**It Would Take a Miracle**

**…To Unite our Country**

**January 15, 2017**

 Hello and welcome to Stevens Creek Church. I am so glad that you are here today. Have you ever heard or said the expression “It Would Take a Miracle?” People use that expression in a variety of ways—to describe someone in poor health, a troubled marriage, a financial reversal and even a ball game if their team is behind. They say this when they are looking ***at*** an impossible situation and they realize that they need something supernatural to happen.

 This is Inauguration Week in America. This week is the culmination of a two-year election cycle that has taken us places that we never thought that we would go. The election surprised us all.

 On November 8th, CNN reported that a top-level Trump Advisor said: “It would take a miracle for Donald Trump to win.” It was not a miracle, but simply the right number of people, in the right number of states went to the polls and elected him as our leader. That’s how it works and today we are preparing for a new season of politics to begin.

 Here’s what you need to know … even if the tides were turned a different way … meaning if Hillary Clinton, Gary Johnson or Jill Stein would have won instead of Donald Trump… in either case…***Jesus is still LORD***.

 On Friday, Donald Trump will be sworn in as President. He will be the most prayed over person ever sworn in … in fact, there will be six prayers offered over him. Of course, I know that the Democrats are saying, “Boy, he needs it.” And, I would say, “We all do.”

 On Friday, Mr. Trump becomes President Trump and on Saturday, we will wake up and for most of us, life will be the same, we will eat grits for breakfast, Washington Road will still be crowded, and Clemson will still be the National Champions.

 I am sure most Americans thought that it would take a miracle for Clemson to beat Alabama, this year, it was not a miracle, just a good football team.

 Like I said earlier, this is inauguration week. Half of America is celebrating a win and the other half is saying wait until next time. I know how both sides are feeling right now. Many people see America as a divided nation. Intellectually I understand that, but I did not emotionally understand it until July 2015.

I was spending a few days with my in-laws in Cleveland, Tennessee watching the news. Donald Trump had just announced his run for the Presidency a few weeks prior. It seemed as though every newscaster was talking bad about him. *This was long before he gave them so much material.*

My mother always taught me: *If you can’t say anything good; don’t say anything at all.* As I listened to the news, I sent a tweet to a campaign worker in South Carolina and said, “If you want a positive story about Mr. Trump, send me an email.” I did not think too much about it, but a day or so later, they responded and I sent them a story about a lady from our church.

 You see in 1986, Anabell and Lenard Hill lived in Waynesboro on a farm that had been in their family for over 100 years. They had several seasons of drought and bad crops and it destroyed them financially… to the point where they were going to lose the farm. The bank made plans to auction the farm off on the courthouse steps.

On the day of the auction, Lenard, overcome with grief, went home and got out his insurance papers. He walked into the bedroom and committed suicide thinking the life insurance would pay off the farm. He did not realize that there his policies did not pay in case of a suicide.

When the news spread throughout Waynesboro, the bank canceled the auction. The story hit the news and a friend of Donald Trump’s in Atlanta called him and told him about it. Donald Trump put together a group of people and paid off the farm and gave it to Ms. Anabel. He flew Anabel to New York and together they burned the note.

 After that, when I would see Ms. Anabel in the community or here at church, she would look at me and say, ***“I’m praying for Mr. Trump.”***

 Long before the television lights were turned on, there was a spirit of generosity in this man.

 I shared that story and did not think any more about it. A couple of days later, I received a call from the Trump Campaign saying that Mr. Trump read your email and he wants you to introduce him when he comes to South Carolina. I said, “No, it’s not my story. It’s a church member’s story.” They said that he asked for you. We need someone comfortable with being on a big stage.

 I did not think it was a big deal, but when we got there it was much bigger than I imagined. Here’s a quick clip from that day.

 You don’t always get to pose for pictures. Here’s one from that event. When Donald Trump read Lindsey Graham’s phone number out loud, I was in disbelief. I was shocked. This is what it looked like (Show picture of MCB laughing).

 I said earlier that *intellectually* I knew our nation was divided, but *emotionally* I did not realize it. That it, until I got home. People saw me on the news with Donald Trump and some of the pent up anger they had against him came my way. I was very surprised.

 It opened my eyes to the division that we have in our nation. It’s deeper than Democrat versus Republican, Conservative versus Liberal, Black versus White or American verses Mexican. It deeper than all of that.

 We are broken. We are spiritually empty. Our hearts are broken. Our lives are broken. Our relationships are broken. All of this brokenness is sitting beneath the surface waiting for a time to come out. When it comes out, it does a lot of damage. When you have anger and it is not dealt with, it turns inward and become bitterness.

**Hebrews 12:15**

See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that **no bitter root**grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

 When your anger is not dealt with, it turns inward and become bitterness. Then, your bitterness hurts other people. Notice the phrase: … that **no bitter root**grows up to cause trouble and *defile many.* Bitterness will cause trouble and hurt people around you.

 Like all weeds, bitterness has a way of spreading. A man infects his wife. She infects her children. The bitterness spreads and soon the whole family is infected.

 So we have created this culture of disrespect, anger and bitterness. You hear it in the words we use. We need to clean up our language. It amazing how words that were considered curse words or slang words are now mainstream. Our language is really a heart issue.

**Luke 6:45**

A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. *What you say flows from what is in your heart*.

 Jesus taught us to love one another. Be kind and compassionate. One day Jesus was in a conversation with a lawyer and he asked, “What can I do to inherit eternal life?

**Luke 10:27**

He answered: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all

your strength and with all your mind; and, Love your neighbor as yourself.”

They lawyer responded:

**Luke 10:29**

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

 Now this question—***who is my neighbor?—***was a big question in the first century, especially among Jewish people. You see, there was a big debate going on as to who qualified to be a neighbor.

 Many Jews actually believed that their neighbors were only other Jews, only other people that thought and had the same religious and value system as they did.

 Anyone of another religion or another ethnicity wasn’t really considered a neighbor, and the Jews didn’t really have to do anything to help them, especially immoral people like prostitutes and dishonest tax collectors. They knew there was no way they were going to help those people. They really felt they only had to help other Jews; they were their neighbors.

Jesus responded by telling the **story of a man who was beaten and left for dead on the side of the road**. A priest came by and then a Levite, but neither of these stopped for help. Then a **Samaritan** came upon this injured man and **offered a helping hand**.

The Samaritan actually risked his life by stopping. He did not know if the robbers were not far away waiting on him. He, himself, could be a victim.

 This guy also risked his reputation. He did not know the ethnicity or the religion of this man that had been beaten. The chances are he was probably a Jew. And if the Samaritan had been seen in public with a Jew, not only would the Jews completely despise him, but other Samaritans would also turn on him.

 He took the risk. He stopped to offer a **helping hand**. He took the man to a local inn and paid to have him cared for. Scholars believe that the amount of money the Samaritan gave—the two silver coins—probably would represent two weeks of full care.

 So the Samaritan is thinking that in a couple of weeks he has to circle back to the inn again and take care of the guy who got beaten. **Jesus is teaching us about compassion**.

 What he is saying to us is that we are called to be nice to people…to care about others. When the opportunity comes our way, we me do something. Change begins with kindness …here at home. **Together we can change our community**.

This past week President Obama gave his final address to the American people. One section specifically spoke to me. ***(Show Video Clip)***

My fellow Americans… Whether you are young or whether you are up young at heart, I do have one final ask of you as your president - the same thing I asked you when you took a chance on me eight years ago. I'm asking you to believe. Not in my ability to bring about change… But in yours.
-President Barack Obama

I love the line: I'm asking you to believe. Not in my ability to bring about change… But in yours. This past week as I was praying, I was reminded of the words of Jesus from Matthew 5

**Matthew 5:14-16**

**14**“You are the light that gives light to the world. A city that is built on a hill cannot be hidden.

**15**And people don’t hide a light under a bowl. They put the light on a lampstand. Then the light shines for all the people in the house.

**16**In the same way, you should be a light for other people. Live so that they will see the good things you do. Live so that they will praise your Father in heaven.

God has placed us here in this community to be a light, to share his truth and love to the people that we meet. He gives us gifts and talents and opportunities so that we can make a difference.

People say: It would take a Miracle…to unite our country. Today, I am asking you to ***be the miracle***. Be the miracle that our community needs. What does that look like?

**How can we “Be the Miracle?”**

* **Recognize the value of every person.**

 People matter to God and they ought to matter to us. We have said that here at The Creek for nearly 30 years. Recently, there have been groups of people who have marched in our nation that have said that only certain people matter … but that’s not true.

When God looks at the world, there is no "them." You have never looked at a human being who was not made by God. You've never looked in the eyes of a person for whom Jesus Christ did not die. That means we are to embrace and accept every person, even if they do not accept us.

If we are going to **be the miracle,** then we need to be intentional and get to know someone that is different from us.

Most of the times we stay in our own groups because we are afraid. Martin Luther King said:

# *“People fail to get along because they fear each other; they fear each other because they don't know each other; they don't know each other because they have not communicated with each other.” ~ Martin Luther King*

Be open to a conversation with someone this week. This could be the door that God is going to use to help unite our community.

* **Do what you can to build each other up.**

Changing the nation begins at home. We need to be a positive force in this community and this begins by intentionally “speaking life” to people and in situations that you are in. You have the power of life and death in your words. Paul said it this way:

**1 Thessalonians 5:11**

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

 The word “encourage” means to “urge forward.” Many times, you can see things in other people that they don’t see themselves. You can see their strengths and talents. Call it out. You can see that God has a special plan for them even though they may be going through a difficult time. Don’t assume that people see what you see in them. Let’s build people up.

 Here’s what we know: **Successful people** build each other up. They motivate, inspire and push each other.

 **Unsuccessful people** just hate, blame and complain. If we are going to be the miracle in this community, then we must encourage one another and build each other up.

We need to be positive. Look for the good in other people. We need to look at the positive and not live in the negative. That reminds me of the middle-aged guy who had just returned from his first day at the gym doing crossfit.

 Just before bed, he was standing in front of a full-length mirror taking a hard look at himself. He said to his wife, "When I look in the mirror, I see an old man. My face is all wrinkled, my hair is almost grey, I have a spare tire around my midsection and I have aches and pains all over my body.” He turns to his wife and says, "Tell me something **positive** to make me feel better about myself."

 She paused for a minute and thought about what to say. In a soft, thoughtful voice, she said, ***"Well, there's nothing wrong with your eyesight."*** Here’s the third and final point.

* **Pray until the heavens open up and sends the presence of the Lord on us.**

If we are going to be the miracle that unites our country, then we must people who pray. Throughout the history of the world, God has changed things through prayer much more often than he has changed things through politics.

**Our hope is not in the man we put in the White House but in the Man we put on the Cross. Jesus is our hope.**

 We are in **21 Day of Prayer**. I want you to join with me and ask God to heal our land, specifically, we are praying that God will touch our government, the military, the media, our businesses, our schools, church and families. We are going to stand in the gap and pray for America. America needs a spiritual awakening. I love the words of:

**2 Chronicles 7:14-15**

**14**if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

**15**Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.

When I read these verses, I realize that the most important word is the first word, “If.” You see, we have a choice. It says, “If we will humble ourselves.” We have a choice to invite God to lead us or we can do it on our own.

America is the greatest country in the world today because our forefathers put God first. They recognized that they needed a power greater than themselves. They risked their lives to establish this country as one nation under God. **Our nation was born through prayer, and our nation can only be healed through prayer.**

CLOSING REMARKS (Revisit the story)

Ms. Anabel Hill has been dead for over 5 years, but the words that she spoke to me in the atrium of this church ought to be a message for all of us: ***I’m praying for Mr. Trump.***

We are in 21 Days of Prayer and the focus today is **Our Nation**. *(HOLD UP 21DOP CARD)*

***Pray for America and those who lead and protect our country (Our President, his cabinet, Congress, Supreme Court, and our Military). Pray for revival in our country.***

It is inauguration week and I asking you to join with me and pray. This past Monday I was invited to participate in the Presidential Inaugural Prayer Breakfast at the Trump Hotel in Washington on Friday. I will be gathering with over 1,000 church leaders to begin Inauguration Day in Prayer.

You don’t have to be in Washington to pray. We can pray right where we are.

**Closing Thoughts and Prayer**