

WITNESS

In 1965 lyricist Hal David and music composer Burt Bacharach teamed up to write a song which was recorded and released and quickly rose to #7 on the US charts. The title of that song was "What the world needs now is love." The lyrics were very simple, "What the world needs now is love sweet love, it's the only thing that there's just too little of. What the world needs now is love sweet love, no not just for some but for everyone." The world needs love, but not the kind of love the world offers. It needs real love. Agape love. What it really needs is the author of love, because the only way to attain this love is through Jesus. The better song might be, "What the world needs now is Jesus sweet Jesus. He's the only thing that there's just too little of, and no not just for some, but for everyone." The world needs Jesus. In order to find Jesus it needs people who are willing to share Jesus.

We are continuing in our series Authentic Faith. A few weeks ago we talked about love. Last week we talked about the fact that giving flows out of love. Today I want to talk about something else that flows out of love, and that is witness. If you truly love someone, you want what is best for them.

There is an old TV Ad that was part of the "Don't Almost Give" campaign. One ad shows a man in a wheelchair sitting looking up a flight of steps. The narrator says, "This man almost learned to walk at a rehab center that almost got built by people who almost gave money." After a pause the narrator continues, "Almost gave. How good is almost giving? About as good as almost walking."

Another ad shows a homeless man curled up in a ball atop a pile of rags. He is covered with a ratty bed sheet. The narrator begins, "This is Jack Thomas. Today someone almost bought Jack something to eat. Someone almost brought him to a shelter. Someone almost gave him a warm blanket." Then after a pause the narrator drives his point home, "And Jack Thomas? Well, he almost made it through the night." If you love someone, you help them. That is true of witnessing. How good is almost witnessing? Well, I wanted to say something but decided not to...

John 20:19-22 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. 21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." 22 And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

A few weeks ago was Canada Day. I had the opportunity to speak online to the South Asian Congregation. Their kids have made a little video, saying how much they loved Canada and how important it was to now live in a free nation. I was thinking to myself, "Canada is free, but for how much longer?" My ancestors came to Canada in 1783 – almost 240 years ago. They fought in the war of 1812. I have a grandfather that fought for Canada in the First World War. I have uncles that fought for Canada in the Second World War. This freedom that we value as a nation was not free.

We are seeing our nation changing quickly. We are losing our freedoms, not to a foreign power but to radical ideologies from within. The Christian heritage that this nation was built upon is being eroded and replaced by humanism. We are still free for now to share our faith, but so often we don't.

God has called us to be His witnesses on earth. He has called us to be light and salt. He is sending us to take His message of hope and love, starting where we live and going out to the very ends of the earth. Are we doing it? Is it a priority in our lives? Is this function the foundation of our life, or have we reduced faith to only an individual thing?

What does Authentic Faith look like? It is a faith that is shared with others. It is a faith that is given. I want to say 3 things about the verse we read this morning;

1. The Example

In verse 21 Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me ..."

To be a Christian literally means to be a little Christ. To be an imitator of Jesus. Jesus wants us to follow His example, to do what He did. It says in this verse that Jesus is sending us *as the father sent Jesus*. So how was Jesus sent? God's plan of salvation has been seen throughout the bible. We see it from the very beginning. Adam and Eve sinned and all creation fell as a result of that sin. But right from the beginning, God had a plan to redeem His creation;

Gen 3:15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.

The devil would have his day, but one day he would be defeated. God had a plan of redemption for all mankind;

Gen 18:18 Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him.

God raised up the nation of Israel to take and spread His knowledge to all nations. Jesus was the culmination of God's redemptive plan. Just after Jesus had risen from the dead, he appeared on the road to Emmaus to two disciples. They were trying to make sense of everything that had happened.

Luke 24:25-27 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

I would have loved to have been there that day. To hear God's unfolding plan of salvation right from the mouth of our Saviour himself. God had a plan. That plan meant that ordinary people WITH the good news had to go to lost people WITHOUT the good news and share it with them.

God's plan of salvation was not simply announced to all peoples from heaven. It required that Jesus come and become one of us. That meant He had to LEAVE His home in glory and GO to those who were lost and helpless. That is the example that Jesus is setting before us, and it was evidenced in the life He lived with us. He spent His ministry going to all the town and villages and synagogues in Israel, proclaiming God's plan of redemption with everyone he met. We are to follow Jesus's example. In order that people will hear, we have to be willing to get up from where we are and go and tell them, just like He did.

While Jesus was on the earth, he showed us what mission looked like. In the New Testament we read the story of Jesus sending out the 72. Basically, Jesus arranged 36 short term missions teams to go and do what He was already doing.

Luke 10:1-3 After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. 2 He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. 3 Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.

These teams went out following Jesus' example, doing the things that Jesus was doing;

Mat 10:7-8 As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' 8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.

Jesus has set an example for us to follow. A model to build our life around. A pattern. As Jesus was sent, so he is sending us. We are the hands and feet of Jesus, sent to declare His love to everyone.

I graduated from the University of Guelph in 1987. That summer I got a job in downtown Toronto with the Yonge St. Mission. In the mornings I ran their food bank. People from the community would come in and I would give them food. In the afternoons, I was given the job of local evangelism. Basically that meant that I would go out and share Jesus with as many people as I could. Sometimes that meant taking a bunch of freezies and giving them out to the street kids in Allen Gardens. Sometimes that meant talking to homeless people and hanging out in Regent Park or talking to tourists in front of the Eaton Center or Nathan Phillips Square. I would finish with the food bank in the morning and then have lunch. Then I would head out the doors of the mission. It was a huge city. Where do you go? What do you do? Who do you speak with? I would say a quick prayer and then, as I walked out the front doors I would say something like "OK God, do you want me to go left or right?" Along the way I would keep saying to myself "What would Jesus do if He were here in my place right now?" I would simply follow God's leading until I found someone to speak with. I was always amazed at where I would end up. People would often ask me how I knew that they needed someone to talk with that day. I would always say the same thing, "I didn't know, I had no idea of where I was going, but God knew."

Let me say to you this morning that was not simply my summer job back in 1987. That is the all our job of all of us today. It is our mission, our calling. We are sent out, lead and empowered by God to tell as many people as we can about His love and mercy.

2. The Expectation

Jesus has not only given us an example to follow. He is commanding us to go. From the verse we read this morning;

In verse 21 Jesus continued, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me ... I am sending you."

Jesus said, "I am sending you." If you are a Christian then you have been sent. As Jesus went into heaven, He commanded us to go. He had given us everything we need in order to accomplish the task that He was setting before us. His expectation was that we would follow His example and do what we were told to do.

Mat 28:18-20 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

As we have seen in this series, there are certain things that, as people of authentic faith, are expected of us. They are commanded of us. They are non-negotiables, not up for debate, not subject to personal preference. This is about lordship, who is calling the shots in your life?

As I stand here this morning, I am reminded of the very first message I preached on this stage more than 8 years ago. It was before I was even a pastor of this church. The message spoke about the fact that all of us are called to witness. God has called us to go. I read from 2 Cor;

2 Cor 5:18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

My first point in that sermon was that God has commanded us to go. He has given us His message and told us to take it out into the world. That is our calling. It is our job. It is what is expected of us. I said "The first reason we need to be sharing our faith is the simple fact that Jesus Himself has told us we should. Jesus told us to GO! That was not a suggestion, it was a command." When you are in the army and your commanding officer says march you march and keep on marching until he says halt. Then I told this story;

The term POSTHASTE goes back to the time of Henry VIII. Postmasters were given relays of horses to carry messages from the king to important cities in England. Because some couriers were irresponsible and wasted time in taverns and inns on the way, a drastic law was put into effect demanding that every dispatch carrier should "ride for his life." The king's edict meant that anyone caught delaying his messages would be publicly hanged. Often there was drawn upon important letters the figure of a man suspended from a gallows. Beneath was this ominous warning: "Haste, post, haste! Haste for thy life!" A number of men did suffer death because of their inefficiency, but in the 19th century the practice was discontinued. However, the old expression still remains as a reminder that the utmost speed and urgency is required when the king's business is involved!

The first reason we need to go is that Jesus told us to go. He has commanded us to do so. He expects us to do this.

You have but one business on earth that is to save souls - John Wesley

The Mark account of the great commission reads;

Mar 16:15-16 He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. 16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

Just before Jesus returned to heaven he again told us to go.

Act 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Jesus told us "You WILL be my witnesses." He did not say, I hope you get around to this. I hope you can work this into your busy schedules. Jesus said "I am sending you." There is an urgency to this request.

Have you ever seen a speed trap? You are driving down the 401 and you see cars on the other side flashing their lights at you. You know there is a speed trap coming so you slow down. After you pass it you do the same thing. You flash your headlights at the oncoming traffic to warn them. Why are we so willing to warn people about the OPP but not warn people of hell?

Story of Skyrider in 1985.

3. The Examination

Jesus said "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." He has told us what to do. He has given us everything we need to complete the task. The simple question is this, are we doing it? Are we going and are we telling people? This requires self-examination.

What is the CENTER of your life? As I have several times through this series, who is calling the shots. Who is in control. What is the focus of your life? We all build our lives around something. For some it is money, for many it is pleasure, for others it is power. Some build their lives around their careers. For others it is their children. Everyone builds their life around something.

Two men were talking over coffee one day. One said: "I'm concerned about my wife. She talks to herself a lot these days." The other said: "Mine does too, but she doesn't know it. She thinks I'm listening." God is speaking to you. The question is, are you listening or have you tuned Him out?

What is the CONTRIBUTION of your life? That means, what are you doing with what you have been given? How are you using the influence you already have? All of us have relationships with other people. That means a level influence, the right to speak into the life of others. How are you using that? How about your spiritual gifts? How are you using them for God's glory? Basically it comes down again to the simple question, are you building your kingdom or are you building God's kingdom?

God may call you to share His good news across the street or around the world. For me, God did not call me to go THERE until I was first doing it HERE. If you can't share your faith with a person in downtown Toronto you should not expect to do it in Japan. Take what you have been given and put it into practice.

What are the CHALLENGES of your life? That means, what is stopping you from being the man or woman of God that you have been called to be? What is the obstacle or obstruction that is getting in the way? Maybe it is a relationship or choice you have made. Maybe it is fear, or pride, or just selfishness.

I think one of the reasons we often do not share our faith with others is that we are afraid to make a mistake. What if I offend this person? What if I say the wrong thing? The only wrong thing you can say is not to say anything at all. Trust that God will give you the words and open your mouth and say something. God has given us a job to do, it is up to us to do it.

There are people who have said to me in the past, "Pastor Steve, why do tell people that sleeping together outside of marriage is wrong? Why preach on Homosexuality or Transgender? Why do you speak about gossip and lying? Don't you know that these things make people uncomfortable?" So why not just speak about love and the fact that God loves us and accepts us? God loves us, but He loves us enough to speak the truth to us. Part of love is telling people when they are in danger. God has called us to be salt and light. Salt is a preservative, it changes what it comes into contact with.

God has called us to be watchmen of this nation that we live in. To speak prophetically to the nation and culture around us.

Ezek 3:17 "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. 18 When I say to a wicked man, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. 19 But if you do warn the wicked man and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his evil ways, he will die for his sin; but you will have saved yourself. 20 "Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and does evil, and I put a stumbling block before him, he will die. Since you did not warn him, he will die for his sin. The righteous things he did will not be remembered, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. 21 But if you do warn the righteous man not to sin and he does not sin, he will surely live because he took warning, and you will have saved yourself."

In ancient times cities had walls around them and gates. At night the gates were closed to keep invaders out. Since gates are easily broken, watchmen would be appointed to stand guard during the night and warn the people if the city was threatened. How terrible it would be for the watchmen to see the danger coming but to say nothing – to do nothing about it. God holds us accountable, not just for the things we say but also for the things we fail to say.

The second most powerful hurricane to ever strike the United States was Hurricane Camille back in 1969. Authorities knew that the storm was coming days before. Warning were sent out telling people who lived along the coast that they had to leave and find safety inland. The night of the hurricane, the police were making sure the last of the residents had gone. The police chief of Pass Christian Mississippi was about to leave the danger area when he discovered a group of more than 20 people having a hurricane party in a beachfront condo. He told the people that they needed to clear out of the area as quickly as possible, but the home owner shouted back saying, "This is my land, if you want me off of it you will have to arrest me!" He did not arrest anyone. It was their choice. He took all their names and information, and then he got into his car and left.

Twelve hours later he returned. The 250 mile an hour winds and 28 foot waves of hurricane Camille had taken out every home along the coast, including the home of the party goers. All of them had died in the storm. It was he that had to call the relatives of those 20 people to tell them what had happened. He had to tell them that they had died because they would not heed his warning to leave. He had done his job, but they had just failed to listen.