

"Can I Get a Witness?"

What's the Point? part #6

Matthew 28:16-20

[46] *Introduction, welcome, etc.*

I invite you to pray with me, placing your hands in front of you, palms up, to show God you are ready to receive whatever He has for you.

Lord, we are ready to hear from you. We come to this place full of expectation. We want to hear a word from your Spirit today, a word that will overwhelm us in a good way. You are the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Show us how to live. This we pray in your name, Jesus. Amen.

[47] I'd like to try something a little different this morning, and I'll explain why afterwards. It's a game: you have one minute go sit somewhere in the sanctuary you've never sat before. It has to be in a different section than where you are now. Along the way, you must greet two people who did not come to church with you. You will only have one minute, so don't be slow. Everyone is going to do this, including my family. Ready? Set? Go.

How does that feel? It's a new perspective, isn't it? Look around you. Notice the people. Notice the difference in the lighting and the sound. How is it on the other side?

[48] Why did I make you do this? Because many of us have forgotten what it feels like to be here for the first time. You may have been coming to church for a while, but the truth is, we were all new at some point. And the same is true for our relationship with Jesus Christ. At some point, you were introduced to Jesus for the first time.

[49] I love how excited children are to invite their friends to church. My son Jonah's friend once came to church after four years of inviting. Last week, a little girl named Ellie came to VBS because I met her looking for the geo-cache in our memorial garden with her mom and aunt. In every Christian there should be excitement, expectation that all people will experience God in this place. We should always be looking to share what we have found.

[50] Invitation is part of discipleship. The past five weeks we have learned that we were created for a purpose: to experience a loving relationship with Jesus Christ. We were planned for God's pleasure, to worship God with our lives. We

were formed for God’s family, for fellowship, to walk together with other Christians. We were created to become like Christ, to grow spiritually as his disciple. We were shaped to serve, to discover our gifts and use them for others.

[51] All of these purposes are tied together in the final message of this series. This is the last truth: you were made for a mission. What is that mission? To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. The fancy word for this is evangelism. Simply put, you were meant to share the good news, to invite others to a loving relationship with God.

How can we accomplish this mission? We must go back to the original “marching orders” from Jesus to his first disciples, in Matthew 28. Today I am hoping we can get a fresh perspective of this incredible mission.

[52] The gospel of Matthew was originally written to convince a group of Christians who were struggling with their faith. Matthew wrote to encourage those who were doubting. Look again at verse 17. “They worshipped him. But some doubted.” Doubted what? Doubted Jesus was alive? I don’t think so. After all, they saw him die, and in this verse he was standing right in front of them. No, I think that the disciples doubted themselves.

[53] Think about what they went through, the most incredible story ever. In one weekend, the disciples fell asleep while Jesus was arrested, abandoned him at the cross, and hid themselves in a locked room. On Easter Sunday, women frantically ran back from the empty tomb, claiming to have seen Jesus face to face. The disciples refused to believe them. And then Jesus actually showed up. Woah! These disciples who initially refused to believe the gospel message were told to now go convince others. It all seems so illogical.

Yet Jesus saw their hearts. He saw their doubts and their fears. Fortunately he knew what to say. You know this is important, because Jesus used a “therefore,” and it was there for a reason.

[54] Jesus says, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go 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 I have commanded you.” (Matt 20:17-18, NIV) He speaks to the hearts of the doubters.

I believe the reason we have trouble getting excited about this mission, making disciples, is not because we doubt the truth of this story. It's because we doubt ourselves. We don't know if we have the strength to go out. The good news, however, is that we go because Jesus commands. We don't go in our own strength. We go in His.

[55] You were made for a mission. So what? Carry out the mission Jesus gives you. "Go. Baptize. Teach." Three steps, that's it. We can do this. Let's break each one down briefly.

[56] First of all, Jesus says, "Go." It's so simple. Go where the people are. Go outside the four walls of this building. The people Jesus is calling us to serve are not here, they're out there! Sunday worship is meant to equip us for the mission we live every day. Jesus didn't say, "Sit. Stay." He said, "Go. Make disciples."

There are literally thousands of opportunities for us to do this here in Houghton County. There are people, in the schools, in the businesses, walking downtown, at the parks. Everywhere you go, there are children of God who don't know the love of their Creator. It is so easy to have a conversation in this town. But how many of us do? Sadly, most of us would rather stay home, isolated and comfortable, than risk sharing an invitation with someone. But Jesus said, "Go." And he meant it.

[57] The second part of the mission, Jesus said, was to baptize. Now, in the United Methodist Church, baptism is a sacrament, which means only certain authorized people can baptize, AKA, the pastor. In our denomination, the parishioners are not allowed to baptize. How does baptism related to our mission to go and invite? Baptism is more than a ritual; it's about belonging. It's about joining the Church, with a capital C. The pastor can handle the sacrament, however, it is up to all of us together, not only to invite others to church, but also to say, "Come be the church with us." Baptism is about committing to God's church.

My favorite church memory is baptizing a whole family I once had invited. The parents and the children all said yes to Jesus at the same time. I asked them why they joined the church. They gave me two simple reasons. #1, "Because you

invited us." And #2, "Because the congregation showed that they cared about us." Think of the blessings they would have missed if no one had reached out.

[58] So Jesus tells us, #1 Go, #2 Baptize. Invite and commit. The third part of the mission from Jesus is to teach. "...[Teach] them to obey everything I have commanded you." (Matt 28:20, NIV) I'll bet I can read some of your minds. "But, Pastor, I'm not a teacher. I don't know the Bible that well. I can't defend the scriptures. I'm not an evangelist."

Raise your hand if you know any good stories. What makes the best story? When you are a part of it. The best part of evangelism is, in God's story, you are one of the main characters. Jesus didn't say, "Go out and tell Billy Graham's story." He didn't say, "Go out and tell Pastor Eric's story." No. He said, "Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you." Your story. Your words.

Can you tell someone what Jesus has done for you? Yes? Then you can tell the good news, and you can obey Jesus by fulfilling your mission. Teaching is really just telling someone what difference Jesus made in your life. When has Jesus showed up for you? When has your relationship with him made a difference? Why do you follow God's word? That is your story, and yours alone.

You were made for a mission. You are an evangelist, because an evangelist is simply someone who shares good news. And the good news is: God loves you. That's a message we all can share. You were made for a mission; go tell your story. Better yet, go tell God's story and your story.

All of us have had some moment of grace. It's how we came to know that Jesus loved us. Your story doesn't have to be polished or profound. It simply has to be your story. Take it. Own it. Don't doubt it. Jesus believes you can accomplish this mission. I do, too.

[59] Jesus said, "You will be my witnesses." (Acts 1:8) Maybe we get all freaked out when we hear the words "witness" and "evangelism". But here's the deal: No one comes to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ without first receiving an invitation from someone, usually multiple invitations. We need to be honest about our mission. We are not just inviting someone to a church, we are inviting them into a relationship. This mission is way bigger than Grace UMC. This is the gospel, the good news of the kingdom. (Matthew 11:12) That's the kind of mission I want to live out in my life.

All authority is given to Jesus. Do you really believe it? Because if you do, then your doubts will fade. Even some of the original disciples doubted. We are in good company. Jesus will give us the power and strength to succeed, just as he did for them.

This is a mission worth living and worth dying for. This is a mission must motivate us to get up and go, to try to understand and empathize with others. We can follow Jesus, go, invite, reach and teach.

Our hymnals contain a very important membership vow that we use at each baptism, confirmation and new membership class. This is the promise we make before each other and before God. I'd like for us to conclude by reading it together.

(From UMH Baptismal Covenant IV)

PASTOR - Let us rejoice in the faithfulness of our covenant God.

PEOPLE – "We give thanks for all that God has already given us.

As members of the body of Christ

and in this congregation of The United Methodist Church,

we will faithfully participate in the ministries of the Church

by our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service and our witness

that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ."

That's our mission. Go share the good news. Amen.

Memory verse:

"Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity." Colossians 4:5

Reflection questions:

1. Think of a story you love to tell. Why do you love to tell it?
2. What does it mean that Jesus has all authority? (Matthew 28:18)
3. How comfortable are you in sharing your faith? What gives you confidence?
4. Who in your life needs to know the "good news"? Pray and R.E.A.C.H. out to them:

Reveal that you are a Christian.

Extend an invitation to a church event/service.

Ask if it's OK to share your story.

Communicate how/why you became a Christian.

Help them know Christ personally.

Based on Rick Warren's "The Purpose-Drive Life", 2002, with Doug Fields Youth Ministry resources.