

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church Des Moines, WA November 9, 2014

A Healthy Church – Shares the Gospel

1. ***Are we serious about the mission?***
2. ***As we carry out the mission!***

Hymns: 561 – 573 – Ready Lord – 559

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

In the summer after my graduation from high school, my family and I took a trip to Washington D.C. One of our ventures took us to Arlington National Cemetery. There, at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, I witnessed one of the most surreal and memorable scenes that I've ever seen in my life. With remarkable silence and attention, people gather and watch as every hour on the hour, 365 days a year, a soldier reports for duty at that tomb. That changing of the guard is marked by precision and routine, and shows respect for the men and women who sacrificed for their country. And as every one of the guards reports for that honored duty, they receive their orders from the guard who is leaving. And the words are always the same, "Orders remain as directed!"

As we stand here today, can't we say the same thing about the orders that our Savior has given to us as his disciples? Nearly 2,000 years ago, our Savior stood in the midst of his followers and he gave them their marching orders. "Go!" he said. "Go and make disciples of all nations!" From that day to now, from one generation to the next, from those 12 apostles to every one of us, the mission remains unchanged. "Go and preach to every person you know and every person you meet. And when you have done it," he charges, "pass the orders on to those who listen to your message." (Matthew 28:19-20) That order, that mission remains as directed, Jesus wants us to tell our world about our loving Savior.

I believe that every one of us Christians knows that mission. As members of this congregation, you hear about that mission at least a few times a year. But whether we are serious about that mission depends on a few things.

The first is our conviction. We live in a time and culture when people preach acceptance of any and every belief; a time when people will tell you that whatever you believe is true, regardless of what it is. People say and believe that God is the same whether

you call him Father or Allah or Buddha. They maintain that heaven is like some mountain that you can ascend on any number of different paths.

And we are pressured to be "okay" with that. We are told that we have no right to label what we believe as truth that needs to be believed and followed. And the more that we are inundated with that message, the more pressured we will feel to conform to that way of thinking. We might reason that it is easier to go along with it, just as long as I can believe what I want.

But here is the thing: the Bible is not "okay" with that. In fact, the message of the Bible that we hold as the true Word of God tells us that this attitude that is so prevalent in the world is flat-out wrong. The Bible tells us that every human being is born with a sinful nature. All people must say with King David in Psalm 51:5, "Surely I have been a sinner from birth; sinful from the time my mother conceived me." The Bible says that out of this sinful nature come all kinds of sinful thoughts and actions (Matthew 15:19). And the Bible says more. It says adamantly that the wages, the results of these sins is death (Romans 6:23). Finally, the Bible teaches that the end result of our sin is eternal punishment, sinners hearing those dreaded words from Jesus, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). The Bible lays out a very different message about our life choices than the message of liberalism and acceptance that the world pushes.

As to the way to heaven? The Bible is just as clear. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Jesus and only Jesus is the way to heaven. There are not many paths, there is not one place for us all.

That brings us to an important question: Are you convinced of the message of the Bible; that all sins have a consequence; that there is only one Savior from those consequences; that there is only one way to heaven?

If we have that conviction, there is a reality that comes along with it. If the Bible is the only source of truth, and Jesus is the only Savior from sin, and faith in his work is the only answer, that means that there are numerous people in each of our lives - people that we are related to, people we love, people we live by and work with - who would go to hell if their time on earth ended right now. And that is a terrible thought to consider. In fact, it is probably a thought that you'd rather not have me mention; perhaps it's a thought that you've chosen to stop thinking about. But it is a thought that you need to be thinking about...because that thought will move us.

On one occasion during his ministry, when he was tired and weary and about to escape for some

needed rest, Jesus saw a crowd of people rushing to meet him. At that point, the Gospel writer made this observation, “When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd” (Mark 6:34). Jesus couldn’t look at those people without seeing the truth. They were lost. Their lives were filled with sin and sorrow. They needed to hear his words. They needed to know who he was and what he would do for them. That compassion moved Jesus to work tirelessly for those people. That compassion moved Jesus to speak to those people. That compassion moved Jesus to suffer and die for those people.

As we look at the people who God brings into our lives, may we always strive to look at people as Jesus would look at them...with unfiltered truth, and that will undoubtedly stir up compassion.

And when we have that compassion, it will undoubtedly lead to commitment. It will motivate us to say those tough words, “There is something that I need to tell you.” It will motivate us to speak in spite of all the risks. Will there be nerves whenever we speak about our Savior? Absolutely. Is there potential for a good relationship to be awkward moving forward? Of course. Could you be blatantly rejected and face lasting effects? Yes. But none of those risks outweigh the risks and results of not speaking up. We have to tell people what the world is trying to hide from them: There is only one way, only one answer. We cannot hide behind the veil of “keeping the peace” or “letting each person find the truth themselves.” Jesus calls us to be committed.

But, ultimately, there is only one thing that will move us to open our mouths and speak to others about Jesus; there is only one thing that can empower us to overcome all the barriers that we put up; only one thing that can fill us with compassion for the lost – and that is the Savior’s passionate, powerful, and personal commitment to each one of us. The more we ponder Jesus’ commitment to us, the more we will be led to declare with the Apostles, “Christ’s love compels us” (2 Corinthians 5:14). “We cannot help but speak about the things we have seen and heard!” (Acts 4:20).

So, are we serious about the mission? If we have conviction in the message, if we have compassion for the lost, if we have commitment to the mission, then we certainly have opportunities right here in front of us. There is opportunity as a church. In the middle of a major metropolis, we literally have all nations right here. And they even come to us. Every day, children from Ethiopia, Ukraine, Russia, China, Korea, Mexico, India, Peru, they come and gather in our school and hear the Word proclaimed to them. In this church today, from this very pulpit, sermons will be preached in three different languages to people whose journey to Jesus started far away from this place. It is

amazing what God allows us to do here in this place, and you have a part in that. Support that mission work, pray for it, perhaps you can even get involved in it. In so many ways, we are, and can be a mission church!

You each can be missionaries. You can be that missionary through the relationships that God gives to us. Every relationship that you have in your life is a bridge built on trust. The stronger your relationship with a person, the more that person trusts you. If you share your convictions, and do it with compassion, that person is likely to at least hear what you have to say. Use those bridges to bring people to Jesus.

Don’t just limit your commitment to sharing our Savior with the people who you know. As you go out into the world, try to see every person, whether it be the person that you sit next to on the bus, the girl who serves you coffee, the guy who rings up your groceries, for what they are...a potential brother or sister in Christ.

As Christian people, we know exactly what our Savior wants from us each day, the orders remain unchanged. As we go into the world, may we be motivated and confident to carry out those orders with diligence. Amen.