

Last week started off great. Sunday, even though it was cold and miserable, we still had a great time. We had a great service. And then with our new conference Minister, Reverend Roberto Ocheo. Again, we had a great little meeting afterwards. And I love watching new people walk in here for the first time.

You know they walk outside, they see that weird little, I call it a spaceship sitting on top of our entryway. They see that, and they're kind of like what's it going to be like when they get inside. And then they come in, and they just get overwhelmed by the windows, and by the cross, and by the pyramids, and the pink. They love it. Everyone always loves it. They always have that weird look on their face, and he came in and was no exception.

He was just amazed. Then he met everybody and he was more amazed. He's like you weren't exaggerating at all when you tell me what you people do here. I said no. He said if anything you don't give your guys credit. Like what do you mean? He's like your people at Saint. Paul's are what the UCC should be. Like I said, that's funny because for so long, the UCC told us we are not what we're supposed to be like. We hear that frequently. I've had professors try and kick me out of this church, to kick me out of the program because they don't think that I should be here. Because they don't think we're doing the right thing. They don't think we're living the right model to represent what the UCC is. And I fight. And I fight, Mom can attest. And I've gotten a few of the professors, really, really mad at me.

But we are exactly what the UCC is. We are exactly what the future of the UCC is. We are who we are for a reason. We were chosen to be here. We were chosen to be this model in this example, and that was a great thing. I was riding in on this, and then we got to Tuesday and Tuesday, I sent out my email for our weekly or our monthly ministerial meeting that we have. And I invited extra guests this week, and I got zero response. Every week I get zero response, every time I send this email out. I know that when Tuesday comes, it's going to be me and Pastor Don from St. John's; I know that's it. I know we're not going to get anybody else. I know it's gonna be the two of us doing it, and that's fine. I expected it, but this time I got two responses back from people that we invited or that I invited. So that got me going. I'm like, all right, two more people. We got four. That is a record for our meetings. Unfortunately, they weren't ministers, but it's still good because we're having a planning meeting next week. Much like we are today.

We're going to be planning about the Outreach that we can do with the Ministerial Association for the community. So I invited the school. I invited the city counsel. I invited the fire department, police department, the home, Tiger Tots, everybody I could think of who needs help in this community. And like I said, which adds a fantastic turnout for our emails, so I'm riding on that

We have a great week, we had a great discussion Thursday night in our Bible study. It was awesome, riding on that and then Saturday came, and I hit a freaking wall head on. I'm getting emails telling me that they're not coming. The two people that

reached up, I'm getting emails from people telling me what they're not going to do. I got people calling me saying, are you seriously still going to go through with the planning meeting. I'm getting hit with every negative thing possible yesterday. And it made it really hard for me to go to bed.

The thing that we talk about in our planning meetings, in other places, is they ask you, what keeps you up at night? What keeps you up? What is it that you have trouble with? Pastor Don and I have gone to a number of these now together, and he always says the same thing. And I changed mine. Change it all the time. Last night, I was laying in bed ,and I was thinking, why can't I sleep Tonight?

And I was frustrated with myself because I had all of these big wins all week long. I let everything that happened get to me, and I forgot all of the good things that we have been doing, all of the good things that I've been doing even though Alyssa, Mom, and Dad and Wednesday kept telling me all these positive things. When I was complaining about being upset, I didn't hear them. I got so focused on myself. I didn't last night And I got me going. It got me thinking, again, this morning thinking about today's scripture.

Jesus chose them just like he chose us. He didn't have to have them. We know Jesus can walk on water. He could have walked out onto that lake and stood there and changed his voice so that everybody could hear. But instead he chose to go outside. He chose to get help for Simon being up all night fishing. He was tired. It's like I don't want to deal with this. And we've all been there. We've all had those days where we go all week long, and it's a nightmare. Saturday comes, you expect to have some rest, and you have to go to football games or basketball games, or you have to go to archery club, where you have to do all kinds of something else. So when Sunday comes, you really don't want to be here.

There you go, we don't want to get up. We don't want to get dressed and we have an option. We have an opportunity for you to stay home and it's a great opportunity. Especially for the people that can't get up and can't come in. But God chose each and every one of us. He chose us to be his followers. He chose us to make a difference in the world. Whether we're here sitting in the pews on Sunday, whether we're at home watching, He shows us to make that difference. He doesn't need us to make a difference. He doesn't need us to do anything.

When I was a kid and I grew up. I grew up. I don't know if I ever actually grew up, but when I was younger, which has an easy one to say, I was told that God was omnipotent. God was everywhere at all times. He knew everything that was happening. He knew the past, he knew the future, and it didn't matter what we did because he knew he couldn't hide anything from. And that's true. I do believe that God also knows there's a million choices for us to make. We can decide to do the right thing. We can decide to do the wrong thing. We can decide to do the easy thing. He doesn't know what exactly we're going to decide at that second. That it comes time but he chooses us to make that

choice. We can make the easy decisions. Each day we can make the easy choice. We can stay home. We cannot help anyone in need. And we choose to do these things. That's what they like about us at the conference.

What doesn't come out is that we choose to help; we choose to be active. We choose to set our differences aside, and to do what matters for everyone else. Last week, I asked you to think about what you want to do, accomplish here at the planning meeting. And I am very grateful for planning meetings today are not like planning meetings when I was younger. I remember sitting down there for six hours one year. We don't do that anymore, I promise. If we do, I'll be gone before that. We don't.

Two years ago I asked all of you, we were talking about something that Jim said. Everybody always says someone else will do it. Who is that someone else? You are that someone else. That's what I said two years ago. Last year I said, you are not alone. What can we do together? Because you are not alone; you're not expected to do these things by yourself. And I personally have the hardest time reminding myself that I always think that I need to do it. I need to be the one. I need to be like somebody, but we are all at somebody. And we've proven that time time, again.

Labor Day, feeding the kids, feeding the kids is so awesome now, that it's not just me. You know, it would take me an hour to do 30 bags. Last time, we did 60 bags in eight minutes. It's a big difference; that's because all of us are doing it. All of us are supporting that thing. This year, today, I asked what keeps you up at night? What is it that keeps you up at night? That's what we're going to talk about today, and that doesn't go just to the people who are here. It goes to the people who are watching, watching at home. Watching today. Watching tomorrow, watching later this week. What keeps all of you up at night? Because we are the example. We are the somebody, and we are together. If there's something that keeps you up at night we should all be doing it together. We should be helping and finding ways to keep this going. Because we were chosen. We were chosen to share God's love. We were chosen to help. We were chosen to make a difference. And we're all very lucky that we are those people. Let us pray.