

Made for a Mission

We've been talking about God's purposes for our lives. We now know that we are here to express our love for God through worship, to love one another through fellowship, to grow more and more like Christ through discipleship, and to serve others through ministries that help people in practical ways.

The 5th and most fulfilling purpose for our lives is to share the good news of Christ with others. Acts 1:8 says, *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

In other words, the 5th purpose of our lives is to share the good news of Christ with others. We are made for a mission and this is that mission. The common name we give to this mission is "Evangelism." Now I know that the word "Evangelism" brings up some scary images for many people, and that the term "Personal Evangelism," is even scarier.

But, there are several things I would have you notice here. In Acts 1:8 Jesus says, "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses." This tells us two very important things. #1 proclaiming the good news of Christ to others is not something we do in our own strength; the motivation and the power come from God. And, #2, witnessing to others grows out of our being; Jesus says, "you will be my witnesses." The evangelism being spoken of here is not something forced. It is something that comes out of us because the Lord lives in us. It is not something we have to do; it is something we will do because we are excited about what Jesus means to us. In fact, we will be evangelists for whatever it is that we are excited about.

Betty Jane is a great evangelist. We recently attended the RV Expo at the Altoona Convention Center and came upon a vendor for Leaf Guard, a company that makes and installs a screen to keep leaves and other debris from clogging up rain spouts. The company rep was a good evangelist for his company and for his product. Now, just a couple of week's later, we have new Leaf Guard rain gutters all around our home and even on the garage. If you want to know more about it, just talk to Betty Jane because she is now a Leaf Guard evangelist. If you ask me,

I'll tell you that the price is a bit exorbitant. The "Scotch" part of my "Scotch-Irish" heritage is prevailing here. I'm more of a Studebaker-Subaru evangelist. You see, we are natural evangelists for whatever we are excited about.

In Acts 4 the disciples are forced to respond to authorities who were telling them to be quiet about Christ, to "put a lid on it." Listen to their answer: In Acts 4:20 they say, *"For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."* If we are not active witnesses for the Lord, we just don't know Him well enough yet, because when we do know Him and are filled with His Spirit, it will be impossible for us to keep it a secret. We will always talk about what we are most passionate about. We just can't help it. **We are meant to be His witnesses.**

Another thing I would have you notice is the word "share." I said, "the 5th purpose of our lives is to "share" the good news of Christ. The kind of witnessing and evangelism we are talking about here has nothing to do with grabbing people by the scruff of the neck and somehow shoving the message about Christ down their throats. It is not about using cleverly constructed sales pitches, psychologically designed to get the customer to buy our product. Rather, it is all about honest, sincere, sharing: "This is how Jesus Christ has changed my life: "He walks with me, and He talks with me, " "He gives me forgiveness, joy, and purpose." "He will do the same for you if you will give Him a chance."

Let me tell you a secret. If the people around us can see for a moment that we seem to be truly at peace, and that we have an abundance of joy, and that we know the purpose of our lives, we won't lack opportunities to witness. Jesus always drew a crowd, and when we allow Him to become visible in our lives, He still will. He said, "When I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto me." We just need to lift Him up. **This is our mission.**

Something else we see in our Scripture text this morning is that there are four arenas for our mission to be carried out, and if we are to obey Christ's command completely we need to be involved in all four. Acts 1:8b says, *"you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* Notice the four arenas: Since baseball season is just round the corner, we might picture it like this: Jerusalem is the home ballpark, Judea is the home team fan base, and Samaria is the city or fan base of the visiting team. The phrase *"to the*

ends of the earth," is self-explanatory. It means the same thing today as

it meant back then. The great commission to go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to every creature.

Or, we could break it down a little differently. We are to receive the good news God gives us and share it with our inner circle of family and friends, with people who are us. Then we are to share it with people around us who are like us. These are people we meet at work, people in our neighborhoods, people with whom we go to school or with whom our children go to school--people who are like us. The third challenge is to share Christ with people who are near us but quite different from us. People of a different race, color, nationality, socioeconomic background. You could call this cross-cultural mission work near to home, and this may well be the most difficult arena in which to work. Working to share Christ's love with people in this arena forces us to lay down our prejudices and to offend the prejudices of some of the people around us who are otherwise like us.

I watched last Sunday's TV special on the life and ministry of Billy Graham. I learned some things about Billy Graham that I didn't know before. I did know that Billy Graham was a great evangelist. What I didn't fully realize before was that he was so convinced that Jesus was for everybody, regardless of nationality, political persuasion, age, gender, ethnic background, economic background, or skin color, that he would not allow any form of segregation at his meetings. Before desegregation in the deep South, a rope would be strung across a meeting venue to separate the dark skinned people from the white skinned people. Blacks had to stay behind the line, while only white folks were allowed to sit to the front of the line. When Billy Graham came to one of his crusade venues and saw that that rope of division had been installed, he told the head usher to take it down. When the usher refused to take it down, Billy took it down for him. It's a wonder that Billy Graham wasn't assassinated along side Martin Luther King, Jr.! But, Billy Graham knew that the good news of Jesus Christ is meant for Samaria as well as for Jerusalem and Judea.

Then, the fourth challenge is to share the good news God gives us with people who are different from us and also far away from us geographically. Here we are reminded that people the whole world over are precious to God. We must care about them and reach out to them, because they, along with us, are at the center of God's heart.

To summarize, we are to share Christ with our own family and friends because Christ is for us. We are to share Christ with those who

are like us. We are to share Christ with those who are near to us who are not like us. And, we are to share Christ with those who are far from us who are also not like us. In other words, we are called to share Christ across the table, across the street, across town and across the oceans. **This is our mission.**

But, before we bring this message to a close this morning I want to go back to a thought I shared earlier and leave you with a specific challenge. The thought was this: We will be evangelists for whatever we are excited about.

The specific challenge comes in the form of a question: How excited are we about Jesus Christ? Are we as excited about Jesus as Betty Jane is excited about Leaf Guard? Are we as excited about Jesus as I am excited about my newest Subaru? This is a question for all of us. Are we as excited about Jesus as we are excited about all the things in this world that excite us? What are you excited about right now? For what are you serving as an evangelist?

It seems to me that the future of our church and the future of the whole church throughout the world hinges on this one question: how excited are we about Jesus Christ? How much passion do we have for the One who was so passionate about us that He lay down His life on a cross for us?

How many of you know the meaning of the word “ennui?” Ennui is defined as “a feeling of listlessness and dissatisfaction arising from a lack of occupation or excitement.” I have no doubt that some of us are suffering from spiritual ennui. Our spiritual lives are marked by a lack of passion and we know that we aren’t where God wants us to be in our relationship with Him. This season of Lent is a time for us to ponder and take action to escape this sense of ennui. But, how do we ignite or re-ignite our passion for the Lord so that our excitement for the Lord puts us back on track to embrace and fulfill our God-given mission? Three things come to mind.

The first thing to do is to make sure that we have a genuine, living relationship with Jesus Christ to begin with. In other words, have you ever sincerely told the Lord that you believe in Him and asked Him to

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come into your heart and life as your personal savior? If you’ve never done that, or if you are not sure, today may be a very important day in your life, because you can take care of business with the Lord right

here, right now, this morning. Your prayer doesn’t have to be fancy, but might sound something like this: “Jesus, I know I have sinned and fallen short of the life you desire for me. Thank you for dying on the cross to declare your love for me and to be the sacrifice for my sins. Thank you for forgiving me. Now come and live within me as the guarantee that I am your child. Empower me to live my life for you and share the message of your love with others. Amen.”

The second thing sufferers of spiritual ennui need to check on and deal with is the presence of sin in their lives. Proverbs 28:13 says: “*The one who covers **his** transgressions will not prosper but whoever confesses them and forsakes them **will find mercy.***” Lent is a time to search our lives for the presence of sin, a time to repent and flee from it. Spiritual ennui is a symptom of sin lurking in our lives. We need to look for sins of commission and omission and attitudinal sins that poison our hearts and frustrate the work of the Holy Spirit. Would you say: “**We need to root out**” “**our sin.**”

Finally, to rid our lives of spiritual ennui, we need to remember Acts 5:32 which tells us that “*the Holy Spirit is God’s gift to those who obey Him.*” One thing I noticed in the definition of ennui is that ennui arises “from a lack of occupation.” It’s not enough to turn away from doing and thinking the things we should not be doing or thinking. Certainly we have to stop those things, but we also need to begin doing or begin again to do the things God wants us to do. We must think godly thoughts and do godly deeds. The formula for getting excited about Jesus is to think the things Jesus tells us to think and to do the things Jesus calls us to do because as we think and do these things the Holy Spirit comes to fill and bless us. Would you say: “**Spiritual excitement**” “**comes from the Holy Spirit**” “**Who is God’s gift**” “**to those who obey Him.**”

My beloved, we can only fulfill our God-given mission to be His witnesses when we are filled with the Holy Spirit. And, being filled with the Holy Spirit is contingent upon our knowing and obeying the Lord Jesus. Taking a clue from Hebrews 12:2, “*let us throw off everything that hinders and **the sin that so easily entangles,***” and let us get on with our mission.

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Acts 2:1-8

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