

WE'VE GOT GOOD NEWS, DON'T WE?

Matthew 28:16-20

Acts 1:6-8

2/7/10

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Have you been to the Dinosaur exhibit at the Arts Center? I haven't made it yet, but I have had so many people tell me how neat it is and how fortunate we are to have it here in Danville. Have you seen Avatar? Candy and I saw it last weekend. I loved it. The special effects were extraordinary. But the movie I have heard most about is "Blindside." So many people have told me that I have got to see it.

Have you ever noticed how easy it is to recommend to people some movie you have seen or restaurant you have eaten at or book you have read? In such cases, we have become witnesses to those things, telling others what our experience was and recommending them.

But when it comes to witnessing for Christ, most people live as though a gag order has been placed over the topic. Most people just don't utter a word about their faith or about God except with other Christians.

That is ironic, isn't it, because **Christian are Christ's only witnesses.** The Bible clearly places the responsibility of being witnesses of Jesus in the hands of Christians. In our gospel lesson from Matthew, the resurrected Jesus, met with his disciples and gave them one final teaching, its called the Great Commission. The last word Jesus wanted to leave with his disciples was this, "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, teaching them to obey everything that I commanded you." Jesus commissioned his followers to spread the good news about him to the world. In the book of Acts, Luke describes a different scene with Jesus and his disciples, but in it, Jesus had the same message. Just before he ascended into heaven, Jesus told his disciples what he expected from them in his absence. "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Jesus left his message and ministry in the hands of his disciples. It was their job to carry it forward.

There is a story about two angels looking over the ramparts of heaven and watching the life of Jesus unfold. As they watched Christ's crucifixion, resurrection, and appearances before his ascension, one the angels said to the other, "You mean He's leaving the spread of the gospel to that little band

of believers?” “Yes,” the angel replied. “But what if they fail,” the angel inquired. The other angel responded, “*He has no other plans.*” My friends, Jesus is counting on us to be his witnesses and share the message of his life and salvation. He has no back up plan. We are it!

But there is a problem, isn't there. **We don't want to be Christ's witnesses.** Let's be honest, we don't want to be Christ's witnesses because we don't want to offend anyone. We reason: “Religion is a private matter. Everyone has to make up their own minds.” That certainly is true, but how are people going to make up their minds about Christ if all they know is what they hear from some screaming, fundamentalist TV preacher? When I heard Pat Robertson's analysis of the reason for the earthquake in Haiti, I was embarrassed as a Christian. Many people will never give Jesus a look, because of what they have seen in the media. Until we tell people differently, they will never know of the awesome love and faithfulness of God.

Years ago a man came to the church and was surprised to see his coworker there. The men had worked together for seven years, but our church member had never mentioned to his coworker where he went to church or even that he was a Christian. How will people ever come to salvation in Christ if Christians are silent? Jesus said, “No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on a lamp stand, and it gives light to all in the house.” “You are the light of the world. Let your light shine before others so they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

Should we be less afraid of offending someone and more concerned that a person live their life in the darkness of self-centeredness and spend eternity in the agony of estrangement from God. We need to be praying to God for our friends and for guidance on how and when to witness of Christ with, as it says in I Peter 3, “*with gentleness and reverence.*”

The other excuse for not witnessing is that we don't feel confident in our faith. We don't believe we know enough about the Bible or have all our questions answered. We are afraid of embarrassing ourselves, so we play it safe, and say nothing. But think about it, is our possible embarrassment of more importance than the salvation of a friend?

A witness in a courtroom, doesn't have to know everything about the case, he/she just has to tell what they know. It is the same with witnessing to our faith. We don't have to be biblical scholars, but only tell someone how God has helped us through hard times and will help them too.

We don't have to be perfect Christians to invite someone to church. We

just need to get over ourselves and have a little humility and let the love of God flow through us to others.

There was something surprising in our passage in Matthew. Jesus appeared before the disciples. The text reads, “When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.” After seeing Jesus die on the cross, be buried in a tomb, and then stand before them resurrected from the dead, some doubted. But that doubt, didn’t stop Jesus from commissioning all the disciples to go and spread the word of Jesus’ victory over death and the kingdom of God that he had brought to the world. They were imperfect Christians. They had doubts, but Jesus still sent them to be his witnesses any way.

That tells me that Jesus can use imperfect Christians like me and like you, to be his witnesses. We don’t have to knock on the doors of strangers to be witnesses. We just have to tell those we know, those who are struggling, those who need the power of love, and forgiveness and hope in their lives. Just tell them how Jesus or the church has blessed our lives and invite them to give Jesus and the church a try.

We do have good news to share, don’t we? Jesus has touched our lives with healing love hasn’t he? Tell someone else where they can get help too.

In *Portrait of Churchill*, Guy Eden tells the story of the heroic evacuation of Dunkirk during the early years of WWII. The Allies had attempted an invasion on the western coast of Europe which had failed. Only the weather had saved the entire force from being annihilated by German planes and guns. Heavy cloud cover had given the Allies enough time to rescue their troops, by using every boat that they could press into service. Ferry boats, trawlers, pleasure craft, even rowboats were used to rescue the soldiers trapped along the coast. A British government official had paddled his own canoe, back and forth three times across the channel under heavy shelling, to bring back as many soldiers as he could.

Millions of people today are stranded in sin, in materialism, in fear, in resentment, in loneliness, and in alienation from God. Our world desperately needs the church today to mobilize in a full-scale effort, to rescue them. The question is, will we take our boats, no matter their size, and go to rescue those in need of Christ? Jesus is counting on us to save his children and bring them home to God. He has no other plans. It is up to us.