

First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth, Michigan

A Commercial Break, Part 1

“We Interrupt This Program for a Commercial Break”

Sunday, February 7, 2021

Rev. Mark Hovermale

Rev. Mark Hovermale – Welcome and Announcement

Welcome to our worship service! Today, on Sunday, February 7th, we are at the Underhill home. So, welcome! We are glad that you are with us today. We have announcements on this Super Bowl Sunday. The first one is the End of Life booklets. This is a tough topic but it's very important for the church to address. The booklets are available to you on Saturday, February 13th from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the church parking lot. You can get a booklet there, also, before and after the worship service on Sunday, February 14th. As well, the Deacons are making the booklet available online. Again, a very difficult topic, but one the church needs to address, and we are addressing it at First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth. And now we'll go to Emily for a couple other announcements

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell – Announcements

Good morning, friends. The first announcement for you today—we have had to cancel our parking lot worship service this morning due to the extreme cold weather that has come into Michigan. Being that our church's annual meeting was also supposed to take place this Sunday, February 7th, we have had to postpone that meeting by two weeks to make sure we give you proper notice. Our church's annual meeting has been rescheduled to Sunday, February 21st. We're taking no chances with weather, going forward! This meeting will take place via Zoom at noon. Again, Sunday, February 21st at noon via Zoom. The purpose of the meeting has not changed. This is our meeting to elect our nominating committee and also to approve ministers' terms of call. As I've shared with you already, the terms of call will hopefully remain the same this coming year; we just need your approval to make that happen. One last thing, would you please pre-register, today, for our Zoom meeting on February 21st at noon. You can do this through our church website. That registration for all church members will be available from now over the next two weeks until we have that meeting.

Friends, today is the first Sunday of the month, which means it is a Sunday that we celebrate communion together. In this way we are reminded that we are one family of faith, even as we celebrate communion within our own homes. Friends, we're going to pause the video here to allow you to gather whatever communion elements you are able to find within your home today, whether juice or water, bread or a cracker. We invite you to go find these elements and bring them before you as you're watching so that when we partake in that part of our service you can join us and together we will be reminded through this holy practice that we truly are one family of faith.

And now, Ashley will come forward and begin this time of worship in prayer.

Ashley Smith Ashley, Associate Pastor – Prayer

Let us pray. Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid, have mercy on us, God, for we are sinners. Like Ananias and Sapphira, we lie and cheat, hoping to enact our own wills, but then failing to follow yours. Lord, we ask that you would cleanse our hearts and focus our minds by the power of the Holy Spirit. Transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace, and in the renewal of our lives. Make known your glory. Through Jesus Christ our Lord who is alive and reigns with you, and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Chancel Choir sings “Make His Praise Glorious” (from April 14, 2019)

Rev. Mark Hovermale – Introduction to the Sermon Theme

Well, it is Super Bowl Sunday. I know, we're not supposed to say that in church, but it is! It's Super Bowl Sunday. Last year in the 2020 edition of the Super Bowl, which the Kansas City Chiefs won, by the way, 99.9 million, so basically, 100 million people in the United States watched the game. That is absolutely incredible! Advertisers paid about \$5.6 million for 30 seconds, or over \$10 million for one minute, which is why at First Pres. we decided to not allocate our funds to doing a Super Bowl commercial!

What's the goal of a commercial in the Super Bowl? They spend so much money! The first goal, sometimes, is name recognition. Right! That's where you get those random commercials that have nothing to do with the actual business; they literally just try to get you to remember their name. Now the second possible goal is where it tries to sum up everything they are part of in 30 seconds or a minute; what their values are, why they exist, why you should remember them, why you need them, what they're about. And, as I watch those commercials, I think about that. I don't have \$5.6 million, but if I were to do a 30-second commercial, or a minute, what would it say about me? What would your commercial say about *you*? What are the values or things that are important in my life that would be expressed? Now we all know that Bradley Cooper or Dwayne Johnson would play me in the commercial! But the reality is what would I actually say about *me*, what would you want to say about *you*? That's what we're going to look at today.

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell – Scripture Readings

Acts 5:1-11

¹Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. ²With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

³Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? ⁴Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God."

⁵When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. ⁶Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

⁷ About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ Peter asked her, “Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?”

“Yes,” she said, “that is the price.”

⁹ Peter said to her, “How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also.”

¹⁰ At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

Acts 6:8-12

⁸ Now Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹ Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to argue with Stephen. ¹⁰ But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.

¹¹ Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, “We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.”

¹² So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin.

May God help us today to understand these readings from his word. Amen.

Rev. Mark Hovermale – Sermon

So what does your commercial say about you? What would my commercial say about me? To help us, we're going to look at two accounts in God's word. Now, “accounts”. Why we use that word is that they're not just “stories”; they actually happened. In the first, we're looking at Ananias and Sapphira. Now, you heard it read and you've heard the whole story. I remember a Sunday school song, “Ananias and Sapphira got together to conspire a plot to cheat the church and get ahead”. I don't remember the rest of it because I wasn't paying attention. I had cookies during that part!

Here's the thing, though. Here's what they did and you heard the story. They sold land. Back then, people in the church would sell property they owned, their own property. They would want to give to people who were in need so they would sell property and bring it and drop it at the apostles’ feet, saying, “You give this to the people who are needy.” Now Ananias and Sapphira, they did this. They wanted the credit for it, right? But they wanted to keep some of the money back and so they lied. They brought the money in and said, “This is all, everything we have.” And it wasn't what they sold it for. As you read or heard, Ananias shows up. Peter says, “You lied!” Ananias drops dead. Not good! Then, a few hours later his wife Sapphira comes in and they go, “Hey! Did you sell that property for that amount of money?” She doubles down and lies, and she dies.

And it says in the Bible, “that great fear seized the whole church.” For all who heard these events, it was one of the scary stories in the Bible. Now, as it is such an intense story, we know that the real big issue was *not* just that they lied. It was that they basically ‘misrepresented, what the original word says, ‘the misappropriation of funds’. And so,

literally, what they did is they got in trouble, not because they sold and gave a little bit of it or some of it, but because they *pretended* they gave it all. So Ananias and Sapphira made a really bad decision, and a bunch of bad decisions. That actually leads us to our first main point of this sermon, *The decisions you make help create your commercial*. The decisions you make help create your commercial or your life. In essence, Ananias and Sapphira made some bad decisions and now we know their commercial. We know what it says, based on those bad decisions.

There's another account I want to talk to you about. It's just a chapter away in Acts, chapter 6. It's about a guy named Stephen. Now Stephen, as it says in the Bible, was a man full of God's grace and power. He performed great wonders and signs among the people. He was a deacon, and he was an amazing guy, both just, and God-fearing. It makes me think, I had a preacher once who said, "No job too big, no job too small." Remember that commercial about the handyman service? That was Steven--no job was too big for him, and no job was too small. So, what happened was some people didn't like him. You say, "Who couldn't like a guy like this?" Ironically enough, religious leaders. They didn't seem to like Christ followers very much and they didn't like him. They actually started to argue with him. But the Bible says he was so smart, based on what the Spirit had given him, that they could argue with him and he would win. So what do you do when you don't like someone, and you can't outsmart them? You trash them! You trash their integrity, and that's what they did. They actually said at one point that he blasphemed or, you know, said stuff against Moses and against God, which would have been a very big deal back then.

So then they put him in front of the Sanhedrin, the church leaders of the day. Stephen has got a decision to make. Just as Ananias and Sapphira had a decision to make, he had a decision to make. Okay, does he back down and kind of just be complicit in and try to do what they want, or does he double down and start preaching what he knows is right? He started preaching what he knows is right, and as you heard the story, he was the church's first martyr. He made a decision to do what was right and because of that he paid a big price.

It also reveals some values. Going back to the story of Ananias and Sapphira, going back to that story, their values were different than Stephen's values. Their value was money and being known for being good. And so that was their value system. They loved money more than they loved integrity and anything else. That led to them making the decisions they made.

Stephen, now, what were his values? I just told you the story. Stephen--did he value his life more than anything else? No! Did he value personal protection or security or even feelings? No! His value was *eternal*; it was serving Jesus Christ. That was his value, and he went to death for it. You know someone's values are pretty high and they hold them pretty close when they're willing to die for them. That leads us to our second main point. *Your values help create your commercial*. Your *decisions* help create your commercial, but so do your values.

Your values help create your commercial. So with Ananias and Sapphira, there isn't really an overload of information. We don't know exactly all the details. Peter kind of confronts them in verse 3 when they lie. We don't know what exactly happens there, but here's what I know. For Ananias to have lied, and then Sapphira, Ananias's wife to double down and lie again, means that their hearts were not really in the church or with Christ. We

know they were part of the church because they brought money to support it, but clearly, clearly, their hearts were not in it.

Here's an example. When I cut the lawn, okay, I do it. I try to do it well, so I don't get in trouble, but my heart's not in it. I'm thinking about fifteen other things I want to be doing instead. I mean, if you can relate to that, I think it's the same with Ananias and Sapphira. Their hearts were not in it.

Stephen, now, let's go to his story, just a chapter later. His heart is one hundred percent in it and why is that? Just like his values, you don't die for something your heart isn't one hundred percent in. He died and he did that because his heart was one hundred percent in it. This is the main point #3, *Where your heart truly is will help create your commercial.* Where your heart truly is will help shape and create your commercial.

So where is your heart this morning? Where do your passions lie? There is one more main point, one more characteristic that I think is important to creating your commercial. One of my favorite books and movies is the American Sniper. It was about Chris Kyle, a Navy Seal, and the deadliest American sniper in history. He had four tours in the Middle Eastern wars. When he gets back, the book and the movie show that he is really struggling from, you know, post-traumatic stress, and, also, just not knowing where to fit in. He felt so badly he couldn't save more American lives and a doctor at the Veterans Administration said, "Hey, you know what? If you start investing in some of these veterans who are really struggling, you might find some meaning. So it shows how he starts mentoring these young men and women, who are struggling as well, and he finds meaning in life by being around those people. The right people gave him the right meaning to life.

It's a great story, but it also indicates a kind of an important idea for each of us. *Who you spend your time with will help shape who you become.* Who you spend your time with will help shape who you become. That's why, parents, that's why you worry about who hangs out with your kids. Think about this. If you're hanging out with a bunch of people all the time that just love cars, you're going to be into cars, or you're going to be like me and leave. If you're out with a bunch of people that are really into running, you're either going to probably talk and do running or you're going to leave. If you're with a group of people who value money and power and getting ahead, no matter what, if that's what they value, and that's what you value, that's what you're going to become. So main point #4 is, *The people you spend your time with will help create your commercial.* The people you spend your time with, especially the ones who you spend time with the most, will help create your commercial.

So, tonight as you're watching all the great commercials and some bad ones, too, take a minute and think about what would your commercial say about you. What would it say about the decisions you make, your values, where your heart is at, and most importantly, maybe, in some aspects, who you spend your time with. What would it say about me? What would it say about you? If you don't like the way the commercial is coming out in

your mind, if it's unraveling a little bit, you can recreate your commercial! You can reshoot it. I think about this as I conclude.

Rev. Emily always says to stay in the main point. "If you're not talking about Jesus, you missed the main point, Mark!" If He is only at the beginning and the end of your commercial, so to speak, you have missed the main point. And if he is *nowhere* to be

found in your commercial, you have really missed the point! Come to think of it, there are some things I need to rewrite in my commercial. How about you?

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell – Sacrament of Communion

We come to this table today at the invitation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus has said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls.”

Let us now turn to Jesus in prayer. Let us pray. Loving Lord, awaken within our hearts, our souls, our minds, and our strength, so that we may love you with the whole of our lives. Help us to be always open and honest before you, so that we may cry out where we have need, ask for your forgiveness where we have failed, and rely on you each and every day for our strength, guidance, and peace. We love you, Lord, and we pray that our lives would be lived in grateful response to your love and grace. We thank you, dear God, today for prayers answered. We thank you for the Covid vaccine and its many forms. We thank you for those who have been vaccinated and pray for those still waiting for that opportunity. We remember and pray for our health care workers at every level. Bless them, protect them, strengthen them in this ongoing battle, we pray. We pray for our teachers and all families as they continue to navigate life in these uncertain times. Please help those who are in need financially or physically, emotionally or spiritually. We pray for all who mourn loved ones this day and pray that they would know your comfort, care and peace. We pray, dear God, too, that they would know the peace that comes from this communion, that we are gathered together today with all the saints in heaven, and as one family of faith, both in heaven and on earth. We proclaim together our praise, our gratitude towards God, as we receive these signs of God's love and grace. But please receive all of our prayers here today, those that we have said together and those we lift up to you from the depth of each of our hearts.

Hear us now as we gather our voices together to pray the prayer your son first taught to us when he said,

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power and the glory forever.
Amen.

Friends, on the night of his arrest, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread and after giving thanks to God, his Father, He broke it, saying, “This is my body that has been broken for you. Do this in memory of me.” In the same way, after supper Jesus took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant sealed by my blood. Whenever you drink from it, do so remembering me, for as often as you eat this bread and drink from this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes again.”

These are the gifts of God given to the people of God. Let us share in this communion meal together.

Choir and Congregation sing “*The Summons*” (from March 8, 2020)

Ashley S. Ashley, Associate Pastor — Closing Prayer

Friends, let us pray. Loving God, you graciously feed us and sustain us at your table. With truly thankful hearts we have received the bread of life and the cup of salvation. May we who have received the sacrament be strengthened in your service. May we have sung your praises, tell of your glory and truth, and may we have seen the greatness of your love, see you face to face in your Kingdom. As a sacrament binds us to you, may it also bind us to one another, that we can be good and caring neighbors, that we can represent your love and presence to those who are suffering and grieving. We lift these dear ones to you today and lift all the concerns of our hearts, knowing that you work for good for those who are your people. As we prepare to go back out into your world, give us such an awareness of your mercies that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips but also with our lives by giving up ourselves to your service and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all of our days. Through Jesus Christ, our redeemer, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be all honor and glory, now and forever. Amen.

Rev. Mark Hovermale — Benediction and Blessing

Well, may you go forth today, and as you watch the game, ask yourself what does my commercial say about me and if it needs to be changed, Lord, let me change it.

Now may the Lord bless you and keep you. May his face shine upon you and all those you love, today and forever more. Amen.