House commits \$1 billion to at-home Covid Tests.” Those are the challenges.

So, what have been the opportunities?

- For the first time in decades, Mt. Everest was able to be seen in parts of India because pollution was less.
- The Flu was almost non-existent because people were wearing masks.

- Masks were seen as helping our neighbor more than helping ourselves from getting Covid.
- People reached out to their neighbors to find out if they needed anything, during the shutdowns.

The opportunities have allowed us to see beyond ourselves. The front-line workers, the “essential workers,” the medical workers were all seen as heroes for putting their lives on the line for you and me. Didn’t we say just 2 weeks ago that seeing beyond ourselves and doing was service, one of the key things we wanted to see in the church we always dreamed of?

When we think of stewardship, it really means “taking care of everything that God has given to us.” When we think of what everything is, we realize that everything is everything. Our jobs, our homes, our families, our whole universe. The real question becomes, what hasn’t God given us? You may have worked for it, but who gave you the opportunities, the smarts, and the skills to get the job, that bought your house, that provided for the family that God gave you?

We usually think of taking care of our family, our home, our church is through giving money and a bit of our time. If we just give enough then all those things will be taken care of. But Jesus challenges us on that thought. He tells the rich young ruler to go and sell everything he has and give it to the poor. How can he then take care of what God has given to him? He will have no money. He is literally told to go and bounce his last check.

But what Jesus is challenging him is to not place all his faith in his possessions or money. Instead, to place his faith in God to take care of him. It is like if we won the Powerball and have all these millions of dollars and Jesus telling us to give it all away because that is not going to save us. It is not going to truly provide in the ways that He is talking about. I know what you are thinking, if you won the Powerball, you are more than willing to give it a try to see if you can provide for all that God has given to you.

God wants us to take a look at our attitude. Is our attitude one of faith and love? It should be. Our giving to the church must have at its very core, faith in God to protect and provide for us, and love for our fellow human being. Without faith and love, we are just putting in time and giving money. It is meaningless.

We are called to take care of all that we have received from God. God gave you your family. God gave you this church, God placed you here at this time and

place to do wonderful things in His name. You have what God knew you needed. He provided the things that would make your life comfortable enough, so you did not struggle but yet challenged you enough to do the work you needed to do. And for those of you who don't think your life is comfortable, remember that 80% of this world lives on less than \$2 per day. Now try to convince me your life is not comfortable.

Each of these things comes with challenges and Covid has been one more challenge. But with everything, as we overcome the challenge, we can see the opportunity that God has placed before us. If we take what God has given to us and we add into the mix our ambition, our interest, our work ethics, we end up with a life changing opportunity to do wonderful things for God. When we take time to contribute to the food ministry either with our time serving, or our money in buying food, we feed people who are very appreciative to receive a hot meal and have the knowledge that someone really does care about them.

Now put yourself in their place. Can you possibly imagine what it must be like to be looked down upon by so many people because you are needy and feel that everyone hates you? And then someone gives you some food and a smile. For those people, it is like looking into the face of Jesus. To them, you ARE Jesus.

Stewardship allows us to see beyond ourselves. That is SERVICE. And we are to take care of the earth, each other, and ourselves. Every time we are good stewards, our relationship with God is strengthened. We grow spiritually when we are good stewards. We grow spiritually because we give, we do, and we love. No one can do that for you. It has to be all you. Like body building, you personally have to put in the work. My lifting the bar bells won't help you build muscle. We each must give our time, talent, treasure, and love.

This is an unprecedented time. The church has before it a unique challenge. We also have a very unique opportunity if we can overcome the challenges, as we become closer to God. Amen.