

Together We...Tell People
The Church Goes and Tells
Matthew 28:16-20

Preached by Rev. Craig T. Smith on October 22nd, 2023

(Read Text)

Mr. Grimes and Korea

Growing up, I used to go to church with my dad after my parents' divorce. We attended the little Disciples of Christ church about five blocks away at the end of my neighborhood. I had a few friends who went there, and we enjoyed playing at the big weeping willow tree – trees were in short supply in Northwest Oklahoma. I learned a lot there in that little church. My dad had grown up in that denomination in Denver, which was heavily saturated with a Disciples of Christ population. He came to the Disciples of Christ college in my hometown and met my mom and found one of seven DoC churches there and that was where we went.

As I got older, I began to notice something. The economy in the early to mid-1980's in Oklahoma was depressed, as an oil bust knocked our region's financial knees out from under us. One by one my friends moved on to other places where the economy was more stable. And then one Sunday, I graduated into the junior high Sunday school department. And I was the only one. We met around a card table in the church office. And then they consolidated the entire youth department into one class. Again, I was the only one.

My Sunday school teacher was an older man who had been an air force pilot in the Korean war. Mr. Grimes. He was discharged due to injury as his plane was shot down and he crashed into a rice field. He told me the story about it. The first Sunday. And most every other Sunday after that. The plane was hit and spun and he became disoriented. He ejected but his plane was upside down and he shot straight into the rice paddy. He said he remembered the image of the mud covering up the air and sky over him and it went completely dark. The next thing that happened, he said, was that he was flying through the air and looked down and saw people working to free his body from the dirt and the mud.

I stopped him and asked him how this was possible. He put down his cigarette (it was the 80's and the DoC is a liberal denomination), grabbed my collar and pulled me in close to his face.

In a haze of Marlboro reds and Sanka coffee, his eyes went wide, and he said, “Boy, I had an out of body experience! I was flying to heaven and then, BOOM, (he clapped so loud that I whimpered), I was back in my physical body and looking up at these Korean farmers.”

I don’t remember talking much for a few days. That experience really spooked me. I remember becoming obsessed with death and what that would feel like, and I would sit at night and stare at the ceiling, afraid to go to sleep. And each Sunday my dad would drop me off to hear more about Mr. Grimes being collected up to the third heaven. Needless to say, I was not thriving there in that experience. I told my dad that I wasn’t sure if I could keep going to Mr. Grimes’s class. Dad said he understood if I needed to find some place with more kids. He said that at the church, he was one of the youngest members, and he was 45.

I found another church where my best friend attended, and it was there that I responded to the gospel and God transformed my life. Death was no longer a scary obsession; it had become a point of hope and anticipation. About 20 years later, I went back one last time to that little church at the end of my old neighborhood for my dad’s funeral. Except it wasn’t the same little church. There was a handful of folks remaining. I asked the minister how things were going, and he said that they had to hire a handyman to change the light bulbs because none of the men, including the minister, were physically able to climb a ladder anymore. He said that they had really stopped growing in the 70’s and had been in decline, losing more and more ground in an ongoing battle of attrition. He said that the church had no impact or engagement with the community or even my old neighborhood. They had lost the power of the gospel. That church’s experience reflects a majority of the 97% of churches that are plateaued, declining, and dying.

In discussing what happens to churches that stop growing and reaching these younger generations who are growing more lost by the day, Mark Clifton from the North American Mission Board diagnosed them this way: “At some point, the church loved the Lord and loved Bible study. They loved each other. They loved the local church *as they experienced it*. But ultimately, their compassion and brokenness for the lostness of the community took a back seat and they didn’t make decisions they needed to make so that the church could become a place where young people could flourish, or they made decisions that made the church feel like a place where young people could not flourish.

They have to own the fact that if they are a church of mostly 75-year-old people, they have to ask themselves, ‘What have we done to make this a place where young people feel like they couldn’t flourish?’”

My experience in an aging church as a teenager was that young people were always welcome to come. The church people all said they wanted young people there, but they didn’t want young people to change anything. They liked things like they had it. When you get to be older you have to realize how short this life is. Life is a fog, a vapor. We’re here and gone. Next year, I will be fifty. This means that I am one bad flu season away from heaven! My passion moving forward is to give the gospel to the next generation and have them embrace it and run with it and create onramps for them.

If the Lord tarries for another twenty years, it is going to be so much more difficult for a person turning forty in twenty years to live a faithful life to Christ in that future culture than it was for me to live for Christ in mine when I turned thirty and forty. It won’t get any easier for them to love Jesus than it is right now.

When Jesus spoke to the church in Ephesus in Revelation 2, He said, “I know your toiling, you work hard for me, you suffer for my namesake, you won’t bear false doctrine” – that reminds me so much of that little church at the end of my neighborhood. It could be every old, dying church I have ever become familiar with. Then Jesus tells the church in Ephesus, “There is one thing I have against you: Remember how far you’ve fallen, repent and return to those things you did at first.” What did they do at first? The book of Acts tells us that the church at Ephesus caused a riot because everyone in the region “knew the way.” Jesus is saying, “The things you did at first – you risked your safety, your job, imprisonment” (if you started a riot in the Roman Empire, you were going to go to jail for a long time). They risked all of that because they wanted people to know the gospel.

What have I risked because I want people to know the gospel? What have you risked? Honestly? What friendship has been strained a bit because you shared with them an uncomfortable conversation about how Jesus changed your life and you sure would love him to change theirs too? What have we risked? Have we risked that someone might not text us back because we texted them to invite them to church because we care about them and want them to know and love Jesus, the only hope for their life?

We need to remember our first love and what we did at first. I became a believer as a thirteen-year-old and over the next five or so years, I invited more people to church than I did for the next fifteen. I memorized more verses of Scripture than I ever have over any five-year period. I wore out my baptism gift Bible, highlighting so much that pages tore, noting so much that the text became hard to read, and turning pages so often that entire chunks of it fell out. I prayed for more of my friends to become Christians than I ever have since. In the best way that I knew how, I told them about Jesus. Somewhere along the way, we became domesticated. We forgot what it meant to praise God from whom all blessings flow and we lost some of the gospel confidence. We forgot Romans 1:16 – “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.”

This morning, we begin a five-week series about what it is going to mean for us to become the church God wants us to become by focusing on what we must do together. Today it is simple: Together we go and tell.

Three Gospel Principles

Let's consider three Gospel Principles from Matthew 28. We will work from the outside in. The first principle is TELL THE GOSPEL. We are commissioned by the Lord Jesus Christ to go and tell people about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus calls every church everywhere to be gospel focused.

This morning, as we consider the type of church God is calling us to become, we start here with the Great Commission. First of all, let's talk about the language here. Jesus said, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations.”

This is not a suggestion. This is a mandate. An order. An expectation. It is not the Great Suggestion. Christ has declared his authority and sends us out as his messengers. We are expected to be His messengers, telling the people about the good news of the gospel.

For a while, churches have substituted the concept of “come and see” for “go and tell.” We have to have a balance of both “come and see” and “go and tell.” It is great to invite a friend to come and see what Jesus is all about at a worship service or at an event or a small group or a children's program at the church. But that cannot replace going out and telling. That is why we

plan specific events that are away from the church. In a few weeks, we have Light the Night, an outreach, gospel focused event that will reach into several neighborhoods within Berkeley County.

We will gather at various homes of our church members. We will pray together. We will set up and prepare and pop corn, allowing the aroma to waft up and down the streets. We will play simple games with the kids and give them candy. We will have projectors playing the *Great Pumpkin Charlie Brown* movie, to engage people who need screens and technology and so the kids can stay longer. And we will have people passing out information and having simple conversations, building relationships and establishing onramps for people to hear about Jesus. We will go to them, where they are, doing what they normally would be doing on October 31st. Won't you come be a part of that with us?

You see, we all have three roles that we must be involved in concerning the gospel. We are all supposed to be pray-ers. *“First of all, then, I urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all those who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good, and it pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”* (1 Tim. 2:1-4) Everyone can pray for the church's outreach to be effective, and pray, by name, for people the church is trying to reach, and pray for specific outreach events.

We are all supposed to be bring-ers. *Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who had heard John and followed him. He first found his own brother Simon and told him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated “the Christ”), and he brought Simon to Jesus.* (John 1:40-42).

We all have a friend or family member that we need to bring to Jesus. What is stopping you? Is there someone like that in your life? Do you have a friend, a family member, someone whose spiritual life concerns you? If so, take these next ten seconds and text them. I remember back in the days when I was a youth pastor, at a youth leadership camp the speaker was from a group called I Am Second. This week, dive into their website and YouTube page (www.iamsecond.com) and check out the various white chair stories. Texting was just becoming a powerful communication tool and teenagers embraced it early. He had them pull their phones out and text their lost friends a simple message. Pick one. Pick five. Pick them all.

He encouraged these Christian teenagers to leverage their friendships, and, in the safety and comfort of that packed chapel, he encouraged them to text that they care about their friends and would love to invite them to church. He had the students pray for those they texted. And throughout the remainder of the service, when they got a response back in which someone accepted an invitation to church or a conversation over lunch, to stand up and remained standing. Within ten minutes, almost the entirety of the chapel was standing. I wonder if you would be willing to do that this morning. Is there someone that you should text this morning?

There are people, your friends, your family, who will right now, this moment, accept your invitation to church, to coffee, to supper at your home and will give you an opening to talk about Jesus. They may even go further and share prayer requests with you. All you need to do is ask to bring them.

We are to be pray-ers. We are to be bring-ers. And we are supposed to be tell-ers. *“But as for you, exercise self-control in everything, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” (2 Tim. 4:5).* We don’t get an option. As Christians, we are commissioned by Christ, according to his divine authority and eternal power, to go and tell.

Gospel Principle #2: Do the Gospel.

In order to be able to Go and Tell, each Christian must become a messenger of God in this world. This means we need to live like Jesus.

At his birth, Jesus became God incarnate. *The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)* At our new birth (John 3:1-19), we become the representation of Jesus in our communities. *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, they are new creations; the old things have passed away, and look, new things have come. (2 Cor. 5:17)*

Because we are new in Christ, we live out the “new life” with integrity before others. So many Christians refuse to *Go and Tell* because they are not living the gospel out in their own lives. There is no credibility bridge that has been built so those in our sphere of influence might walk across it.

In other words, you live like a lost reprobate who hardly ever considers Jesus on a daily basis.

You drag yourself here, put on appearances, and then roll home, mad about something trivial that has no eternal significance and then cuss out your neighbor because his yard is a mess. No way in the world you are going to text anything about Jesus to anyone, ever. Period.

We have forgotten that when we “invite them to church,” we are also fulfilling a larger role than merely inviting. We have been included in the ministry of reconciliation that Christ was called to. He has empowered us to go in His name, as His messenger, helping reconcile people back to God.

Sin has broken the relationship between men and women to the One they were designed to have a relationship with. We are called to share the message of salvation – by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. We do this both through “go and tell” and “come and see” approaches.

We go as ambassadors not diplomats. Diplomats usually represent a country in the attempt to negotiate some sort of deal that is preferable for the sending country. Ambassadors represent a sovereign power with their message in a foreign place. That is what we are called to do in this Great Commission. Go into every place we can and represent the King of Kings and Lord of Lords and share the message that God is willing to be reconciled with us and Jesus can make that possible!

Sadly we don't go and tell. We are not great ambassadors because we are not living like His messengers. We are living like diplomats, representing our own interests. Which leads us to the third Gospel Principle dealing with our most interior dimension.

Gospel Principle #3: Be the Gospel.

The greatest motivation for evangelism is each person's individual relationship with God, compelling us to love those who God loves. However, we will not engage people for the gospel until we have become convinced of its power in our own lives. We have to understand that vision, that calling. God changed our lives, bringing life to something that was dead. Taking something and making it brand new. We are living sermon illustrations of the power of the gospel!

Think back to your moment of salvation. If you are like 97% of all believers, your moment came through an existing relationship – a friend, a relative, a neighbor, a pastor.

You walked across a bridge of credibility with someone that you knew and trusted. That has been and always will be the most effective way to share the gospel – by leveraging your credibility of your transformed life as a bridge to share the gospel with someone.

You cannot rely on someone else to do this for you. I can't do it because I do not share that same bridge of credibility that you do. I cannot tell you how many times a person has come to me and asked me to share the gospel with their loved one and I replied, "I am glad to do that, but don't you think it would mean more and resonate more deeply if it came from you? God has brought them into your life."

You must be convinced of the life-changing potency of the gospel. If you aren't, why not? Has it not changed your life? Are you not being transformed into Christ's likeness? Are you not becoming His messenger? This is a crucial component. This is the missing puzzle piece for so many Christians. Lock onto this and suddenly you find yourself going and telling rather than hoping they will magically come and see.

Go and tell will always be the most effective way to share the gospel, especially as the culture continues to move away from its Christian background, heritage, and memory. It is imperative that you become completely convinced that what the Bible says about the gospel is true! And that truth must compel you to be the gospel, do the gospel, and tell the gospel.

A BONUS GOSPEL PRINCIPLE

Gospel Principle #4: The Whole Church Must Embrace the Mandate for Evangelism. We all have to do this together. This doesn't fall on other people. Jesus didn't say, "And some of you just get to watch others go and make disciples."

If you are NOT going and telling, then you are NOT fulfilling the mandate of the Great Commission. Ask yourself some inventory questions:

- How many times this week did you share the gospel?
- When was the last time you shared the gospel?
- Do you have ANY IDEA what the gospel is? (if your answer is no, here is a follow up to consider: Why do you consider yourself a Christian?)
- How many people YOUR AGE have you invited and brought to church in the past year?

- How many people sitting in this church regularly worshipping are here because you invited them?

Maybe you are here this morning, and you want to go and tell, but you just don't know how.

- Start with intentional prayer. It isn't just a cliché. The early church in Acts received its power through prayer. Pray for boldness. Pray for the movement of God's Spirit. Pray the provisional prayer from Jeremiah 1, asking God to lead you where you need to go and put the words in your mouth. Prayer walk your neighborhood, praying for all in each home – especially your neighbors – asking the Lord to open doors of opportunity for you to go and tell.

- Help people bring friends! After all, together we go and tell! Join together with someone else and invest and invite a mutual friend. You have invested time, energy, and resources with unchurched friends. Invite them to consider coming to church with you and pray that they would also consider the Christ of the church.

- Be sensitive to the leadership of the Holy Spirit each day. As He leads and guides you, follow Him and be looking for gospel opportunities.

One last thought: our mandate is to go and tell. We are not on the hook to force results. The Spirit will move and work. You and I are to be faithful seed planters. God will provide the rest.

Most importantly, and this is where we will head next week, prayer and the gospel go hand in hand. Next week we will consider how together we pray. But begin now, praying for gospel doors to open wide for you.

And if you listened to all of this, and still seem sort of confused as to what the gospel is, would you indulge me for one last moment? No, this is not some weird, out-of-body, nicotine twinged, supernatural Storytime. I just want to share the gospel with you.

God created us to be with Him. (Genesis 1-2)

Our sin separated us from God. (Genesis 3)

Sin could not be removed through doing good things. (Old Testament)

Paying the price for our sin, Jesus Christ died and rose again. (Gospels)

Everyone who trusts in Jesus *alone* can be saved. (Epistles)

Life in Christ can start right now, and it will last forever. (Revelation)

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

MEN'S BIBLE STUDY: Monday October 23 at 6:30PM at Pastor Craig's home. We are going through the book of Ephesians. All men are welcome!

Wednesday Morning Bible Study at 10:30AM. Our study continues in Mark.

FBC Kids Wednesday Nights. 6-7:30PM See Pastor Jason for details!

LIGHT THE NIGHT: October 31. Sign up to volunteer today! We also need prayers for the gospel to be shared, encouraging conversations to be had, and a lot of candy donations! Your help with this is greatly appreciated.

BUSINESS MEETING: October 30th, 6PM. Please get your committee/team/ministry's report turned *in this week!* Email it to contact@fbcmartinsburg.com. Be sure to grab a book of reports, prospective 2024 budget and Nominating Committee list as well.

Deacon Nomination Forms are available for the next four Sundays in the foyer outside the sanctuary.

THIS PAST WEEK: SUNDAY 10/15/2023

OFFERING GIVEN: \$5,255.90

IN WORSHIP: 166

WEEKLY BIBLICAL COMMUNITY: 205

THIS COMING WEEK: Oct.23-27

OFFICE HOURS THIS WEEK: M-TH: 8AM-2PM, Closed Friday.