

Broad Series: Grounded (The life of Jesus in four parts, Exploring Jesus as the incarnation of God in the created world, and how that gives salvation an earth grounding.)

Series Part 1: Dirty Hands

Sermon #5: “Someone Else’s Dirt”

Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12

Text: Luke 2:31-32 “You prepared this salvation in the presence of all peoples. It’s a light for revelation to the Gentiles and a glory for your people Israel.”

Sermon Blurb: Christmas can become a very selfish holiday. We get presents, we get time off work, we want to spend time doing what we want. Sometimes we can be like those kids who pout because they didn’t get what they wanted. But deep in the Christmas story is an “and also.” Christmas is for us, *and also* for them. Christmas is about God’s focus on other people, too. We need to take care not to keep Christmas just for ourselves. This Sunday, as we hear about the Magi who come from the East, God will shift our focus *and also* to others.

Gathering Song:

Welcome: Pastor David

Worship Set: Sanctify

Kids invited to Kid’s Church

Prayers: -Andrew & Pastor David

Message: “Someone Else’s Dirt” -Pastor David

PP#1: Grounded: Dirty Hands

“You prepared this salvation in the presence of all peoples. It’s a light for revelation to the Gentiles and a glory for your people Israel.” -Luke 2:31-32

Grounded: God’s Dirty Feet. “Someone Else’s Dirt.” Luke 2:31-32 “You prepared this salvation in the presence of all peoples. It’s a light for revelation to the Gentiles and a glory for your people Israel.”

PP#2: *Image of the A-Team.*

Anybody here remember the A-Team? It was a top-10 TV show back in the 80s about a four-member Vietnam Special Ops unit who were wrongly accused of a crime, but 10 years later they were still being hunted down by the military police. While keeping underground, they served as soldiers of fortune helping people who were in trouble, who were being bullied, or who were oppressed. One episode, for example, was how they helped an orphanage in Mexico get rid of the drug militia that was occupying their buildings. Well, we’ve been watching episodes on Netflix, and we’ve been binging lately because the show went off of Netflix today. We only made it through the second season.

PP#3: *Action scene of the A-Team.*

Well, many of the episodes are based on turf wars. There are people who don't want certain other people around, usually based on skin color, beliefs, religion, or way of life. Somehow, they are different, and they're not wanted or included. The A-Team is asked to come in and take care of the bullies, so the different people can live in peace.

In one episode we watched this past week, Hannibal, the leader, says to some stubborn people, "This valley is big enough for you and them. Why don't you learn to share?"

PP#4: *Two toddlers wrestling over a toy.*

Sharing. That's an idea that is easy and hard. Easy to understand. Easy to do in theory. But hard to put into actual practice. This past week we had Christmas Camp here at church. Kids were all over the lobby, playing with toys. Two toddlers near me were in a full-on wrestling match over an etch-a-sketch, screaming and crying. I tried to get them to take turns. But they weren't having it. They each wanted it, and were not open to sharing.

It's something we try to teach our kids from early on. Yet we struggle with it all our live long. You know what I'm talking about. No matter how much your parents hammered it into you, or no matter how much you pushed this into your kids, even now we don't want to share. We're selfish by nature. We have to willfully overcome it, each and every time.

It lurks behind bigotry, and racism, and jealousy. Our struggle with sharing breaks up our relationships and jeopardizes our security. We label those we think are like us and those we think aren't. And we include those like us as the "in" crowd, and those different as outsiders.

PP#5: *Image of two very different people (race, gender, etc.) smiling and looking like friends.*

What's interesting to me, however, is that the accepted characteristics of those we deem "like us" becomes broader and broader the more we get to know others. The more we get to know different people, the less different they seem, and the less we exclude them.

Put another way, we are much more willing to share with people we know and like, even if they are very different from us. We can become friends with anyone, as long as we can find what we share in common and what connects us.

PP#6: *Image of Jesus in the manger.*

Christmas is about sharing. God, who is very different from people, chose to become like us enough so that we could become friends. God shared Himself in Christmas, coming as the baby Jesus. He came to share. He shared with us His forgiveness, His righteousness, His purity, His eternal life. God shared salvation with people, and we are connected to God personally.

Christmas is about sharing. But most people missed it that first Christmas. And throughout most of His earthly life, most people missed Jesus as the Messiah.

The Jews knew they were the chosen people. And when you mix "chosen" with our selfish nature, for most people that means: better. The Jews thought that because they were chosen, they were God's favorite, God's *special* people. They thought that God liked them better than everyone else, and so they were *higher* than everyone else. And so, in the Jewish world, Jews were "in" and everyone else, whom they called "gentiles," were out.

PP#7: *Image for Israel being the light to the nations.*

But if you take a second look at Scripture, we see something else going on. The Jews were God's chosen people all right, but chosen not for special blessing and status, but instead chosen for a special purpose, a special task. Their job was to walk with God so that they could be an example, a witness, a light, to the rest of the people on earth for how they, too, could walk with God. They were to draw others towards God, not push them away claiming Gentiles weren't good enough.

PP#8: Genesis 12:1

“The Lord said to Abram, ‘Leave your land, your family, and your father’s household for the land that I will show you. 2 I will make of you a great nation and will bless you. I will make your name respected, and you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, those who curse you I will curse; all the families of the earth will be blessed because of you.’”

God made that purpose very clear. All through Scripture. Right from the beginning. When God called Abram to be the father of a chosen people, we see why. Genesis 12:3, “all the families of the earth will be blessed because of you.” God is chooses Abraham to be the father of the Israelites, and their purpose is to bring blessing to all people on earth.

PP#9: Psalm 67:

1 Let God grant us grace and bless us; let God make his face shine on us,
 2 so that your way becomes known on earth, so that your salvation becomes known among all the nations.
 3 Let the people thank you, God! Let all the people thank you!
 4 Let the people celebrate and shout with joy because you judge the nations fairly and guide all nations on the earth.

Psalm 67: Let God bless us, meaning Israel, so that God's way will become known on earth, and so God's salvation would become known among all the nations.

PP#10: Malachi 1:11

Nevertheless, from sunrise to sunset, my name will be great among the nations. Incense and a pure grain offering will be offered everywhere in my name, because my name is great among the nations, says the Lord of heavenly forces.

The prophets, like Malachi. God's intention is for His name to be known among all the nations; and for all people, everywhere, to know Him and praise Him.

The Israelites were chosen, not for special status, but for special work. Yet, when combined with a resistance to sharing, the Israelites soon developed a theology of God's focus only on them. God loved them, not the Gentiles. The Gentiles were unclean, unsaved, and unloved. Jews were in, the Gentiles were out. And the Israelites missed Christmas.

PP#11: Isaiah 42

1 But here is my servant, the one I uphold; my chosen, who brings me delight.
 I've put my spirit upon Him; He will bring justice to the nations.
 6 I, the Lord, have called you for a good reason. I will grasp your hand and guard you, and give you as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations.

The prophets also described the coming Messiah, the promised one, who was going to restore the reign of King David. He would bring blessing to the Jews. But...and here it is again...so that all the people on earth would be blessed. Isaiah 42, God's promised coming servant, will have God's Spirit within Him. He will restore justice to all the nations. They Israelites will be a covenant to all the people of the earth, and be a light to them, showing them God.

PP#12: Isaiah 49:6

6 He said: It is not enough, since you are my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the survivors of Israel. Hence, I will also appoint you as light to the nations so that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.

Or again in Isaiah 49. The Messiah doesn't come just to raise up Israel. No. That's not enough. He has a bigger purpose. He will lead Israel in being a light to the nations, so that God's salvation will be extended to all people, all the earth, Jews and Gentiles....everyone.

Christmas is about sharing. God shared Himself in Jesus, but not just to the Jews. He came as savior for everyone, the world over. Most Jews missed Christmas because they were looking for a savior just for them. Most people missed Christmas because it was about sharing, really sharing!

PP#13: *Image of Simeon with Jesus at the temple, subtitled,*

"You prepared this salvation in the presence of all peoples. It's a light for revelation to the Gentiles and a glory for your people Israel." -Luke 2:31-32

But an old man at the Temple didn't miss it. When Joseph and Mary bring baby Jesus—eight days old—to the temple for His dedication and circumcision, an old prophet is there, waiting. His name is Simeon. When he sees the young couple and the baby, he grabs Jesus in his arms and proclaims that this is the arrival of God's salvation. He says, "You prepared this salvation in the presence of all peoples. It's a light for revelation to the Gentiles and a glory for your people Israel."

Salvation...light for the Gentiles!

PP#14: *Image of the star appearing over the stable in Bethlehem.*

When Jesus is born, something appears in the sky. Do you remember what it was? Anyone? [Star.] Why, do you think, did God have a star appear in the sky that first Christmas? Have you ever thought about that? What purpose did it serve?

Well, it is Matthew who tells about the star's appearance. And when it appears, it is noticed by some people living far, far away. They're not Jews. They're gentiles! And these gentiles come to worship this Jewish Messiah King.

Let's go to that passage and read it again. And as we do, I want you to pay special attention to the star.

PP#15: Matthew 2:1-12 (CEB)

1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the territory of Judea during the rule of King Herod, magi came from the east to Jerusalem. 2 They asked, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We've seen His **star** in the east, and we've come to honor Him."

3 When King Herod heard this, he was troubled, and everyone in Jerusalem was troubled with him. 4 He gathered all the chief priests and the legal experts and asked them where the Christ was to be born.

Matthew 2: “After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the territory of Judea during the rule of King Herod, magi came from the east to Jerusalem. They asked, ‘Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We’ve seen His **star** in the east, and we’ve come to honor Him.’ When King Herod heard this, he was troubled, and everyone in Jerusalem was troubled with him. He gathered all the chief priests and the legal experts and asked them where the Christ was to be born.

PP#16: Matthew 2:1-12 (CEB)

5 They said, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for this is what the prophet wrote: 6 You, Bethlehem, land of Judah, by no means are you least among the rulers of Judah, because from you will come one who governs, who will shepherd my people Israel.”

7 Then Herod secretly called for the magi and found out from them the time when the **star** had first appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search carefully for the child. When you’ve found Him, report to me so that I too may go and honor Him.”

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PP#17: Matthew 2:1-12 (CEB)

9 When they heard the king, they went; and look, the **star** they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stood over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the **star**, they were filled with joy. 11 They entered the house and saw the child with Mary His mother. Falling to their knees, they honored Him. Then they opened their treasure chests and presented Him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12 Because they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country by another route.

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PP#18: *Image of the magi (obviously ethnically different) bowing to Jesus.*

The star appeared in the sky on Christmas because Jesus was born as the Savior not just to the Jews, but for all people under the sky. God was proclaiming that in Jesus He was fulfilling all the Old Testament promises. Jesus was the savior for all the world.

The significance of the story of the coming of the magi is that they are Gentiles. Gentiles coming to worship the new born king. He was their king, too! He was their savior, even though they lived in a foreign land, far, far away.

Most of the Jews missed Christmas because they were only looking for a savior who would be only for them. They also rejected Him when He was older, preaching and teaching. Jesus said that

God would allow the temple to be torn down, and all the Jewish way of life dismantled because salvation was now through Him, not their religious system. The people gathered to Him hoping He would lead the Jews in a rebellion against the Romans and establish their own kingdom. But when He didn't, they gave up on Him. In the end, they threw Him away, handing Him over to be crucified for not doing what they selfishly wanted.

PP#19: Matthew 28 “The Great Commission”

19 “Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to obey everything that I’ve commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age.”

Yet, it was just then, right then, that God worked salvation for everyone. When Jesus died on the cross, He died for Jews and Gentiles, for the shepherds and for the magi, for you and me.

And when Jesus goes back to heaven, He restates the ancient purpose of God’s chosen people. Those who follow Jesus are part of God’s chosen people. And their task, like the Jews of old, is to share the light of salvation to all people. “Go into all the world and make disciples of all people.”

PP#20: *Image of a wide variety of people together, ethnic, race, color, gender, etc.*

When Jesus was born as a baby, He took on a human body. He took on a body made from dirt. But this dirt was not just for the Jews. It was for the Gentiles, too. It was someone else’s dirt, too!

Sometimes we, as Christians, can struggle with this selfishness. We want to keep Christmas just for us, and those like us. We want to keep Jesus just for us and ours. But in come the magi. They look different. They act different. And they remind us not to miss Christmas.

Who are our magi? Who do we need to make room for, as Christians, close to Jesus? Is it that family member no one else will talk to because she is so annoying? It is the guy at work who talks incessantly about himself? It is smelly woman who wears the same cloths over and over again? Is it the guy who voted for Trump? It is the woman with her head covered by a hajib?

PP#21: *Image of John Wesley with arms extended, preaching outside somewhere, subtitled,*

“I look upon all the world as my parish; thus far I mean, that, in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty to declare unto all that are willing to hear the glad tidings of salvation.” -John Wesley

God got dirty at Christmas, taking on a body of dirt, and getting involved in our lives. But that dirt on God’s feet, isn’t just for you, for us. It’s for all people. God invites others into His sandbox, into His valley. He makes them all a part of His A-Team.

Don’t miss Christmas. Share. Share Jesus with others. Be open to others being as important to God as you are. Then act that way! Treat them that way! And we will discover that when we do go out of our way to find what we have in common, what we share, that we can become friends. And we will draw our lines of those “in” and “out” much more like God does.

Now there’s a resolution for the new year!

Amen.

Holy Communion & Offering

Closing Song

Benediction: Pastor David