

I. Advanced Organizer. First set of car keys.

- A. I was given my **first set of car keys for my seventeenth birthday**. The year was 1994. I was getting ready to start my senior year of high school. And for that seventeenth birthday, my parents bought for me to use a white used Toyota Camry, probably from around 1985. For me, it was the coolest car on the planet. I marveled that it had a power sun roof. It was awesome.
- B. And in the first year that I had that car, **I ruined the engine** by not checking or servicing the oil, and after the engine had been replaced, **I wrapped the rear of the car around a tree**. While the trunk was extremely caved in, the car was drivable, so **my parents let me drive that car with the knarly trunk for several months** before having it repaired. And despite my embarrassment at having to consistently tell friends and strangers about what happened to the rear of my car, I recognized the graciousness of my parents.
- C. **They were giving my seventeen-year-old self a level of responsibility** that, as history demonstrated, may not have been an advantageous move on their part from an economic point of view. **I was not, at that point, a “safe investment”**. Yet yielding a return on the care of their extra vehicle was not my parents primary concern in giving me the keys to that car. **Their concern was my maturity and growth**. They wanted to help me become an adult, and one of the ways they did that was entrust me with an adult responsibility. And while there was a cost incurred on their part, **the endeavor did help yield it's intended result**. The lessons I learned with that first car were painful but important lessons about the consequences of my actions; lessons that stuck with me for years to come. I was beginning to learn that what I did or didn't do actually mattered in the real world.
- D. Three weeks into series, **“Live the Love”**, looking at ways Jesus embodies love in practical ways; to see if we can take some cues from him as we seek to move beyond hashtags to actualized love that makes an impact on the world around us. Today, we're gonna take a look at one of the ways Jesus showed love to the people closest to him; his closest followers, or disciples, who walked away from their jobs, their families, their established lives, to follow a nomadic itinerant preacher around the countryside. How did Jesus relate to these folks and demonstrate love to them?

II. Take a look at a story that comes from Matthew's account of life of Jesus in **Matthew 16**.

A. **Intro.**

1. This is fairly far into Matthew's account. Jesus has been traveling with his closest followers awhile; maybe a couple years at this point. They've heard him preach like no one can preach. They learned to pray from Jesus. They've learned how to think differently about children, and groups of people that don't seem very religious; tax collectors, prostitutes.
2. And they've seen the miracles. Crazy things no one in their lifetime has ever done. They've seen him heal the sick, the blind. They've seen him cast demons out of people. They've watched him turn a couple of loaves and fishes into enough food to feed many thousands. They've even seen him speak to a storm on the sea and watched it become still. This guy is different.
3. And despite this, despite all they've seen, these guys still have a hard time keeping up with Jesus. Right before our story today, no more than a chapter earlier Jesus responds to them on two different occasions in frustration because they so miss the point he's trying to make. “Don't you understand yet?” he keeps asking. “Why can't you understand?” And right after this last frustrated encounter, we get the story we're gonna focus on today.

B. **Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his**

disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah. (Matthew 16:13-19)

- C. So this is an interesting little story. It starts with **Jesus, digging for some information.** What are people saying about him? What have the disciples heard? So the disciples offer some of the things that people have been saying; stabs folks are taking at comprehending who Jesus really is, or how they should understand his work. And these aren't bad guesses, but they also aren't particularly controversial. And then comes the more pointed question: “Who do *you* say that I am?” Jesus is no longer interested in theories from more removed parties, he is asking the people who are closest to Jesus to judge for themselves what they've been witness to, and give language to it.
- D. **Simon Peter is delightfully unmeasured in his response.** Before he can think twice, words are escaping his lips. “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!” And to his response, Jesus responds back with even more enthusiasm. It's a total contrast from the last thing he said to them; “Why can't you understand?” This answer Jesus is pretty pleased with. Apparently Simon nailed it.
- E. **This is where things get especially interesting.** Not only does Jesus give Simon a new name, “Peter” which meant, quite literally, “Rock”, but he tells him this: ***on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*** So I don't know about you, but this seems to me a little bizarre and supernatural. What was Jesus talking about? It sounds like it was probably important, but what did this mean for Peter, and further, what might it mean for us?

III. (Considering “church” and “kingdom of heaven”.)

- A. Start by considering a word that is used here and throughout the New Testament in various places; the word we translate as “church”. **In Greek, the language Matthew was writing in, the word being used is *ekklesia*.**
 - 1. before it's usage in this context, **it was not considered a religious word.**
 - 2. **“*Ekklesia*” was used in Ancient Greece to depict an assembly of people, it literally means “gathering” or “assembly”.**
 - 3. There were words in Greek to describe a religious group gathering together, but *ekklesia* was not one of them.
 - 4. ***Ekklesia* was the word used more often in speaking of social and political gatherings.** For example, in Ancient Athens, about four centuries before Jesus, the ***ekklesia* was the democratic chamber of the day.** It was the assembly of Greek citizens who were called together and **given total authority to govern in Athens.**
 - 5. Sometimes the **trick of studying Scripture is identifying ways in which we impose our own assumptions and understandings onto the text,** and how those skew what we read. Knowing just a bit more about what this word is,

how might it change our reading of Jesus' statement? "On this rock I will build my *ekklesia*"? No longer is Jesus saying to us, on this rock I will build my *religious institution*, or my *house of worship*. He is saying, "**I will build my socio-political assembly. My gathered people, assembled to govern with authority will be built up, starting Peter, with you.**" *Ekklesia*. What does he mean?

- B. Well, the political imagery Jesus uses in naming his *ekklesia* is further expanded and illuminated in the next sentence. "I will give you **the keys of the kingdom of heaven.**" The keys of the kingdom. What is that about?
1. Throughout Jesus' preaching ministry he speaks again and again about the coming of what he calls the **Kingdom of Heaven or the Kingdom of God** (*interchangeable*). And while the idea of a "kingdom" might seem like something out of a fairy-tale to many of us, this would not have been the case for Jesus' listeners. **Monarchies, empires, authoritarian rule were the norms of the day.** Jesus' audience was entirely Jewish. The Jews of his day were an occupied people, under the control of Caesar Augustus who led the entire Roman Empire. Yet these Jews longed for the day that their Messiah, the Anointed One of God, would overthrow their political enemies and establish a free Israel, which would endure. **So is that what Jesus had in mind when he described the Kingdom of God?**
 2. Jesus did a lot of preaching on this topic. And when he did, he used **many parables to describe the Kingdom he had in mind.**
 - a. Kingdom as a **mustard seed** that starts incredibly small, but grows into an enormous tree.
 - b. Kingdom as **a bit of yeast a woman hides in dough**, which works its way throughout the dough to leaven it.
 - c. A mustard seed. Yeast. Both of these brief parables are telling a similar story. They speak of **something small, hidden, almost undetectable, but filled with dynamic capability.** Over time, the mustard seed grows from a tiny seed to a great tree. Likewise, the yeast works its way through the dough and brings total growth and transformation. This is the kind of Kingdom Jesus is proposing. **But how can a kingdom operate like this?**
 3. It might be helpful to acknowledge that the word "Kingdom" does not just denote **a geographic political entity**: a nation state with firm borders on a map. It also **communicates a relationship**. A King is a ruler, and he reigns over all who recognize his authority. Whoever and whatever the King reigns over is his Kingdom. So when Jesus is talking about the Kingdom of God, he is not necessarily talking about an entity, separate from the rest of the world, with a high wall and protected borders. Rather, he seems to be talking about a **subversive campaign, a planted seed or a hidden bit of yeast, that starts small, but is ever-expanding, pushing across political and cultural boundaries, as more and more people acknowledge God as the ultimate authority in their life, and thus come under the reign or Kingdom of God.**
 4. So what is God's reign like? What makes the Kingdom of God different than the other kingdoms on earth?
 - a. **Earthly kingdoms are generally characterized by the abuse of power, by greed, and by self-interest.**
 - b. In contrast, Jesus is introducing a different kind of kingdom. The

order of the reign of God is one of **love toward the outcast, the oppressed, the powerless, and any other person in need.**

- c. The Kingdom of God seeks to **reconcile instead of conquer.** Seeks to unite instead of divide and dominate.
 - d. It speaks of peace and healing instead of destruction and violence.
 - e. At its core, the expansion of the Kingdom is the unfolding of God's work to **redeem creation by reconciling it to God's self and restoring it in justice.** This healing of the world is meant to enfold all creation: from individuals to nations to cultures to the redemption of the very land itself. When we say, "God, let your Kingdom come," this is the process we are inviting to come to completion.
5. This endeavor, this **expansion of the Kingdom of God is arguably the greatest, most important, most significant-on-a-cosmic-scale project in all of history.** And here, in Matthew 16, **Jesus hands over the authority to do the job to Peter and his *ekklesia*.** He says, "I am giving you the keys of the kingdom". I am giving you the keys. This is a much bigger deal than me receiving keys to a 1985 Toyota Camry. It's a much bigger deal, but it is a similar idea. In the same way that my parents demonstrated a particular kind of love to me by giving me the keys to that car, Jesus is demonstrating love to Peter. He's **empowering him.**
 6. **To give someone keys in Jesus' day was to give them their authority. To give them the power to rule on their behalf.** Jesus says, "*whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*" Now some of this is hard to understand because it's pretty mysterious, but what we can say definitively is that Jesus is telling Peter that he is giving him authority to **make choices that will have some sort of cosmic effects.** He's inviting Peter to play a real role of discernment and decision making in the whole kingdom expansion project. He's saying that Peter's creativity and his input will be honored in a cosmic way.
 7. **This promise is not just for Peter.** Two chapters later, Jesus repeats the line about binding and loosing, but this time **speaks it to of all his disciples,** demonstrating that this authority is not given to Peter alone.
 - a. After that Peter himself wrote in his letter to the church that **those in the church are members of a royal priesthood.** This is a surprising picture. The priests were the people in Israel who interacted with God on behalf of everyone else. But here, the priesthood has been democratized. Peter says to all who have faith in Jesus, "**You're all priests. You all interact with God and participate in the work of the *ekklesia*; the work of the church.**"
- C. I remember when I first sensed Jesus **challenging my notion of what church was and what it was for.**
1. I had come to faith in Jesus when I was a theatre student in college, and it was a tremendous experience, but I also found myself very aware that as a theatre major who followed Jesus, I was in a unique place. In the theatre program I was the only Christian, in church I was the only theatre person. Very few of my theatre friends had any interest in or knowledge of Jesus, and they certainly didn't go to church. I loved each of these worlds but the experiences were never integrated.
 2. Towards the end of college I began to struggle with the question many grads

wrestle with of, “what next?” And early in the process ministry leaders and pastors I knew began to **encourage me to consider full-time ministry**. But in my mind, **to choose a life in the church meant to turn away from all the people I knew and loved who were far from Jesus, the theatre folks, my secular friends**. So I'd say to those well meaning pastors, “No. I'm called to the world; not the church.” I was sure they were two very distinct categories, and you had to pick one or the other. And so instead of walking down the pastoral path, I started a band, I recorded a couple of CDs, and spent my time gigging throughout the rock clubs of Chicago. I did this for several years, while always staying active in my church, leading worship, starting ministries, and preaching “on the side”.

3. It took a serious encounter with pneumonia that had me bed-ridden for six weeks for God to change my perspective. As I lay on my couch, bored and unable to do anything I loved, I found it puzzling that the thing I missed most wasn't my gigging, wasn't my day job, it was all of my ministry involvement. I found myself praying, “Jesus, why do I miss ministry more than anything else?”
4. The answer I heard from Jesus surprised me: “Because that's what you were made for.”
5. “But I thought I was made for the world, not the church,” I responded.
6. “Why do you think it has to be one or the other?” he asked back. And in that moment I understood that **I had spent years making a false choice**. “Church” and “world” were not meant to be separate entities. **Jesus was looking for people to bring his church, his *ekklesia*, into the world; not to reinforce the boundaries between them**. And he wanted to demonstrate love to me, just like he did to Peter, by empowering me to be a part of it.

D. In this passage, Jesus seems to be saying that he is giving Peter and the church he builds upon him an authoritative role to play in the project of redeeming the world through the expanding reign of God. But **how does this actually work?** What is Jesus actually inviting Peter and the church that follows to do? If we're meant to be a part of this whole deal, if Jesus might be empowering each of us with a role to play, how exactly do we go about the project? I think this passage gives us a couple important clues.

IV. First, **the church is called to proclamation**.

- A. What prompts Jesus' affirmation of Peter is his **proclamation of Jesus' identity**. Peter is the first to truly get who Jesus is and to name it. “You are the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Son of the Living God.” *This* is the beginning of the spread of the reign of God. Jesus has been preaching his kingdom, but until now, no one has fully understood the role Jesus plays in it. *He is* the King who will reign. *He is* the Anointed One who will sit upon the throne forever. Peter is the founding rock of the church, because **he is the first to execute the mission of the church which is to proclaim to the world that Jesus is Lord**. Therefore, the church, if it is to fulfill its role as *ekklesia* must be above all a community of proclamation; a community that announces to the world that God's Kingdom work is here and happening.
- B. Now before some of you pull back and I've lost you, **I am not talking first and foremost about “evangelism” in the narrow sense**. I'm not talking about shouting religious statements at people who don't want to hear them. I'm talking about joining in the subversive campaign to allow the Good News of Jesus' reign of justice and healing to permeate every corner of the globe. I'm talking about ministering the way Jesus ministered, being in people's lives, meeting them where they are at, demonstrating love and inclusion of the other. For some this will happen in ways that may look like explicit

acts of Christian ministry: preaching, teaching, leading others in worship of the King. For others, participation in the work of the Kingdom coming may look very different.

- C. **William Wilberforce** was a young English politician in his 20s serving in Parliament in 1785, when he underwent a conversion experience and encountered Jesus in a real way. Caught up in a desire to serve Jesus, he began to wonder if he should leave the political life and pursue a vocation in the church. The movie ***Amazing Grace*** tells Wilberforce's story. We're going to watch a scene that takes place at a dinner party planned by one of William's friends in the period where William is considering leaving politics. **(Movie clip. 26:00 – 29:00)**
- D. "Perhaps you could do both." **What if doing the work of God didn't mean extracting yourself from the concerns of the world, but immersing yourself in the middle of them, where you stand on behalf of God's kingdom and proclaim the healing and justice that his reign brings?** This was the call on Wilberforce's life. He stayed in parliament, and against all odds, took on the task of ending slavery in the West Indies, a trade that at the time represented about 80 percent of Great Britain's foreign income. The rest of the film documents the trials that Wilberforce endured, the number of times his bills for the abolition of slavery were defeated, but also the great victory he achieved when in 1807, the Parliament voted to abolish the slave trade, 54 years before the start of the American Civil War and without a single drop of bloodshed. William Wilberforce played his role in proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom.
- E. Last week **a group of us showed up at Pride**. We were there not to "convert" anyone to anything, but simply to share the love of Jesus with folks who, more often than not, have heard words of judgement and condemnation from people of faith, rather than words of acceptance and affirmation. (Show pictures). We carried signs that said things like "Christians for Marriage Equality", and "This Christian Apologizes to You". We gave out stickers that said "Christian plus gay equals OK." And though what we were doing seemed so simple, it was amazing how moved by it so many people were. People ran to us and asked to have their picture taken with us. People hugged us, gave us high fives and fist bumps. And some even shared with us a bit of their stories. One young man was holding back tears as he told us about all the times his parents tried to pray the demons out of him. How hurt by that experience he was. We listened, we apologized, and as we did, in our listening, we proclaimed the good reign of Jesus in a tangible way, without even saying his name.
- V. **The second point to consider here is that our proclamation is empowered by God himself.**
 - A. Jesus made it clear that Peter did not have his insight into Jesus' identity on his own. God the Father had revealed it to him. God was at work opening Peter's eyes.
 - B. Later, after Jesus' resurrection he told Peter and the other disciples, "Wait. Don't go out yet and start a revolution. Wait - I will go to heaven and then send you the Holy Spirit. And you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes. Power to *go* and proclaim what has been revealed to you." Power to preach. Power to perform signs and wonders. You'll do amazing things, but the work is dependent on God's work to reveal and to empower.
 - C. You see, ***the Holy Spirit is the actor in this unfolding drama, the church (the ekklesia) is his instrument.*** We are the ones to whom God has graciously revealed the truth about Jesus, and God's desire to heal all of creation. But **it is not just for our personal benefit**. It is not just so we can go to heaven someday or enjoy being together with each other worshipping on Sundays, although both of those are fantastic benefits. But ultimately, this revelation has come to us with power, with gifting, with invitation to pick up the keys of the kingdom and join in God's work in the world.

- D. How is the Holy Spirit acting in your life? How might God want to empower you to participate in His beautiful, glorious reign expanding? There are lots of ways this can look.
1. William Wilberforce was one example. Pride.
 2. **Alex's story** - family raised him with the expectation that he'd enter ministry.
 - a. He tried. Early in marriage, took a job as a youth pastor. Was a bad fit.
 - b. Became a teacher. Thrived.
 - c. His second child: autism spectrum.
 - d. Family devastated; problem of faith. Alex and his wife, problem of acceptance. Began to sense God's pleasure in their son, blessing on them to participate in educating others and creating more spaces for kids on the spectrum to thrive.
 - e. Alex now working on PhD in education with focus on accessibility of education for special needs kids. Advocate on behalf of families on the spectrum, and other special needs kids.
 - f. He sees in Jesus an inclusive God who is breaking down barriers that divide and separate. His unique role to play in the work of Jesus' *ekklesia*.
 3. **Story of first feeling called to start a church.**
 - a. One of the first highlights of Jason and I's adventure of growing in proclamation took place in 2001 when we were engaged and the two of us attended a conference together at our church, the Evanston Vineyard. One evening they had a ministry time in which they invited all the people under 30 to come forward and receive prayer and commissioning for the future. We both went up, and it was extremely powerful. As people were praying for me, I felt God's presence as palpably as I ever have. In that place, I heard in my heart Jesus speak to me. "**Someday you guys are going to start a church,**" he said, followed by, "don't tell Jason." Now, this is one of the weirdest things I've ever heard from God. What did he mean "don't tell Jason"? Why not? Wasn't it a bit relevant if God wanted Jason to be a pastor and I was gonna be stuck following him along as the pastor's wife?!
 - b. This is how I know Jesus is smart, and also has a kind of wicked sense of humor. I got that word, I thought, "What the heck, what do I have to lose?" and I began praying for years in secret the church that we would eventually start. But because at this point I had not seen any models of Vineyard churches pastored by women, I assumed the word was for Jason; that eventually Jesus would call him to be a pastor. And year after year that call never came. Finally, in 2006 through a number of circumstances, some of which I've already described, I finally understood that this word was for me. Jason was never supposed to be the pastor. I was the one starting ministries, leading groups, leading worship, preaching, but wondering when God was going to call Jason. All the time, sneaky Jesus was actually preparing *me* to lead a church start-up someday. That word was about Jesus empowering me.
- E. What are the ways Jesus has uniquely created you to participate in his *ekklesia*? How is he empowering you? And who is he empowering you to empower?

VI. Love, when it really works, is contagious. So is empowerment.

A. We are empowered so we can empower.

B. Jesus didn't empower his followers because they were fully ready. He empowered them because he loved them. And he saw the potential.

1. I don't think any of us who started Haven felt like the most qualified people to lead a church. Even me. If you were there, you probably remember. And truthfully, I think some of us, if we're honest, would still say we feel that way. And yet Jesus has been gracious with us. He's honored our willingness to be used. And he's honored us by using us, despite our weaknesses, or inexperience.

C. Who can we empower?

1. What got me from that first word "Someday you guys are going to start a church" to actually feeling confident enough to say, "I think I'm supposed to be the pastor" to finally moving to Berkeley and starting Haven was lots of people along the way, calling things out in me, naming what I was good at, confirming what they saw in me, praying for more, and making space for me to try stuff. Who are the people God has put in your life to impact, to call out, to make space for? This could be in church, it could be in the workplace, it could be in your family.
2. If we're going to look to Jesus to show us how to "live the love", don't just accept the empowerment for ourselves. We take it and empower others.

D. Pray for us to receive God's empowerment to proclamation, and to make Haven a community that empowers others in all kinds of ways. (Invite folks to stand, open their hands, pray for the Holy Spirit to come...)