

Everyone, Everywhere (The Alliance World Tour)
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It is really great to be with you this morning. Welcome again to those Homestead Falls in the rain and wherever you might be joining. I know my wife and our youngest are in Columbus, so at least we have somebody from Columbus on the stream as well this morning. But wherever you're joining from, welcome.

It's a real honor for me to be here at Grace this weekend. Like Jonathan shared, were a part of a family of churches. And I get to work with that family of churches. But I grew up in northeast Ohio. So for me, this is coming home. I was tempted to wear my Bernie Kosar jersey this morning because I don't know the last time the next time I'm going to get to preach in Cleveland, we're in first place.

So it's good to be here riding high. It's good to be in Middleburg this morning. It's also really good for me to be here because I don't know if you know this, but this church leads the way in so many ways in this family of churches called the Christian and Missionary Alliance, like this is the frontrunner church in terms of missions giving to stuff around the world and to leadership and church planting ten churches in the last 20 years.

So I don't have the privilege that often to be in a church like Grace. And it's really encouraging for me to be here. And so I want to honor Jonathan and Mary and the whole team. I have so many friends at Grace here, so yeah, thank you. Just exceptional leadership and integrity and passion for the kingdom. And so it really is an honor for me to be here this morning.

All of our Christian journeys are unique. So if you're here this morning, you consider yourself a follower of Jesus. We all come to this faith journey in different ways. We're found by God in different ways. But there are similarities in our journeys across all the variety. One of them is that at some point our brokenness becomes real to us, to the point that we go, Oh, I need some help.

So whether it's very obvious and we're doing horrible things or we're in a traumatic situation or a kid and we just realize me and I'm not God and I need help, at some point we come to the end of ourselves and we put our faith in Jesus. That's the first step in our spiritual journey with Christ. That's very basic.

One of the next steps is we realize that we're here for a purpose. And so we start asking questions like, And as we go in our journey, we start asking questions like, Well, so what am I supposed to do with my time? If I'm supposed to follow God, He's supposed to be the first most important person in my life.

What do I do with my time and my energy and my work and my money and my family and all those things? And as we begin to ask those questions, God begins to answer. And one of the first responses is, I'm glad you asked, because your life really ultimately isn't about you. And that's a bit of a shocking and sometimes discouraging reality.

If we're honest, because we're all pretty much selfish, driven by our own wants and needs. And a lot of those things are very real. But when we're walking with God and we go deeper with Him, we start realizing, okay, maybe I'm not on the planet just for me. Maybe I'm not even just saved. For me, it's true that we're forgiven and we have this promise of heaven, but we're not brought into the family of God just so that we would be happier.

And then we can get on with our lives. We're brought into the family of God to join some bigger purpose, some kind of beyond reality than us. My wife and I served for a number of years in France, and I'll never forget when a young architect named Frederic he came to faith secular house, secular country. His father was a Buddhist.

He came to faith, very new to all this Christian stuff, and I was mentoring a group of young guys in their twenties and they were trying to figure out what does it mean to follow Jesus. And so we would talk every week like some of you are a part of these kind of groups. And we'd say, you know, it's God's turn.

Anything in you, you learn anything. And he's like, Man, I never know what to say when you ask these questions. I don't know what God's

saying or doing. But one week he said, I think I have an answer. This week I said, All right, what do you got? He said, It sounds kind of dumb, but I was standing on the subway.

The metro is what we call it in Paris. I was standing on the metro and I realized I didn't care about anybody around me and maybe I should. And we said, actually, that's pretty profound because as we realized that we're not the purpose of our own lives, that it's about more than us. It's about God and his work and it's about other people.

We realized that actually there are other people in this world Now, that sounds basic, but it is basic. It is easy to live our lives without caring about anybody, or at least trying not to. But in our faith journey, we realized, I mean, we have neighbors and friends and family members, some of whom are fun to love, and some of them not so fun to love or to hang out with.

And as we go deeper with Christ, then we start having different priorities first in our lives, like we start realizing, Man, this life with Jesus is actually so good. We got to tell somebody else about us. It might start like we're new to Columbus National office, moved to Columbus a couple of years ago, so we've been there two years and we're still exploring the city, having a lot of fun in Columbus.

Every time I go to a new restaurant, I feel like I need to text my friends who move there to like, Oh, you guys got to check out this restaurant or whatever. So sometimes our face is as simple as that is, Man, this is exciting and I share this. Then as we journey with God, it gets even deeper.

It gets to the point where we're like, Man, like, I've got to tell people about this because without this, like, what we have, you know, a lot of my friends who don't follow Christ or used to follow Christ or people that I meet, they'll go, Why do you really believe this? Really? Like, still you believe this stuff? I go, I really don't know where else to turn.

Jesus is real and he really does set us free. And then there become these priorities. We sang earlier about just just songs about the Holy Spirit. And the truth is, as the Holy Spirit comes and fills us up, he does

give us a heart to care about the things that God cares about. This is the journey. It's the progression.

We get in love with Jesus. He starts helping us care about Him, and then He turns us to other people, even to people that we'd never meet around the world. Why would we care about other countries or people that because our hearts almost irrationally begin to align with the heart of Jesus for his world? This model is pretty biblical as well.

We see these examples all the time. Jesus finds disciples, He teaches them, and even before they even know very much, He's sending them out into the world to be messengers, what Paul calls messengers of reconciliation. In other words, we are these presence carriers that take the good news all over the world and to people right near us. In Chapter one, Jesus has just risen from the dead.

He is shown that He's the Messiah. His disciples who have been tracking with them are now like, okay, now we're getting somewhere they have in mind something different than Jesus has in mind. If you know these stories, you know that to be true. Jesus says in chapter one, He goes, Hey, wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit comes on you.

He gives us a really good wisdom here that you can't do anything for God unless the Spirit God is in you. Otherwise you just burn out or you get distracted or it becomes too much sacrifice. But when the Holy Spirit does come on us, there's a whole lot that God wants to get done with us. God doesn't need us.

He's not asking us to do something for him because he's like incapable for some reason, God's desire was to leave the future of the church in the hands of people, which seems to me like a bad plan in some ways, because I know myself and I don't know you that well, but I know other people and we're highly unreliable and selfish.

And yet God takes pleasure in partnering with people to get this job done. So he says, the disciples wait here in Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit will come on you the very next verse. They say, So when are you going to restore political power to us? That's literally their next question. That can be our tendency as well, whether it's political power or something else.

Jesus doesn't really answer Question He does slightly by saying, First of all, it's not up to you to know anything. Only the father knows. Then he responds by saying, When the Holy Spirit comes on you in Acts one eight, you will receive power and you will be my witnesses. That word witnesses is the word martyr Cross in Greek, which is really better translated evidence like you will be evidence by your lives and your witness and your, you know, descriptions of who I am, that I am real, that I did raised from the dead, and that I have a plan for this world.

You will be my evidence to Jerusalem, where you live, to Judea, where the region we're in Samaria, to all the people that are close to you, but very different from you, whether it's ethnically or culturally or economic, and then to the ends of the earth. And then he goes into heaven and the disciples are looking at each other going, what do we do now?

They take Jesus literally. They stay in Jerusalem and they wait. They interpret Jesus command to pray. And we know that because in Acts two, when the Holy Spirit descends on them, what are they doing? They're praying. And then right away, something happens where Peter goes out, starts preaching, and all these people start coming to faith. There's this link between our alignment with Jesus and when he fills us and a care very basically about other people.

And then they would somehow be part of this story that he's writing this morning. I want to take you on what we call the Alliance World tour. So for about 14 minutes, we're going to look at a lot of slides. Gonna be like an old slide show. American missionaries would come back with their slide projectors and get, like, stuck on the thing.

And hopefully that doesn't happen today. But I'm going to do an old school slide show for you just wrote this. It's for people like me who get bored easily, so hopefully you don't get bored easily for the next 40 minutes. I want to show you this for two reasons. First, I just want to give you some good news.

Like Pastor Jonathan said earlier this world is filled with bad news. I'm going to come back to that afterwards. But we have a lot of reasons to be kind of discouraged and overwhelmed coming out of the pandemic. You know, numbers of faith, even in our own country, aren't that

encouraging. And then we've got wars and a I and consumerism and materialism and political stuff, and then you layer on your own crisis, your own trauma, your own issues, the stresses.

You know, we've got a junior and a seventh grader, our lives are busy and full and we're preoccupied. And it's easy to lose perspective about what God is doing in the world because friends, Jesus is not nervous about what's going on in the world and he's not done. And you're going to hear that. So I want to share some good news.

Secondly, as I share a bunch of stories from all over the world, I'd love to just invite you into this journey. What God's doing to say, Can you see yourself leaning in, whether it's through prayer or through the way you give your finances or maybe even through participating yourself? Can you see yourself in the story? Because these are your stories as a church who leads the way.

And a lot of this these stories aren't possible without churches like this one. So these are your stories and I invite you to see yourself in this. It really is a privilege this morning to give you a snapshot of what God is doing and has been doing through the Christian Missionary Alliance, This family of churches just through the over the last couple of years.

I'm not going to tell long historical stories in the alliance. We have always been a deeper life. That means there's more to this than just checking a box and getting into having a deep life with Jesus and a missions movement. Those two things go together from the beginning. We believe that as the work of God goes more deeply, us, the Word of God flows more broadly from us.

And those things are connected. God's heart, like I've said already, is really for people for you, for me, and for people all over the world. And as our hearts are joined more intimately with his, we begin to share his passion. A quick note before we begin the world tour. I can't name a lot of specific locations because of live streaming in others for safety reasons, but I'm hoping to give you a glimpse of what God's been doing.

So what has our church, what has your church been up to recently? Well, let's start in the United States, whether it's a rural area of the Midwest to your church, our alliance family is reaching broadly to

engage the world with Christ Love. In the United States, we celebrated 17,795 professions of faith, 7382 baptisms and 48 new church plants.

Just last year, the Union Hill Church in Redmond, Washington, partners with local agency to provide tiny homes for Seattle's homeless population. Your church here in Cleveland, as you know, launched a campus at the Lorain Correctional Institution, where over 100 men are worshipping from the incarcerated community every week. And that story continues to grow. Hey, guys. In the Twin Cities of Minnesota, we have partnered with the local resettlement agency to provide tutoring for a community of East African immigrants.

They're also involved, involved in sports outreaches, English and citizenship classes, sewing lessons and community gardens. Your Lyons family in the United States consists of 327,000 worshipers in almost 2000 churches, praising in 38 language in additional 98,000 attend online. Hello again to some of you. And over a thousand alliance family members served on short term mission trips last year.

But the U.S. church is just a part of a much larger God story worldwide. In 2021, 112,000 people were baptized in alliance churches. That's like the size and more of the horseshoe. And if you've been there, that's a lot of people. The Alliance World Fellowship is global family of 60 national church networks, consisting of now over 25,000 churches in 81 countries with more than 6 million Alliance Alliance worshipers.

This fellowship includes over 4 million baptized church members, 184 full term theological schools, and over 30,000 national workers. In 2022, our U.S. alliance had just about 700 international workers from the US that are serving 150 people groups in more than 140 cities. Our U.S. workers, though, joined more than a thousand other cross-cultural workers from that IWC partner family.

At our recent council in Spokane, Washington, we commissioned 36 new international workers because sending workers to the least rich places remains one of our highest priorities. Passion and love for Christ is always at the heart of our missionary activity. Nothing is possible without the filling work of the spirit that I've already mentioned. And as he continues to send us, we'll continue to go.

The Spirit's presence is made manifest through worship, through encounter and through mission, and we become presence carriers. We're going to difficult and hard places now to take the gospel. So let's take a look at some of that work around the globe, Western and Eastern Europe. In Western and Eastern Europe, the Holy Spirit power is at work even in the midst of warfare and disaster.

As armed conflict continued through Ukraine. Throughout Ukraine, the alliance has come alongside Ukrainian refugees in Germany. Through this ongoing partnership, refugee families have received food and clothing, temporary housing, transportation, pastoral care and more as they establish themselves in a new country. In Bordeaux, France, where only 1% of the population is evangelical, God is expanding its presence. This year, the community witnessed the dedication of the Mackinac Church, a beacon of hospitality.

The church has cared for Ukrainian refugees as well. In France. And because of your generosity of over \$1,000,000, thank you to many who gave. The alliance has been able to support the work directly of the National Church in Ukraine to be the hands and feet of Christ. They distributed two tons of food per month and they're mobilizing refugee centers all over the place.

Our leaders are delighted to report as well that in Ukraine the church is actually advancing. Despite the war, one local church has recently grown from 30 to 200 as openness and hunger for Christ increases the Middle East, Our alliance workers have also been manifesting the presence of Jesus in the Middle East. 1604 Food packages were given out to Syrian refugees in 2020.

To all of these with home visits from volunteers, one food package of essential food items sustains a family of six for about 2 to 3 weeks, and Alliance Bible School celebrated the graduation of 18 students who are now serving the Lord throughout the Arab world in a different Middle Eastern ministry, location and English program has returned to a very full load of students and teachers, and they now have more students enrolled than they ever have before.

This program continues to be a centerpiece of their community center. A soccer outreach continues to grow, both in popularity and in more

connections with the boys. They they serve. They recently had 80 kids at practice, and this is an outreach from the local Syrian school, and the coach acts as a mentor to these young boys to make the presence of known of Jesus, known in the Middle East Alliance.

International workers regularly visit refugee families, and in this particular place, 100 refugee families assisting them with urgent nutritional and medical needs. In one Middle Eastern country, the Alliance has witnessed more people come to faith in Christ over the last year than had come to faith over the last ten years combined. And amidst this rapid growth, a local man became the first Muslim background believer to serve as an ordained alliance pastor in one Islamic city of 1.4 million.

There are less than 50 known believers. Alliance international workers are launching gospel presence to provide things that people need in that place, like English classes, gospel centered community and Christlike relationships. The alliance has also been focused in responding to major earthquakes that impacted southeast Turkey and Northern Syria. Alliance churches and IWC from several countries were in place to help with care in Asia.

The alliance has persevered for years in order to bring life of Jesus to the darkest places. Ten years after the Alliance withdrew from this Central Asian country, we've returned to share the hope of the Gospel with those who have never heard it in the short time since their return. Alliance workers have started language learning business, and they're forming strategic relationships with local ministry partners.

After seven years of trips to a remote region, two Alliance workers were able to share the gospel for the first time without objection or interruption. After seven years, something is really changing. The prayerful presence of God's people is actually pushing back the darkness throughout East Asia. Silver Linings Missions provides orphan children with safe homes, facilitating a rehabilitation center for children with disabilities, providing opportunities to impoverished families through education programs.

Silver Lining Family Village currently has 15 families raising over 160 orphan children in another Asian country on one of the world's largest

unreached islands. God has opened opportunities for another alliance worker to engage with marginalized youth offenders from two dozen ethnic groups who are seeking to reenter society after leaving their detention centers during an 18 month window over 1200 people received Christ in northern Cambodia and ten new house churches were planted.

And since 2020, the National Church in Cambodia seen a 10% growth, with 20 churches planted since the start of COVID 19. Like in the Book of Acts, miracles, healings casting out of demons have been dozens of people to believe in Christ, starting house churches in villages all over the region. In a neighboring country, over 2000 students and nearly 200 fully trained leaders are participating in theological education, by extension TV, which has a significant impact on oppressed and marginalized people.

Groups such as the Hmong. You're aware of some of these stats, but more than 40 million people globally are trapped in slavery, sex slavery, bonded labor, child slavery, other forms of extreme injustice, justice ventures, international partners and local organizations and global stakeholders to eradicate human trafficking and other extreme injustice. With the engagement of alliance workers, the Ministry is expanding their work by placing what we call justice hubs in high prevalence areas for human trafficking in northern India.

Since this ministry in South Asia was opened in 2018, the program has provided women trainees with a sense of belonging to a community that affirms them, teaches them new skills and shares hope. Approximately 100 children of the women in the program attend a weekly Sunday school class. Friends, God's not done in the world. He's not done Africa. Some of you know these stories because of your partnerships.

We're not done advancing into hard places in Africa. The Alliance is focusing on ministering to a specific people group which spans across many countries. If and as they respond to Christ, the entire continent will be impacted. Though for safety reasons, we've had to reduce our footprint in multiple cities in West Africa. We have strong national churches that carry on and now celebrate 100 years of Alliance ministry in one African location.

The Alliance celebrated the baptisms of 40 new believers, many of whom live in a pair of villages that had previously lacked any known witness to the gospel. Radio songs in both good news radio are awesome. What started in 2001 to share the good news of Jesus in Pointe-noire The Republic of Congo today are SMS ministry through radio and Facebook Live streaming Make the Gospel message accessible in four languages to hundreds of thousands of listeners.

Dana is a young woman from a West African people group of about 3.3 million. That is almost completely unreached. She heard about Hands of Honor in Alliance ministry, was accepted into the program, ministered to love those involved, and she came to faith. This past year, Bangalow Hospital in Gaborone serves over 40,000 patients a year. Each of these patients.

Here's the good news of Christ. Thousands have accepted that call. And the missions department, now of the Alliance Church in Gabon, is sending their own views to several new countries in Central and West Africa. We praise God for His faithfulness and for the fruit of gospel. Witness Over decades and decades of hard work. Last but not least, in Latin America, we strengthen the witness of Christ Through our presence.

The Alliance demonstrated the love of Jesus to Cuba by delivering food, medicine and other vital supplies to regions that can be difficult for alliance international workers to access. They also receive building supplies for a new alliance seminary that will train and equip leaders for 15 church plants that have sprung to life in the country. With tens of thousands of young Dominicans having yet to hear experience the Gospel.

The alliance started a university center where students can enjoy coffee, learn English, fall in love with Jesus. The Greenhouse Student Center is an environment that's designed to create space to also identify and develop missional leaders who reach students in the capital of Santo Domingo. God has also shown his faithfulness to central Mexico by strengthening the presence of the alliance in the Circle of Silence, a region of over 2 million people where 2% identify as Christians.

This year, an Alliance church in that area baptized 25 more people. Uruguay's the country of Latin European mix that chose one year ago to remove faith and religion from its country. And the result is a secular state whose suicide rate is more than double the regional average. Alliance workers have been ministering there for 25 years and seeing the fruit now of being present, Uruguayans are turning to Jesus for salvation and churches are being planted.

Our Columbian Alliance family of churches just celebrated their 100th anniversary as well, and with joy, they expressed deep gratitude to the US Alliance for sending Wave after wave of international workers who brought the gospel to them, leading to the establishment of a few hundred churches. The anniversary celebration highlighted the commissioning of three new international workers again sent from their country, who will now take the gospel to a region where we've had a lot of difficulty getting access.

I started by saying that as the work of God goes deeper in us, the Word of God flows more broadly from us, and I hope you see this tour as evidence that among the displaced and refugee populations, even amid war, natural disasters, evacuating country, we've long since had access to political unrest and even a global pandemic. The alliance has continued to take all of Jesus to all the world.

We've been present. We're still taking the gospel to the hardest places in the least rich people. So what has your family of churches been up to? We've been praying. We've been giving. And we've been going and responding to the call of our Lord to take his word to the ends of the earth. And as we do all this, we're becoming increasingly aware that to fulfill our mission is going to take every single one of us fully engaged, fully obedient.

We're going to new and difficult places now because as our hearts are joined more deeply with Jesus and filled with His Holy Spirit, we reflect His mission and further our vision of all of Jesus for all the world. Friends, I told you the punch line before we started the World tour. First, I just wanted to give you some good news.

This is not the kind of news that's reported on news channels or that you see often on social media or whatever. We hear a lot of bad stuff.

This is like the newsreel that's played in heaven every day where angels are rejoicing over yet another who puts their faith in Christ. This is the real news. I think part of our invitation is to say, what are the lenses with which we're seeing the world?

Do we primarily see the world through evening news lenses or selfish lenses, or are we seeing the world more and more through gospel lenses that Jesus is giving us by His Holy Spirit, where we go, Wow, He's not done. He's doing stuff and we get to be a part of it. So I wanted to give you some good news.

I also want to just invite you to say if you see yourself in God's story in any way, you're moving towards him. You've put your faith in him. He's inviting you not because he desperately needs you, but because he wants you to join him in this. I, in my job, have the privilege of sitting down with people who give generously to causes like this.

And the conversation that comes back over and over to the fact that really there's no better investment financially than to something that will literally last forever. Even if we save up and we pass it on to our kids, eventually somebody is going to mess up the money or all of our stuff gets burned up. In the end, a lot of the things that we spend much of our time investing in emotionally and our energy and even our finances burn up and we have an opportunity to be a part of something that lasts forever.

This big God story that is being written. That also is the way that we spend our emotional energy and our prayers. Now, as a father with kids who are in high school and junior high, it makes me a little bit more nervous when they say things like, Hey, I think God might be calling me to go somewhere overseas.

It was one thing to do it myself, but if we realize that our lives are fundamentally not ours and that we're not on the planet for us, then we begin to take steps of open handed obedience to go, God, whatever you stir in me, I'll do it. So I wonder if God has stirred something in you this morning and I'm going to let him fill in those blanks.

But as we respond and as you reflect, I invite you to join in the good news story that Jesus is going to write all the way until he comes again

and he's going to involve us in it to his glory and for his kingdom. Let's pray, God, whatever you're doing this morning in our hearts, whether we're sitting on a couch or we're in a chair in church, God, you speak to us in graciousness, in kindness, in love.

I pray that nothing I've said this morning would create extra burden or guilt, but would just simply be invitation to join you in what you're doing. Jesus, you're the king of all kings. The fact that we even know you is a miracle. But would you let us be a part of something different? Would you do something new in our hearts and whatever that is?

Would you make us into what you're making us into? And we follow you in obedience? I pray. Blessing on Grace Church today. Blessing on all those listening. In Jesus name, Amen.