

5.15.05

You Were Made For A Mission Acts 1:4-8, 2:1-13, James 2:14-17

Douglas Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church

“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works?

Can faith save you?

If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them,

“*Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,*” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?

So faith, by itself, if it has no works, is dead.” James 2:14-17

So far during our 40 Days of Purpose we have looked at four purposes: the first is **worship** - knowing and loving God; the second is **fellowship** – learning to love each other; the third is **discipleship** – learning to become like Jesus; the fourth is **ministry** – learning to serve God and others. This brings us to our fifth purpose **Evangelism – You Were Made For a Mission**. Evangelism is a word that conjures up all kinds of things for Christians and non-Christians, not all of them positive. Evangelism comes from the Greek word for “good news.” The good news is that God loves us, our life has purpose and meaning, and God wants us to share that news with other people in every way that we can.

In Acts 1:8 Jesus says to his followers, “*You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*” When Jesus says this to the disciples they are in Jerusalem so he is telling them simply to begin where they are. When it comes to sharing the good news we begin where we are, right in our own community. Then he says I want you to go to Judea and Samaria, for us that would be like Plymouth County, the next county on the other side of the bridge. In other words, people nearby, but some of those people may be different than you are culturally and racially as the Samaritans were different than the Jewish followers of Jesus. Then Jesus concludes by saying we are to be witnesses “*to the ends of the earth,*” we are to share the good news of God’s love in Jesus with everybody else wherever they may be.

The word “**witness**” is important. Jesus doesn’t say we will be his defense attorney or his prosecutor. We don’t have to defend God. A witness is somebody who just tells what they have seen. “I saw this, then I saw this, and then this happened.”

Witnesses say what happened to them. Nobody knows more about your life than you do. Nobody knows more, is more of an expert than you on the subject of what God has done in your life. You are the authority. People can argue with the Bible or with your theology but they can't refute, deny or ignore the power of a transformed life. Being a witness for Jesus simply means telling other folks what God has done for you, how is your life different? What was it like before compared to what it is now? God simply wants us to let people know – the people right around us, the folks who are near, but different than us, and even to folks who are far away.

Why does God want us to do this? Remember back in week two we talked and read about how God is building a family of people who love and trust God and who will spend eternity with God. The scriptures teach us that God wants family members from every nation in the whole world. One thing God is not is an isolationist or nationalist. God wants folks from all over the world to be a part of the family of God. 2 Peter 3:9 tells us God doesn't want anyone to perish, but all to come to repentance and new life.

Sometimes folks will ask, "Isn't our church big enough?" It is important to understand that we don't grow for our own benefit. We don't change things like an organization structure or a worship and educational schedule because it is convenient or comfortable. We are willing to deal with growing pains and at times change and even inconvenience **so that we can reach more people with God's love and bring them into God's family.** A church that is unwilling to take the risks and steps necessary to reach more people is like folks who have escaped from a sinking ship who are safely in a lifeboat. They know there are people around them in the water who need to be pulled to safety – they can hear them and see them, but they don't care enough to work to row to them and help them into the boat because that would be tiring, messy, wet, and maybe even dangerous. After the service in which I was ordained into the Christian ministry 15 years ago, an older African-American gentleman from a nearby church shook my hand and congratulated me. He said, "*I serve on board the largest ship in the world,*" and he paused, then said, "*the fellowship of the church.*" BBC is a fellowship that is going to keep rowing trying to pull folks on board.

That is the mission that God has given us and that we are invited to be a part of in our lifetime. You can share in conversation about what is happening in your life. You

share with those in your world, in your circle of relationship and influence. There are many ways you can be a witness. You can give tapes, CD's, or Christian books. You can invite folks to attend worship with you.

God cares more about people than about anything else, so should we. **You were made for a mission is the fifth purpose of our life.** First we share with those in our circle – our family and friends, our neighbors and co-workers. We begin in our town and in our community. But that is not enough. Jesus says we are **to reach beyond our familiar circle.** Love demands that we move beyond our comfort zone to people with different backgrounds, different educational and economic levels, and different languages. Someone cared enough to tell you about God's love, that's why you're here today. We are to be caring enough to tell others. **Christians are called to build bridges, not walls.** It is kind of funny in English that you can't spell "God," "Gospel" or "Good News," without "go." We are to go and tell others. We are to take the initiative. We are to dare to reach beyond our familiar, comfortable world.

That is why the Letter of James in the New Testament constantly is reminding us of the need to reach out to folks who may be homeless, hungry, in need of clothing, widows or widowers, orphans, the poor – because *"faith, by itself, if it has no works, is dead."* We don't have to leave Barnstable County to do this – all of these situations are within 20 minutes of our building. If Jesus were here today he would be reaching out to people with Aids, to the poor, to those struggling to get by. We are to reach out to others, even to those who may make us feel uncomfortable for different reasons – whether because we feel badly or guilty that we have so much more materially, or because we don't know what to say to people who have lost a loved one to death, or because we're afraid of getting close to someone. When you go the Ministry Fair, make sure you look at all the mission and caring ministries that we are involved in that you can be a part of – from the Caring Cupboard food pantry, Carpenter's Helpers, Habitat for Humanity, Caring Nurses, and so many more. This very night we will have a number of homeless women sleeping in our church as a part of the Overnights of Hospitality program.

Whether you are deeply involved in ministry at BBC or if you are here today for the first time, I strongly urge you to **walk around the entire ministry fair** just so you

have a better understanding of all the ways people are serving in ministry and mission at BBC. You will be amazed. I guarantee you there will be several things you will say, *“I didn’t know the church was involved in that.”* And there will be at least a couple of things that you will be able to say, *“I think I can do that, I could help with that.”*

There is really no reason, except for significant physical limitations, for anyone to leave our campus today without being able to sign one of the yellow cards found at all the tables at the fair saying, *“I would like to be part of this mission, this ministry, this team.”*

I hope when I speak to you in the coming weeks, whether leaving the building after worship or anywhere else, that you will be able to tell me, *“I just want you to know, Doug, I signed up to be a part of this ministry. I signed up to learn more about this team.”* If you’re already doing one or more things, fill out a card anyway and just note on it, *“I am already serving in”* **“Faith, by itself, if it has no works, is dead.”**

A living faith is a loving, serving faith.

One day many years ago, a famous Catholic bishop named Fulton Sheen was in a leper colony in Africa, and he was repulsed by the open sores on the bodies of everybody lying there in the dirt. One man in particular was in really bad shape; in addition to leprosy he had other skin diseases and terrible open wounds on his legs. As Fulton Sheen leaned over him to talk to him, the chain that he was wearing around his neck from which hung a cross broke, and the cross fell into the man’s open wound. He wrote, *“For a minute I was repulsed. I wanted to just step back. Then all of a sudden I was filled; I was overcome with love for this person who had nothing. I reached into the sore and I took up the cross.”* That is what following Jesus is all about, taking up the cross, and **being willing to reach beyond our inner circle, beyond people in our area who may be different than us, to care about the whole world and people wherever and whoever they may be.**

Jesus says to us, *“Come, follow me, and I’ll make you fish for people.”* **If we’re not fishing, we’re not following.** It has never been easier to communicate or travel all around the world. Like many of you I receive emails from all over the US as well as India, Scotland, Africa, you name it. Two weeks from today we will have a terrific American Baptist missionary, Dr. Bill Clemmer who has been serving with his wife Ann in the Democratic Republic of Congo for years, even through all the trials and violence of

civil war in that country. Bill is flying to New York to report on the work of the hospital and medical mission and then flying back, he will only be in the US for a week. Our church is the only one he is speaking at so we are privileged to have him. The ability to travel in the 21st century makes it possible. In just the last six months, members of our church have traveled to India, Rwanda, South Africa, and the Dominican Republic on mission trips and anyone who goes will tell you that it changes your life. **I hope more and more people will go on a cross cultural mission trip because it opens your life and faith to a broader world and because the faith of sisters and brothers in other parts of the world is so inspiring.**

We were all made for a mission - a mission of historic and life changing proportions. Many people who were alive then can remember when President Kennedy inspired our nation to put a man on the moon and to return him safely to earth by the end of the 1960's. That mission inspired and focused a nation.

{ Showed video/audio clip of going to the moon. }

Jesus also gave his followers a mission – to share the good news of God's love with their family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. To live out their faith by loving and serving others, including folks who were nearby who were different than they were or who were in need. Jesus wants us sharing with people from every nation the Good News of God's love in Jesus.

A sleepy angel was awakened by the brightness of Jesus ascent into heaven. The angel saw Jesus and said, "*Where have you been?*" Jesus replied, "*I've been on earth.*" "*How long were you there?*" "*A few years.*"

"*How did it go?*" the angel asked. "*They crucified me,*" Jesus said.

"*That's awful, but you must have had an incredibly vast influence,*" the angel remarked.

Jesus said, "*I had about 120 followers.*"

"*What will become of your work?*" the angel asked.

Jesus said, "*I left it in the hands of my friends.*"

"*And if they fail?*" asked the angel.

Jesus said, "*I have no other plans.*"

It is intriguing to imagine, who will be in heaven because of you? When you get to heaven, who is going to greet you with a huge hug and say, “Thank you for telling me the Good news!” As long as we are alive, our mission is not complete.

When invited to be a part of God’s mission, Moses said, “*Who me?*”

Jonah said, “*Not me.*” Habakkuk said, “*Why me?*” Isaiah said, “*Send me.*”

Perhaps the most dangerous and exciting prayer we can pray is, “God use me.” Let’s pray: “God we thank you that you call us to accept our mission from you. Give us the courage to walk around the ministry fair, to sign a commitment card, and to be a part of your mission in the world.

Thank you for the privilege of being part of the greatest cause, the most inspiring and comprehensive mission the world has ever known, the building of your family from people of every nation, tribe, and language.

“God, more than anything else, I want to fulfill your purposes for my life, including my mission to tell others your Good News. Use me anytime, any place, anywhere, any way you choose. We want to bring others to you, we want to share your love, and we want to serve your purpose in our generation. Help me to help our church to fulfill our mission. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Blessing:

“Christ has no body on earth but yours;

No hands but yours;

No feet but yours;

Yours are the eyes

Through which is to look out

Christ’s compassion to the world;

Yours are the feet

With which he is to go about

Doing good;

Yours are the hands

With which he is to bless now.”

St. Teresa of Avila