

"Taking the Gospel to the World"

Can you think of a time when something really good or exciting happened to you, and you just couldn't wait to tell someone? We've all had that experience many times where we just had to share with somebody something good that happened!

Jesus' words at the end of Matthew's gospel is often called the "Great Commission". "And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age'" (Matthew 28:18-20).

What are the 2 things this involves? Baptize – this symbolizes conversion, beginning the new life in Christ. Teach - help new believers grow, and learn to obey what Jesus commands. The promise that goes with this is that Jesus is with us always! We are not making disciples just through our own power or ability. Jesus is with us in this mission! Jesus has all authority (vs. 18) - *therefore (because of that)* go make disciples.

So, the last thing Jesus said, according to Matthew, is for His followers to "go" into the world, get the message out so people can connect with Christ.

What about the other gospels? How do they conclude as they tell the story of Jesus? Each of the gospel writers describes Jesus' final words in slightly different ways.

Here is what Mark writes: "Later he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were sitting at the table, and he upbraided them for their lack of faith and stubbornness, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. And he said to them, 'Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved, but the one who does not believe will be condemned'" (Mark 16:14-16).

There's that word again: "Go"! Did they do it? Yes! Further on, verse 20 tells us: "And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it."

How about Luke's gospel? "Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised, so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high'" (Luke 24:45-49). This is the last appearance of Jesus to the disciples right before His ascension. Repentance and forgiveness is to be proclaimed in His name to all nations. Are to go and be witnesses to what seen and heard.

One more gospel...the Gospel of John. Near the end of the gospel, the Risen Christ appears to His disciples, who are huddled together in a house, behind locked doors, because they are afraid of the Jews. "When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors were

locked where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'" (John 20:19-22). As the father has sent me, now I'm sending you! Then Jesus breathes the Spirit on them.

Do you get feeling that to be follower of Jesus means to go and get gospel message out to world? He wants us to get beyond just thinking about ourselves, and share the good news of Jesus with others!

Each of us is called to share our faith and be in mission to the world! A lot of Christians don't do any personal faith-sharing. We may be strong believers, go to church, pray and read the Bible, work at growing in our own faith, but just don't ever talk about the Lord with other people outside the church. Some of the most embarrassing questions you can ask a Christian is: "When was the last time you shared your faith with anyone?" or "How long has it been since you talked to someone outside the church about Jesus?"

Sharing our faith and experience of Christ with others should be a natural thing to do! When something wonderful happens to us, or we witness something exciting, isn't it natural that we want to tell somebody about it?

It reminds me of the story about the pastor who bagged church one Sunday. He said he was sick, but he actually went out to play golf at a course a bit of a distance from his home. He got paired up with several other players whom he didn't know. Would you believe that morning he got a hole in one! He got so excited that he reached for his cell phone to call some of his friends, but then he thought: "Who can I tell?" Isn't it a natural thing to want to share good news? "Gospel" means "good news"! If Christ has come into our life and is changing us, the natural thing is to want to share this with others. If He is saving us, we should want to talk about it!

You may say, "I don't know how to witness. Can you give me a system or method?" There is no one approach that is *the* "right" way and works for everybody. Here are some thoughts:

Build relationships with non-Christians. Many people today have a negative view of Christians and the church, so it's important to build healthy, loving relationships with people. Often people will not listen to what we say about Christ until they have the sense that we are genuinely interested in them, and care about them. Unfortunately, many in the church have been in church so long that we don't have non-Christian friends or acquaintances. Try to build some relationships with people not saved.

Ask questions that may lead to spiritual discussions. Questions like, "Do you go to church?" "What do you really want out of life?" "What do you think of Jesus?" "What do you believe about God?" "What do you think God expects of us?"

Another point: *Tell your story in a simple way.* (1) This is what I was like before I met Jesus. (2) This is how I came to commit my life to Christ. (3) These are some of the differences He is making in my life.

Then too: *Don't be afraid to admit your weaknesses and limitations.* Most people today are turned off by Christians who come across as knowing everything, or being super good. Even the most dedicated of Christians experience doubt at times, or make serious mistakes. Don't be afraid to admit it. If an unbeliever asks you a question about the Bible or about God, and you don't know the answer, say, "I don't know." It's not only the truth, but it helps you come across as genuine!

Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to lead you. Begin the day by asking the Spirit to guide you to people who need to hear the gospel message. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you share your faith in a meaningful way to this person. And He will!

In the Book of Acts, chapter 1, it says that Jesus' followers did what He had told them to do before He left them. They went back to Jerusalem, gathered together to pray and wait for the Spirit to come on them. And *then* they began to share the gospel with others. Bathing ourselves in prayer, allowing the Holy Spirit to fill us, are important practices that give us the God power to witness effectively. Frankly, too many of us believers spent little time in prayer.

Also remember, "witnessing" or "sharing our faith" is in deeds as well as words. Feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, taking an elderly person to their doctor appointment, listening compassionately to someone who is troubled - these are all ways that we share our faith. In fact, without loving, compassionate deeds to back up our words, our words will mean little.

Before Jesus left His disciples and returned to His Father in heaven, His final words reminded them that they were to *go* and share His message with the world.

But churches, congregations, are called to get the gospel into the world too. Individual "witnessing" is important - but that's our calling as the Church also! We are to "go" into the world and make disciples. Many congregations are inwardly focused, and spend most of our time, energy and money taking care of the people already in the church. Pastoral care, congregational care, is important, but it's not whole story.

Reggie McNeal is one of the most provocative thinkers in the church today. He talks about the "club mentality" in the church today. So many churches are focused on doing "church stuff" and taking care of the club members and their needs. He says we need to hit the street with the gospel. He also rightly points out that the goal of a lot of churches is: How do we get people to come into our building? Jesus didn't fret about how to get people to go to the temple or how to get people to attend synagogue once a week! Jesus hit the road, and went to where people were - on the beach, in the village market place, on the dusty roads of Palestine.

McNeal says we need to go where people are already hanging out! At Walmart supercenters. At

Starbucks and Barnes & Noble. At sports arenas and complexes. And even more so today, *online*. Facebook, church web page, YouTube, blogs, etc. Using the technology of our day to reach people for Jesus.

Congregations need to focus less on "come" - getting people to come here - and more on "go" - go into the world and make disciples. A few years ago I read an inspiring book called *City Impact*. It tells how churches in Florida banded together in some major cities, just infiltrating their cities with people willing to pray, or work with other community leaders for the betterment of community. And what a tremendous spiritual impact this had on these cities.

There was a period in our lives when Nancy and I traveled regularly to the Wilkes-Barre area, where an aunt of Nancy's lived. On the way there we went through the little town of Cressona. I noticed there's we passed a little street in that town called Go Go Street! Churches need to be "Go go people!" (No, not the disco scene). But, go outside of the building and do good in the name of Jesus.

"Church Answers" is an online ministry I find very helpful. They have their pulse on our American culture, what's happening, and how that affects the church. One of the main premises that the leaders of this ministry have is that the reason churches are dying is that we have forgotten *evangelism*. Churches simply don't do the work of evangelism – winning people to Christ. Or even making that a priority. They provide practical means of creating a culture of evangelism in a congregation.

Check out each of the 4 gospels, and they all end with Jesus telling His followers to *go* - go make disciples, go and preach gospel to all creatures, go and proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name, as Father has sent me, so I send you. Do you think Jesus is trying to tell us something important!

Harry L. Kaufhold, Jr.
Community United Methodist Church
April 27, 2025

