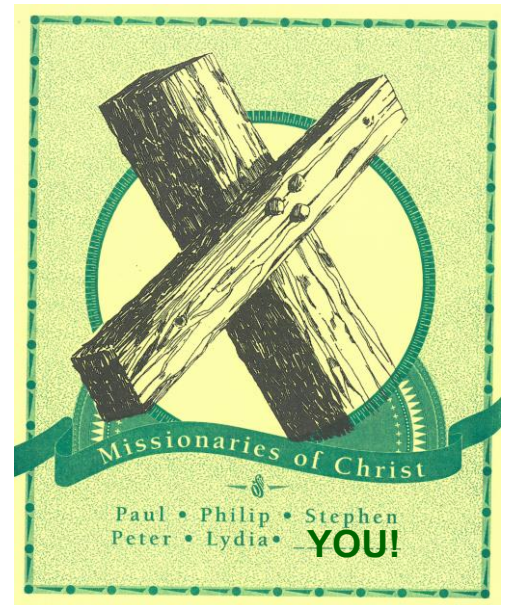


Theme: You are a Missionary!

Text: Matthew 28:16-20 (NKJV)

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. ¹⁷ When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

In the introduction for our Vacation Bible School this past week I asked the students, "Who comes to mind when you think of someone sent on a 'mission.'" I then showed several pictures of possible answers: Maybe a super spy, like the ones in the Mission Impossible movies; perhaps a secret agent, like James Bond; or maybe a soldier. I also made the point that sometimes the person who is sent on a mission is someone you might not expect. Our VBS, was of course, focused on people sent out on a very different type of "mission" than the ones we listed in the introduction—not top-secret spy missions or military operations—but "missions" to spread the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The theme of our VBS was titled "Missionaries of Christ." And yes, it did include some people we might not expect, including the first day's lesson which was on the Apostle Paul, a man who was originally a violent persecutor of Christians, but was converted by Christ to become the greatest missionary of all time.



We also made the point that all of us as believers are also "Missionaries of Christ!" Yes, even the three and four year olds among us right up to the oldest ones in our midst are called by Christ to be His missionaries. That's why on the cover of their lesson books for the week there is a blank line next to the list of the five missionaries we would learn about during the week. That blank line was there for them to write their name in as a reminder that "**You are a missionary!**"

Well, what if you weren't at our VBS this past week. Are you still a "Missionary of Christ"? Absolutely! How can we say that with such certainty? Because Jesus gave us and all believers our "mission" when He spoke the words of the "Great Commission" in our text: **"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (v. 19-20a).**

In other words Jesus wants His believers, His "followers," His "**disciples**," to go out and make *more* "followers," or "**disciples**" of Jesus! How is this done? Jesus does not give us a specific "how to" course on evangelism, but He does tell us the means by which we are to "**make disciples**." He says,

1) "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (v. 19), and
2) "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (v. 20). In other words Jesus is telling us to use what we call "The Means of Grace," or the tools or instruments by which Jesus gives us His grace, namely the Gospel, both in **Word (the Bible)** and in the **Sacraments (baptism, Lord's Supper)**. The Gospel—that is what converts hearts, saves souls, changes minds, and "**makes disciples**" of Jesus! And that is what Jesus calls us to use!

What is the Gospel? Literally, it means “*Good News*” and it refers to the “good news” that God loves us so much that He sent His only Son Jesus to live the perfect life for us that we couldn’t, to die an innocent death on the cross to pay the punishment that our sins deserved, and on the third day rise again from the dead to give us the assurance of our own resurrection to eternal life in heaven with Him forever.

How have we been doing at using these, “tools” God has given us, these “instruments of Salvation,” these “Means of Grace?” Have we been sharing the “Good News” of forgiveness of sins, life and salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus? Probably not as well as we should have or could have.

Often times when we think of sharing the Gospel or spreading the “Good News” about Jesus, we think about going overseas to do mission work. Some of you who are here today may have had the opportunity to go overseas and spread the Gospel to far away countries. But many of us here today have not. Some of us never will. Can we still do mission work? Of course!

First of all, we all can support the efforts of our missionaries through our prayers and offerings. Secondly, think about local mission work. Remember where Jesus told His disciples to witness first when He gave them yet another of His “Great Commissions” in our reading from Acts? He said, **“You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).** He told them to start locally and expand out from there. We can all do the same thing. He has put you in the city you’re in, in the neighborhood you’re in, in the house you’re in, in the job, or school you’re in for a very specific reason and purpose. He wants to use you as a witness to the people in your sphere of life. Think about our personal evangelism to the people that we know and see everyday. Do we make efforts to tell them about Jesus and the forgiveness and salvation He’s won for them? If not, why not?

Maybe you’re not very good with words and can’t preach an eloquent Gospel sermon like the Apostle Peter or the Apostle Paul. Maybe you just don’t know what to say. There is a great line in the hymn that the children learned this week, which we’re going to sing right after this sermon, that reminds us: *If you cannot speak like angels, If you cannot preach like Paul, You can tell the love of Jesus, You can say “He died for all!”* (Hymn 826 v. 2 LSB; 496 v. 2 TLH). It really is that simple! *You can tell the love of Jesus, you can say “He died for all!”* You don’t have to know how to preach a sermon or write a textbook on evangelism to be a “Missionary for Christ.”

Even just memorizing a Bible passage or two that expresses the Gospel clearly is a good, short, simple way to share the Good News with others. **Romans 5:8** is a good example of this:

“But God shows his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8 EHV)

Or, perhaps the most well-known Gospel passage of all, **John 3:16**,

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16 NKJV)

At the very least we can always invite the people we know to come to church to worship Jesus and learn more about Him and the salvation He has won for them. Take it upon yourself each week when you see these empty pew spaces to invite people you know, or people you meet during your day to come and fill those spaces and hear the message of salvation through Jesus Christ.

You can always tell the people by your *actions* as well as your words how much Jesus has done for you and that He died to save them too. One of the unexpected “missionaries” we learned about during VBS was Lydia. Lydia was a seller of purple cloth, which was very valuable and sought after in those days since it was the color of royalty. When she heard Paul preach the Gospel message we’re told that **“the Lord opened her heart” (Acts 16:14)** and she believed and was baptized. In fact, she shared this message with her whole household and they believed and were baptized. She then showed her faith by persuading Paul and his missionary companions to stay at her house. She used her wealth and resources to help support other “Missionaries of Christ” to spread the Gospel.

These are all things we can do as well. In fact, we have a good example of that here today: A father and a mother bringing the Gospel of Christ to their children and helping them grow in their faith through the Word of God which was taught them in our school and here at church, and bringing them here today to be baptized.

Can you think of someone close to you who you can share the love of Jesus with? Maybe it’s a family member or a coworker or a classmate or friend. Maybe it’s someone you see each week at the grocery store or pharmacy. Think specifically of at least *one* person and make it a point this week to pray for that person. Pray that the Lord would bring them to faith through His saving Word and pray that the Lord would give you the courage and love to share that Gospel Word with them. Pray for them; make efforts to witness to them by loving acts of care and kindness; share the Good News of Jesus with them, and invite them to come to church with you. Most people who go to church and eventually become members of a church do so because someone they know invited them or brought them. All of us have opportunities to do this nearly every day if we are watching for them.

You are a Missionary! Jesus has made you one by bringing you to faith and giving you your “mission,” the “Great Commission.” What a blessed privilege! But what a daunting task at the same time. Left to ourselves we could not hope to begin to keep it. That is why Jesus gives us more than a “commission” in our text. He gives us His great promises. He fills us with confidence when He reminds us, **“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (v. 18).** Why do we tend to forget or “skip over” that part when we read this text? Again, remember Jesus is talking to you here! He is reminding you that He is in control! Nothing in heaven and earth can keep Jesus from carrying out His will, and He wants to carry out His will through us. If Jesus is for us, who can be against us **(cf. Romans 8:31)?** No one! Jesus also fills us with comfort and strength to open our mouths to witness and confess Him, even before a hostile world filled with darkness and opposition to Him.

This is one of the lessons we learned this week when we read the account of Stephen, the man after whom we named our church and school. Stephen faithfully preached God’s Word in the face of opposition and even pleaded for the forgiveness of those who stoned him to death for preaching about Jesus. We have that powerful, comforting reminder etched into the stained-glass window in the front of our church: **“Be faithful until death and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10).** We have Jesus own words of assurance in v. 20 of our text, **“I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (v. 20).** Jesus is with you! His promises are yours! **You are a Missionary of Christ!** Amen.