

## INTRODUCTION

Does anyone know the name Lottie Moon? (1840-1912). When Lottie Moon sailed to China in 1873 it took eight weeks to get there... She came home only twice—in 1892 and again 1902. Became sick and died in Japan en route home in 1912; she was buried in Crewe, VA.

On Wednesday when my wife flies to Beijing it will take about 14 hours...

China is still far away from Virginia, but it is a shorter, well quicker trip today. Technology has shrunk the world, yes? You can call or email people in any part of the globe almost instantaneously. You can travel from one remote spot to the other side of the globe in less than 24 hours—news from one country is viewed in another the same day.

Still the world is a big place. The population is growing (7 billion plus). The combination of cultures and societies is enormously complex. The world's peoples are grouped in 200 nations and speak almost 7000 languages. They belong to more than 14,000 ethnic people groups.

My challenge today is to persuade you that it is a good thing to pray for this world—even to pray for those who are different than us and located far, far away. Because we believe, do we not, that all persons are created in the image of God and thus have intrinsic worth and value. And because we affirm that God so loved the world that He gave his only Son...

So all people need and dare we say deserve at least bread to eat and water to drink, and that it is good for those who have to share with those who have not? And if the good news of Jesus has made a difference in our lives do we not want other people, even the far ones, to have a chance to hear and to respond to that same good news?

But two challenges stand in our way. First, do we know very much about the *far ones*, about distant countries and cultures? Do we have a habit or even an intention about keeping up with global news and trends? Do you do as Karl Barth once suggested: read both the Bible and the newspaper together so as to know both God's wisdom and today's events and circumstances?

The second challenge is simpler; do you care about what is happening around the world? Do you care for lost souls, for hungry people, for children sold into slavery, for abused women, for sheep without a shepherd?

Do you know that old one-liner? *What's the difference between ignorance and apathy? I don't know and I don't care!*

Let me tell you a story!

## JONAH

1. The Call and sea journey plus the fish
2. Jonah's prayer from the fish's belly
3. Second try; preaching & repentance in Nineveh
4. Jonah and the plant; anger management

In that story we learn about a prophet, a spokesman from God who did not care about some far away people. In fact, Jonah seems to go out of his way to be displeased and even angry that God has compassion on the people of Nineveh, on those foreigners, on such far away people. By the way, ancient Nineveh is located quite close to the city of Mosul in Iraq today.

The whole Jonah story seems to be an indictment on the prophet's attitude of *compassion-lessness*. Is that a word? I mean "lack of compassion."

Suppose we do care and suppose we do make the effort to get to know what is happening in the world. Suppose we keep track of where there are floods and where there is hunger; suppose we want to be involved in doing justice and loving mercy as well as walking humbly with God.

What can we do? Send money? Send missionaries? Yes and yes. But what can I do on a regular basis? I cannot go to all these places. I cannot afford to support all the causes or all the missionaries. Even if I were to grow in generosity of giving—which I need to do.

We can touch the world with our prayers! We can pray for *the far ones*. We can pray for hungry people in Somalia and democracy seekers in Libya. For flood victims in Pakistan and the perennially poor in Haiti. We can pray for the millions who never have heard of Jesus Christ.

And we can believe that God hears our prayers and uses our prayers and answers our prayers. Prayer goes hand in hand with faith. And faith is like a muscle. The more you exercise it the stronger it becomes.

When *you* need some prayer, whom do you approach?

Will any person do or do you think of someone who prays regularly and seriously? Don't you want a prayer warrior to plead your case? If you need surgery you want a good surgeon, an experienced doctor. And if you need prayer you might want to ask someone who knows and cares.

You and I can be those prayer partners who know and care. We can be accused of being faithful in prayer and be proven guilty.

Let me tell you one more story.

Story: *Helen Roseveare and the hot water bottle*

God is the "answering prayer" business. He loves for us to trust him with bold and audacious prayers. And to trust Him with little prayers and daily prayers. Will you consider

making a commitment today to pray for the world God loves? Will you read the news or watch the news with an eye toward letting today's current events guide you in your praying?

Story: Recall the story of the 90 and the nine sheep. Why leave the 99 for the lost sheep? What kind of system allows for such effort to find one lost soul?

God's kingdom runs on different principles. Everyone is of great value. And the Church is called to manifest reckless grace and astonishing love and mercy for others. Even if you and I cannot go to the ends of the earth, we can give. And even if you cannot give as you want, even if you do not give generously as you might, you can pray. Touch the world with your prayers. And see what God will do!