Tonight we are gathered as one community of faith and as one body in Christ serving in God’s mission field here in the neighborhood of Sheepshead Bay. Do you know that more than 150 years ago, this area was nothing but farm land and remote countryside? Many of our homes that we live in today were built upon land that was once occupied by various horse racing and auto racing tracks, notably the famous Sheepshead Bay and the Gravesend race tracks. The BMT Subway – the Brighton Line didn’t even come into service until 1878, while providing access to these race tracks and also to Coney Island and Sheepshead Bay. And as they say, the rest is history…

The reason I mentioned all of these is that it just goes to show, whether our church is 116 years or just a few months old, we are all part of the city’s transformation AND also God’s missional plan. We were part of the mission frontier and still is today. It is by no coincidence that we are worshipping here tonight remember what God has done for us and also for this neighborhood over these years.

**Undoubtedly the neighborhood has changed dramatically over the years but yet God’s mission remains the same, to reach those who are unreached, and to extend God’s love to others.** God’s faithfulness remains steadfast as we continue to serve on this mission frontier wherever we live, work or go to school.

*Homecrest Presbyterian Church* was the beneficiary of God’s vision and mission when a group of faithful believers along with its founding pastor – the Rev. Edward Tibbals prayerfully petitioned to the *Presbytery of Brooklyn* to begin this new mission outpost more than 116 years ago. To this day, Homecrest remains the southernmost congregation in the NYC Presbytery geographically.

*Resurrection Sheepshead Bay* began its first worship service just the end of last year, after many years of prayers, planning, and envisioning as a result of the compassion and relationships that were fostered subsequent to the Superstorm Sandy in 2012. People come together in faith in support of one another, especially when there is a looming crisis and a deep spiritual hunger and yearning for God’s vision in God’s Kingdom.

Both of our congregations have someone or know someone who has had their homes destroyed, basements flooded, or still bears the deep emotional scars and fears every day. Even though Sandy might have destroyed our houses, washed away our cars, and disrupted our lives. We were all touched by God’s mission in extending God’s love to our neighbors who are in needs. God’s mission of mercy does not stop when a crisis or tragedy occurs. As a matter of fact, it even magnifies and expands manifolds.

In the same way, when Christ took his final breaths on the cross, the world did not stop either, even though according to the Scripture there we as long period of silence and the curtain at the temple was split. **When Christ said *“It is finished”* on the cross, that was our prompt of commission that Christ’s work here on earth has now finished, but ours has just begun!**

Some biblical scholars contrasted Christ’s next to the last word on the cross “***It is finished***” with the work of God’s creation when God had finished all that He had created in 6 days and declared it was complete and it was **very good**.[[1]](#footnote-1)

You see, God the Creator is in the business of creating. God will continue to create even at times when we fail to acknowledge God’s creation or when we have done our parts to ruin and destroy God’s “very good” creation here on earth. For example, **we have failed to be good stewards of this earth for the sake of our convenience by squandering our precious earthly resources and polluting our environment.** **Instead of building bridges, nurturing relationships, and reconciling our differences, we’re putting up physical and invisible fences and walls that separate us from our neighbors.** We invest heavily in weaponry of mass destruction, in the name of “defense”, while perpetrating aggression and violence instead of promoting peace and justice as demonstrated through Christ’s humility and love.

I’m not sure this is what God had in mind when we were commanded by Christ to “***feed my lambs and take care of my sheep***.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Whenever we fail to love our neighbors, or we fail to love ourselves, it gives God deep grieves and pains, as Christ lamented and wept over the city of Jerusalem on his final journey, “***Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do****.”[[3]](#footnote-3)*

Let us bring it a little closer back home. What does it mean for us today? Just as the post-Sandy recovery and the rebuilding work that never seems to be finished, **God’s work on humanity is also an on-going work-in-progress.** Many of us may still bear physical scars and vivid memories that we would very much like to erase, however, those scars and memories are here for a reason. They serve as a reminder of God’s unconditional love for us…just like those scars that were imprinted on Christ’s hands, his feet, and his beaten and bruised body upon the cross. **Those scars and marks that we see each day served as symbols of God’s ultimate LOVE for us!** This is how God expressed God’s love to us all.

This week we witnessed once again, through the series of terrorist attacks in Europe and in other parts of the world, the presence of evil is ever so real and present all around us. **We must remain vigilant not only for evil in this world but also for God’s love, compassion, and hope in light of tragedies. Evil is the absence of God’s love.**

What happened on that fateful day, more than 2,000 years ago, was also yet another terrorist attack that incite great fear and trauma amongst the many believers and followers of Jesus. Yet God conquered fear and evil through the love as expressed by his Son. **God was willing to surrender his ultimate love in order that we may live.** This was all part of God’s plan of salvation for humanity, and yet we have done nothing to deserve all of this either.

Friends, we are living in a liminal (an in-between) time. Christ has sent us all on a LOVE mission to go out and proclaim who Christ is through our love. Once again in the year 2016, we find ourselves living in the mission frontier here in South Brooklyn. Just take a look all around us. **Do we know the neighbors who live next door? Do we know their languages, their cultures, their hopes and dreams of their future?**

Jesus the Great Shepherd has placed us in charge with a flock of sheep to tender…in our neighborhoods, or wherever God may be sending us to, even into places outside of our comfort zones. God has also given us the gift of the Holy Spirit, who grants us faith, courage and strength to proclaim when we must, and to remain silent and exemplify Christ’s humility when we should.

As we gaze upon the cross this evening, remembering and meditating upon the final words that Christ has spoken, we may sympathize Christ’s pain and agony…but more importantly may we be inspired by Christ’s ultimate love and sacrifice for humanity, bend down and wash one another’s feet, lay down our lives for others and demonstrate God’s compassion and mercy.

**The death that Christ died on the cross was our deaths. The cross that Christ bore upon His shoulder was ours also.** God’s work of reconciliation with humanity through Christ may be finished, but our work of seeking reconciliation with one another has just begun. **It is NOT finished!!!** With the Holy Spirit’s leading the way, we WILL continue to run this race that Christ has started until Christ returns once again.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Genesis 1:31-2:1* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Luke 21:15-17* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Luke 23:34* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)