God by the Numbers…. A friendsgiving sermon

1. Welcome to a special gathering of Our Safe Harbor Church. We take one Sunday a year to celebrate our community. It makes sense to place that celebration at this time of year. It is the month where Americans celebrate Thanksgiving (but we place it early in the month so we don't get in the way of family gatherings) and it is also our 4th birthday as a faith community.

2. We started right here with an iPhone and a tripod. Dave Cassilly was upstairs working furiously to keep us on YouTube as a storm raged across the Eastern half of the USA and knocked YouTube off the air. It was an inauspicious start to say the least. Here we are, trying to do something completely new and unsure if it is a good thing or if it will last.

3. Four years later, it is clear that we hit a seam and filled a real need. Let me throw some numbers at you.

    a. 1 tripod and 1 iPhone.
    b. 1 man with a few helpers working to keep us on the air.
    c. Now, we have 4 cameras, a video switcher, hardware streaming encoder, 3 computers and a soundboard all run by 5-6 people.
    d. Over 3,200 followers on Facebook.
    e. Over 4,900 subscribers on YouTube
    f. Over 1,000 people get our newsletter each week.
    g. We have posted over 1,000 videos online which remain there and garner over 30,000 views a month.
    h. We also post on X, Rumble and Vimeo.
    i. We have views from 37 nations and all US states, though we are concentrated in about 15 states and 5 nations. (as far as we know!)
    j. Our podcasts are downloaded between 4-8,000 times a month.
    k. We have about 80 men in the Louisiana State Penitentiary who receive our notes and who are members of OSHC.

4. We celebrate God's amazing work with us and how He has blessed Our Safe Harbor Church. Numbers can tell some of the story, but not the whole story. Remember "Paint By Numbers"? They are still out there and people still enjoy them but, no matter how hard you try,

when you are done, it doesn't look like the original. Lego sells a Lego Build by Number of the Mona Lisa. It has 1503 pieces! Does it look like the Mona Lisa when you are done? A little. A bit.

5. In the same way, telling the story of what God does with our gifts by numbers paints a picture but it doesn't reveal the entire glory of God if we focus just on the numbers.

6. Jesus chose 12 apostles. I think it is good to focus on that number for awhile. They were not men of power, education, or renown. They were not trained rabbis nor were they community leaders. Yet, these 12 men would start the spread of the Gospel…but just start it. Their lives were not long, except for that of John. The rest died early in their ministries but the effects of those ministries still continue.

7. North Africa, Syria, Turkey, Georgia, all the way to India in the east to Spain in the west were touched by apostles. Just 12 regular, flawed men. If you focus on the number or on the men themselves, it is impressive but it doesn't give you the whole picture, the perfect picture of God. To see God at work, you have to pull back and see what happened with the work those men (and many holy women) left behind. We are still here. In fact, we are in lands those apostles never visited and never knew existed.

8. How about 5 loaves and 2 fishes? Not impressive numbers at all, but what Jesus did with them is still being talked about today. When what we have is placed into God's hands, He can and will do things with those small gifts that make a difference for centuries in the lives of thousands and tens of thousands.

9. Gifts given to OSHC have fed and clothes countless people through our partners, Graceworks, One Generation Away, Lifeline and many more. Babies have been saved from the abortion mill and, more than that, they've been clothed, fed and cared for. Their mothers have been given diapers, formula, cribs, and community.

10. Speaking of numbers, in a nation where there were 625,000 abortions last year alone, and where major political leaders have called for abortion on demand up to the moment of birth, we have remained staunchly pro-life…but not just the life of the child before

they are born. We also are pro-life for the mother and child after they are born. Our friends at Lifeline in Missouri are a sterling example of that commitment to aftercare.

11. God chose 1 family – Abraham – and told him that through him all nations of the earth would be blessed. It seems…insufficient to choose just one family. And that family wasn't an important one. It had problems. And, yet, God is still blessing us through Abraham today and will at the end of all things when we are welcomed into eternity with God.

12. Never downplay what is in your pocket or what kind of family you have. Never think that you have nothing to give because of your financial, social, marital, or spiritual condition. If it is given to God, He will do great things with your gift and with your life.

13. Jesus said that God would not forget you giving a single drink of water to someone who needed it. Not a single glass. We know what He thinks of such things when it is simple things like that that He mentions in Matthew 25 when He welcomes people home to heaven.

14. When we find a concentration of members in an area, I try to get to them. It can take two days to get to their city. We can send 12-40 emails to members asking them to come meet me and each other. Sometimes, we fill up the hotel meeting areas. Other times, there are a handful and no more. I've never regretted going to an area even if just one or two show up. They are important to God and their effort is not overlooked in heaven. God will do something with that gathering.

15. How do I know? I see His record in history and in the history of Our Safe Harbor Church. We know we are small and feeble in the world's eyes, but He is painting a picture that is far more beautiful and stunning than the one we see. We are only painting by numbers. He is a master artist.

16. Changes will always come. Our soundstage is for sale as our hosts for the last 4 years face some financial decisions that make selling this home a wise move. That does not bother any of us because we know what God can do with one tripod and one iPhone!

And we have more than that now. We have equipment we can move here or there as we need and we have plans in place to make it so.

17. We do NOT have plans to buy a building. There is always a danger of mission creep that can slowly pull us away from what we are – a worldwide, online community of faith – into a building locked community. We resist that though, to be honest, if someone gave us a building that could be used for the soundstage, offices, and also for community good, we would consider it. If it happens, it happens. We don't think we need it but should God supply it, we will come to you and talk about it.

18. As for me? At my former church, I told them I wanted to work until I was 70 and then step away from the pulpit and do mentorship and support work for younger men and women in ministry. We even looked for who could come along and fill my shoes when that time came.

19. Now? I have decided to give the rest of my life to proclaiming freedom, faith, and the love of Christ. If my brain or body give out, fair enough. Until then, I will continue this work if God supplies the funds to keep us alive. And He does, by many, many small contributions and a few large ones.

20. You see, there we come back to numbers but ones that we cannot quantify. The numbers of emails, cards, or calls that we get to encourage us, to lift us up, to tell us that we ARE meeting a need and that what we do IS making a difference…? They refresh us and keep us moving forward. Notes and cards are amazing and passed around. Check-ins are shots in the arm.

21. One thousand plus videos and more than 200 live services in 4 years means there aren't many days off and we can never coast, but with the support of all of you, with your prayers and with the power and plans of God, we will continue.

22. For we serve the master artist who can take our small, unimpressive numbers and change the world.