

## *6th Mission Response*

# Go



# 36 Go into the Streets

*“Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.” (Luke 14:21)*

I do not watch many movies twice. One that I have seen a few times, however, is “Father of the Bride,” starring Steve Martin. It is actually a remake of the old movie that featured Spencer Tracy. The movie has many hilarious moments—some of them far fetched, but others closer to the truth than one might want to admit. In one scene, they are going over the guest list. Actually, I found through my own experience in my daughter’s wedding planning that this process is not so much about who will be invited as who will be cut. I suspect many families have approached this task with greater turmoil than a baseball manager faces in making the final cuts to get his team to a 25-man roster.

Just the opposite is true with God. He holds nothing back when it comes to inviting people to the His Son’s wedding feast. In fact, when one looks at the record of Scripture, He appears almost reckless in his love and openness to those He invites. Look at the parables and you will find a shepherd who is willing to leave the entire flock for the one lost sheep. In another parable, the father is coming—no running—down the road toward the humiliated son returning home. He does not seem to care that his actions will make himself the object of shame. His son is returning home! (Luke 15).

In the parable of the wedding banquet, rejected by many who are too busy, too indifferent or too self-centered to come to his son’s banquet, the King invites—even

compels—the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame to come to his banquet. He holds nothing back. He is not looking who to cut, but rather who can be added to the list. What an amazing picture these parables offer us!

I agree with Philip Yancey who wrote, “. . . Jesus did not give the parables to teach us how to live. He gave them, I believe, to correct our notions about who God is and who God loves” (p. 53). The danger I find is that we become so familiar with these parables that we lose the sense of just how raw and almost reckless is the love of God. God is intent on one thing—He wants His house full.

*“Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full’ (Luke 14:23).*

Nothing will deter Him. No excuses, no matter how lame or personal against Him, will discourage Him. There will be those who will be too preoccupied with things: “*I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me*” (vs. 18). This is just an excuse. Would you not check out the land before buying it? Others will be too busy making a living to have time for Him: “*I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me*” (vs. 19). Still others will allow relationships to stand in the way of following the will of God: “*I just got married, so I can’t come*” (vs. 20). Again, this is a pretty lame excuse. Weddings

went on for days and would have involved the entire village. This banquet would not have been scheduled to conflict with such an event. The man is really saying, “I am busy; I cannot come to your banquet.”

I am reminded of a story that appeared in the Boston Globe in June of 1990. It is a modern day version of this strange and amazing wedding banquet:

“Accompanied by her fiancé, a woman went to the Hyatt Hotel in downtown Boston and ordered the meal. The two of them poured over the menu, made selections of china and silver, and pointed to pictures of the flower arrangements they liked. They both had expensive taste, and the bill came to thirteen thousand dollars. [Keep in mind—this is 1990.] After leaving a check for half that amount as down payment, the couple went home to flip through books of wedding announcements.

“The day the announcements were supposed to hit the mailbox, the potential groom got cold feet. ‘I’m just not sure,’ he said. ‘It’s a big commitment. Let’s think about this a little longer.’ When his angry fiancée returned to the Hyatt to cancel the banquet, the Events Manager could not have been more understanding. ‘The same thing happened to me, honey,’ she said, and told the story of her own broken engagement. But about the refund, she had bad news. ‘The contract is binding. You’re only entitled to thirteen hundred dollars back. You have two options: to forfeit the rest of the down payment, or go ahead with the banquet. I’m sorry. Really, I am.’”

“It seemed crazy, but the more the jilted bride thought about it, the more she liked the idea of going ahead with the party—not a wedding banquet, mind you, but a big blowout. Ten years before, this same woman had been living in a homeless shelter. She had got back on

her feet, found a good job, and set aside a sizeable nest egg. Now she had the wild notion of using her savings to treat the down-and-outs of Boston to a night on the town. And so it was that in June of 1990 the Hyatt hotel in downtown Boston hosted a party such as it had never seen before. The hostess changed the menu to boneless chicken—‘in honor of the groom,’ she said—and sent invitations to rescue missions and homeless shelters. That warm summer night, people who were used to peeling half-gnawed pizza off the cardboard dined instead on chicken cordon bleu. Hyatt waiters in tuxedos served hors d’oeuvres to senior citizens propped up by crutches and aluminum walkers. Bag ladies, vagrants, and addicts took one night off from the hard life on the sidewalks outside and instead sipped champagne, ate chocolate wedding cake, and danced to big-band melodies late into the night” (Yancey, pp. 48-49).

No matter how offensive or lame the excuse, God will not be discouraged. I wish that I could say the same for me. I struggle with this at times. When I reach out to people and witness to them, it is one excuse after another. If it isn’t their lives being too busy with the kids, then it is that the church is not friendly enough. Or, that work is just so demanding that it leaves no time. It leaves me with the feeling sometimes of, “Why bother?” I become hesitant to approach someone else out of fear or resentment of the next excuse.

In those moments, one thought propels me forward: “Go quickly” (Luke 14:21). This is more than a thought. It is His command and our calling. Jesus calls us to go quickly and invite people to His banquet. This is not a calling for the ordained only. Each of us has been called through our Baptism into this priesthood.

*“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare*

*the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light”*  
(1 Peter 2:9).

In those moments when I get discouraged by the barrage of excuses, it is this sense of calling that keeps me going out into the streets, inviting people into the banquet. Jesus’ call to “Go quickly” reminds me that irregardless of how people respond to me or even what they may think of me, my life is accountable to one person and the call He has laid on my heart. In his book, “The Call,” Os Guinness has helpful words in this regard:

“Only madmen, geniuses, and supreme egotists do things purely for themselves. It is easy to buck a crowd, not too hard to march to a different drummer. But it is truly difficult—perhaps impossible—to march only to your own drumbeat. Most of us, whether we are aware of it or not, do things with an eye to the approval of some audience or other. The question is not whether we have an audience but which audience we have. This observation underscores another vital feature of the truth of calling: A life lived listening to the decisive call of God is a life lived before one audience that trumps all others—the Audience of One.

“In Genesis, Abraham’s call is to live a life of trust in God as he journeys before God. Usually God calls Abraham, but at one point he appears and says, “*I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless.*” Behind the voice of God is the eye of God, and behind the eye, the face, and behind the face the heart. To follow the call of God is therefore to live before the heart of God. It is to live life *coram deo* (before the heart of God) and

thus to shift our awareness of audiences to the point where only the last and highest—God—counts” (p. 73).

Keeping this in focus frees me. Free from wondering what people think of me. Free from worrying how people will respond because, ultimately, it is the Lord they are responding to when we live before the heart of God as Abraham did.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who understood something about standing strong and not backing down, said:

“Who stands fast, only the man whose final standard is not his reason, his principles, his conscience, his freedom, or his virtue, but who is ready to sacrifice all this when he is called to obedient and responsible action in faith and in exclusive allegiance to God—the responsible man, who tries to make his whole life an answer to the question and call of God?” (Guinness, p.94).

When we are living before God and certain as to where we stand with Him, we are freed to demonstrate that same kind of reckless love we experience and see in Jesus. I suspect that if one listened closely, there could be heard the applause of One—the applause of nail-pierced hands.

**Prayer:** Father, thank you for inviting me. I do not deserve your invitation, but you have extended it to me because this is the nature of your love. Yet there is still room, isn’t there? Who is it that you want me to go and invite as well? No matter the excuse, help me not to become discouraged, for there is too much at stake. In Jesus’ name I ask this. **Amen.**

**Challenge:** Who is one person that you know who has not yet responded to Christ’s invitation? Pray for them throughout this day that God would stir their heart and make them receptive to coming to the banquet.

**Scripture Reading:** Luke 14

**From the Book of Concord:** “In all these sayings Peter represents the whole company of apostles, as is apparent from the text itself. For Christ did not question Peter only but asked, ‘Who do you (plural) say that I am?’ [Matt. 16:15]. What is said here in the singular—‘I will give you the keys’ and ‘Whatever you bind . . .’—is said elsewhere in the plural: ‘Whatever you (plural) bind . . .’ [Matt. 18:18] and, in John [20:23], ‘if you (plural) forgive the sins of any . . .’ These words show that the keys were entrusted equally to all the apostles and that all the apostles were commissioned in like manner. Moreover, it must be acknowledged that the keys do not belong to one particular person but to the church, as many clear and irrefutable arguments show. For having spoken of the keys in Matthew 18[18], Christ goes on to say: ‘Wherever two or three agree on earth . . .’ [Matt. 18:19–20]. Thus, he grants the power of the keys principally and without mediation to the church, and for the same reason the church has primary possession of the right to call ministers. One must, then, see Peter as representing the whole company of apostles in these sayings, which consequently do not attribute to him any special prerogative, preeminence, or lordship” (Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, p. 334.23-24).

# 37

## Go and As You Are Going

*“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.’” (Matthew 28:18-20)*

How many commands do you read in the following Bible verse?

*“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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19).*

One? Two? Three? Four?

The common belief is that Jesus gave us four commands: Go. Make. Baptize. Teach. In reality, there is only one command. In the original language, only one is written in what is called the imperative: “make disciples.”

The word “Go” certainly sounds like a command doesn’t it? It is, however, a participle in form. Now, please understand that when it comes to grammar, participles sound more like vegetables to me. I suspect that I was thinking of other things during the days of ninth-grade English and Grammar. Participles and prepositions didn’t quite match up to the important things, like baseball. However, it is important for the sake of understanding our mission that we understand participles in this case. Jesus is saying, in effect, “As you go. . .” or “Going along the way. . .” or “Having gone. . .” In other words, He is assuming that the disciples will not sit still, waiting for the world to come to them. He assumes that they will be on the move. In essence, He is saying to them, “Wherever you are, make disciples!”

To understand the word “Go” as a participle is to understand the strategy of Christ for our mission. Christ does not establish His Church on a “build it and they will come” mindset, but rather, “As you are going along the way, make disciples.” Let it become a natural part of your everyday life.

Actually, when you review history, it has been the Divine strategy long before the birth of Christ. In the sixth century before Christ, the Southern Kingdom, Judah, which had lasted about 200 years longer than the Northern Kingdom, was captured and brought into exile, far from their homeland. From that time forward, the Old Testament people of God (the nation of Israel) were scattered throughout the world. Wherever they went, they carried their faith with them. Their faith was quite different from the other religions of the world. It was a belief in one God—a God who had provided His people with clear teachings of His mercy and grace. It was a teaching that called them to high moral standards that were unusual for those living beneath Roman influence. Most of all, wherever the people of Israel went, they went with the expectation that God would send His Messiah, a King. As much as the Jews longed to be back home, being dispersed helped to prepare the world for the coming of Bethlehem’s Child.

One can see the impact of this years, even centuries, later when magi travel a great distance to come and worship the promised

king. Where did they hear of this in the first place? The Word had spread throughout the continent because of the “going” of the dispersed Jews.

This is one of the keys to an effective church. The mistake is often made in measuring the effectiveness of a church by Sunday morning’s attendance or the size and creativity of its programs or ministries. Others will measure the effectiveness by the size of its building. The Word, however, measures maximum impact and effectiveness by a different standard. What Jesus holds up in His teachings is our ability to be salt and light.

*“You are the salt of the earth . . . you are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden” (Matthew 5:13-14).*

What do salt and light have in common? They both must penetrate something or lose themselves in something in order to be effective. They both must go out from their source in order to be effective. The salt must go into the food and the light must go into the darkness. So it is with missional churches. They are measured by the sum total of individual believers who penetrate the community by means of their “goings” to and from.

This is the assumption behind the Great Commission from Matthew 29:19—*“Go [or as you go along your way] . . . make disciples.”* Imagine the impact potential for any congregation. The worship concludes and the members “go along their way” back to school or work or into their neighborhoods. This is the Church “on the go” in the mission sense.

Have you ever seen a sign that greets members who are leaving the church or the property that says, “You are now entering the mission field!”? This is the attitude of a missional church. The making of disciples occurs as people are “going along the way.”

There is something significant about this charge that Jesus gives His disciples in light of what He said earlier in Matthew 10:5-6. He sends the Twelve out with the following instructions:

*“Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, preach this message: The Kingdom of Heaven is near” (Matthew 10:5-7).*

You see, there it is again. “As you go. . . .” It is this strategy that says be natural; be intentional. As you go, along the way, preach the message. What makes this different, however, is the limitation, “Do not go among the Gentiles. . . .” Jesus had a very specific objective. Go to Israel first. Later it will be expanded. Jesus was a master at laying the groundwork. He understood the importance of keeping it focused and narrow. Then when the objective is established, widen the scope. He did the same thing with the training of His disciples. He spent three years with them in an intensive leadership and discipling track. When He ascended, the group was small but the base was solid and deep. The Church exploded with growth when the Spirit came upon them on the Day of Pentecost.

In Matthew 28, on his Ascension Day, He expanded the commission:

*“Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations.”*

No restrictions. No limitations. Go into all the world. What a radical thought for those who heard it. Go into all the world and make disciples of them. The strategy is simple. Be intentional and be natural. As you are going along the way. The vision is huge:

*“Make disciples of all nations.”*

This commission and vision shape and focus our purpose in ministry at St. Luke. Our purpose is expressed in our mission statement: “Making and Maturing Disciples to Minister.” In this six-word statement, “disciples” is the focus; it is the object of the sentence. It is around this that our ministry is directed. In everything we do, we are either seeking to make disciples, assisting them in maturing to the full stature of Christ, or leading them to minister according to the way in which God

has uniquely gifted and shaped them. Our calling is not to save souls. That is His work. Ours is to make disciples by means of those two other participles in the Great Commission: “baptizing” and “teaching.” Making disciples is directly connected to teaching the Word and baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. In Baptism, not only does the Holy Spirit work faith and cleanse sin, but the Spirit also invites the person into a relationship with the Triune God and His Body, the Church. This is at the core of understanding what a disciple is. A disciple is not so much a student as he or she is a follower—a follower of one person, Jesus Christ. A disciple is one who seeks to model his or her life, submitting to the authority of His teaching.

Everything we do in the Church should focus on developing disciples—those who are willing to follow the call of Jesus for their life. Jesus said,

*“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23).*

One of the core principles taught in the discipleship class for new members at St. Luke is this:

“A disciple is one who responds in faith and obedience to the gracious call of Jesus Christ. Being a disciple is a life-long process of dying to self while allowing Jesus Christ to come alive in us.”

This process begins in our Baptism where the old nature is drowned and the new man rises up within us. This is not a one-time act as some would think. It is the beginning of a daily dying and re-birth. Martin Luther would make the sign of the cross each morning as he awakened to remind him of his identity in Baptism where he was called daily to die to self as the new nature arose within him.

It is time to get on with the rest of the day. As you are going along the way, keep in mind the one command He gave before He left—”make disciples.” With that one command, however, He also gives us a precious promise: *“And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).*

**Prayer:** Jesus, I love being your disciple. Thank you for calling me to follow you. As I am going along my way this day, show me how I can fulfill your command to make disciples of those with whom I meet. Let it come naturally to me so that others might see you in me. **Amen.**

**Challenge:** As you are going along this day, look for natural opportunities to give a witness to Christ being in your life.

**Scripture Reading:** Matthew 28

**From the Book of Concord:** “Because of this personal union and the communion that results from it, which the divine and human natures in the person of Christ have with each other in fact and in truth, things are attributed to Christ according to the flesh that the flesh, according to its nature and essence, cannot outside of this union intrinsically be or have—for example, that his flesh is a true, life-giving food and his blood is a true, life-giving drink, as the two hundred *patres* [Fathers] at the Council of Ephesus testified, ‘carnem Christi esse vivificam seu vivificatricem’ (that is, that the flesh of Christ is a life-bestowing flesh). For this reason, too, this human being alone and no other human being can say in truth, ‘Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them’ [Matt. 18:20], and, ‘I am with you always, to the end of the age’ [Matt. 28:20]” (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article VIII: Person of Christ, p. 631.76).

# 38

## Go Because He Says So

*“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations. . . .’” (Matthew 28:18-19a)*

For years I have said that my passion is for the lost—for those who are dying without Christ. Whether in my personal life or as a leader within the church, I have sought ways to keep this as my primary passion. Then recently, I took a closer look at Matthew 28:18-19:

*“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations. . . .”*

Many are familiar with this Great Commission. But do we know what should compel us to carry it out? I have always assumed it was because of our love for the lost, our concern that without Christ people will spend an eternity in Hell without Him, but this is not the basis He gives for the Great Commission. He says, *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go. . . .”*

Jesus certainly wants our hearts to be filled with love for the lost. This, however, is not the primary motivator He gives for us to reach out with the saving message of the Gospel. His Lordship is what should compel us. Nothing less. All authority belongs to Him, and He commands us to do this.

Jesus has come through the crucifixion and the three days in the grave as the Victor! Luther’s words express this so well:

“I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and

condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness” (Luther’s Small Catechism p. 14).

His blood has not only freed me from my sin, the fear and punishment of death and the power of the devil—His blood has made me His own. “That I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him. . . .” He is my Lord. He has the right to ask of me whatever He wishes. I am His slave.

The disciples understood this on that day of His Ascension. Scripture records for us this moment immediately before He gave them the Great Commission:

*“Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted” (Matthew 28:16-17).*

Not everyone that day was convinced. But, those who understood knew who stood before them. In response they worshipped. Then Jesus said, *“All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore go. . . .”* Those who worship Christ as Lord must also be willing to hear Him say, “I have authority over your life; here is what I now want you to do in response.”

My passion continues to be for the lost, for those who will spend an eternity in Hell without Christ. The “aha moment” for me is in recognizing a greater, more abiding passion—I want to live my life in response to His authority over me. I want to be His servant and no one else’s. My love for the lost is rooted in a first love for Jesus.

There are many men and women of faith who I admire and respect. Many of those have blessed my life directly. Some I have never met and yet their lives are such a witness and inspiration to me. One whom I never met but will someday meet in heaven is Dr. Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ. I am moved by his words:

“My life’s message is to be a slave of Jesus. And all that it involves. Love your master, trust your master, and obey your master. Obviously, I’m a son of God, heir of God, joint-heir with Christ, and if He was described as a slave—Paul, and Peter and the other apostles were slaves—this to me is the highest privilege any one could know. I evaluate everything I do in light of what He wants me to do. I try to relate every move, every day, in light of how I can help fulfill His great commission and fulfill His commandments.”

Responding to the Great Commission first out of obedience and love for Jesus rather than the needs of the lost will have an effect on my daily walk. When my response to the Great Commission is rooted first in obedience to His authority, then my life’s mission will reflect His own. The primary reason that Jesus came to this earth was not His love for you and me. It was not even so that He could die on the cross or rise from the grave. The primary reason that Jesus came to this earth was out of obedience to His Father. The result of that obedience was that He would die on the cross and be raised on the third day. Within that obedience there was, of course, His love for you and me. Clearly, though, His first love and passion was to follow His Father’s will.

I tend to so often focus on the loving Jesus that I diminish His primary motivation and purpose—obedience to His Father:

“*‘My food,’ said Jesus, ‘is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work’*” (John 4:34).

“*... but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me*” (John 14:31).

“*Then He said, ‘Here I am, I have come to do your will.’ He sets aside the first to establish the second*” (Hebrews 10:9).

Remember how as a little boy Jesus upset his mother and earthly father when they could not find Him? Even then, there was a greater love within Him, guiding His steps: “*‘Why were you searching for me?’ he asked. ‘Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?’*” (Luke 2:49).

The second way that responding to the Great Commission out of obedience and love for Jesus will impact my walk is that it will give me strength and guidance. There are many times in our lives that the expectations and needs of other people will tug at our hearts. What is the guiding principle that determines what we say yes to and what we turn away? The answer rests in living our lives before an audience of One.

The demands of a hurting and hungry world were always before Jesus. How did He know when to say yes and when to say no? Henri Nouwen offers this thought:

“*In the lonely place Jesus finds the courage to follow God’s will and not his own; to speak God’s words and not his own; to do God’s work and not his own. He reminds us constantly, ‘I can do nothing by myself . . . my aim is to do not my own will, but the will of him who sent me’* (John 5:30). And again, *‘The words I say to you I do not speak as from myself; it is the Father, living in me, who is doing this work’* (John 14:10)” (1974, p.14).

I am under His command to make disciples as I go along my way. I do this in obedience to Him and with love for those to whom I give witness. Even more important, though, is that my witness flows out of my first love for Him. This, in the end, will be the most winsome part of my witness. People will sense and see this, just as they will hear the witness I offer.

I am coming to see one other benefit to viewing the Great Commission from this perspective of obedience to His authority: Where I go or to whom I go is not as significant as making sure that He is the one who directs my goings. Remember the moment with Jesus and Peter on the beach? No sooner have they unpacked all the baggage of the last few days than this conversation is recorded:

*“Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them . . . When Peter saw him, he asked, ‘Lord what about him?’ Jesus answered, ‘If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me’” (John 21:20-22).*

It is so easy to become concerned with what God asks others to do, comparing our position in life with theirs. Keeping in mind that our response to the Great Commission is a matter of obedience frees me from getting all hung up as to whether someone is more passionate than me or more successful than me. It is not about me and what I accomplish in life. It is about His will for my life as His servant.

*“All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore go. . . .”* As you are going into the day and week ahead of you, go as a person under authority. As you do, your mission will be a reflection of His; there will be the guidance as to when to say yes and when to say no; and there will be a lot less concern about what others are being asked to do in life. You will find that being His servant is the most freeing thing that you will experience in life.

**Prayer:** Jesus, You are my Lord. You have all authority over me. Show me what you want me to do. Give me the power by your Spirit to carry it out. I am your servant.  
**Amen.**

**Challenge:** Is there anywhere in your life that God is waiting for you to submit yourself to His authority? Ask Him for His help in turning this over to Him.

**Scripture Reading:** John 21

**From the Book of Concord:** “For our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is our only teacher; concerning him this weighty command was given from heaven to all human beings, ‘Hunc audite’ (‘listen to him’) [Matt. 17:5]. He was not a mere human being or angel. He was not only truthful, wise, and powerful. He is the eternal truth and Wisdom itself, and almighty God. He knows very well what to say and how to say it, and he can accomplish through his power everything that he has said and promises, and can make it happen, as he says, ‘Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away’ [Luke 21:33], and, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me’ [Matt. 28:18]” (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article VII: Holy Supper, p. 600.43)

# 39

## Go and Don't Stop

*"We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance." (2 Thessalonians 3:4-5)*

When I grow up someday, I want to be like Caleb. There are many people that I admire in the Scripture, and Caleb is near the top of that list.

Caleb is one of the twelve spies who were sent into Canaan early in Israel's exodus from Egypt. Ten spies returned and reported to Moses that entering the Promised Land was next to impossible. Two spies, Joshua and Caleb, said that it could be done. Israel listened to the ten, refusing to enter. God then punished their disobedience and lack of faith by letting them wander in the wilderness for forty years—one year for every day that the spies had spent on their mission. Forty years later, when they finally entered, only two people remained who originally left Egypt—Joshua and Caleb.

It is what happens at this point that makes me want to be like Caleb. They are dividing up the inheritance of the land. Some parcels of that land are better than others. Listen to what Caleb says:

*"Now then, just as the Lord promised, he has kept me alive for forty-five years since the time he said this to Moses, while Israel moved about in the desert. So here I am today, eighty-five years old! I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I'm just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then. Now give me this hill country that the Lord promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified but, the Lord helping*

*me, I will drive them out just as he said" (Joshua 14:10-12).*

At eighty-five years young, Caleb is asking for some of the toughest and most formidable property that exists. "Give me the hill country." No beach-front property for this man. "Give me the hill country that the Lord promised me that day. You yourself heard then that Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified." There is still a good fight left in this faithful senior citizen. "The Lord helping me, I will drive them out just as He said." His confidence is not in his strength but in God's.

Go and don't stop. There is so much that can stand in the way of our going. Maybe right now you find yourself discouraged, defeated and tired. Is there any good fight left within you? Go and don't stop.

History is marked by great people who would not let anything stand in their way. Winston Churchill seemed so dull as a youth that his father thought him to be incapable of earning a living.

Thomas Edison's first teacher described him as slow, and his father was convinced that he was a dunce. It took thousands of experiments before the light bulb was perfected.

Albert Einstein performed so badly in high school, except in the area of mathematics, that a teacher asked him to consider dropping out.

Then, of course, there was the man who failed in business at age 22. He ran for Legislature and was defeated at 23. He

failed again in business at 24. Elected finally to Legislature at age 25, he had a nervous breakdown at 27. He was defeated for Speaker at 29 and defeated for Elector at 31. He was defeated for Congress at 34 and then elected to Congress at 37. Then two years later he was defeated for Congress, and then again defeated for Senate at 46. He was defeated for Vice President at 47, as well as being defeated for Senate again at 49. Finally, he was elected as the 16<sup>th</sup> President of the United States at age 51—Abraham Lincoln.

Go and don't stop.

Going forth in the name of Jesus can be very discouraging at times. We can end up feeling, "What good does this do? Who really cares after all?"

It is in those moments when I am haunted by these types of questions that I find strength not in my desire or my ambition, but in His command, "Therefore go and make disciples." No one may care. It may do little good in my eyes. This does not matter in the end. What matters is that I am going in response to His command. He does not let me go it alone. Jesus offers a promise to accompany His command, "*and surely I will be with you always, to the end of the age*" (Matthew 28: 20).

When I think about His promise, a picture that comes to my mind is something that occurred in the 1992 Summer Olympics in Barcelona. From his seat in the top row of the Stadium, Jim Redmond saw what 65,000 others were seeing unfold. It was the semi-finals of the men's 400-meter race. A British runner by the name of Derek was in trouble. While others gasped and watched as Derek fell to the track surface, Jim Redmond reacted in a far different way. Derek was his son. Derek had ripped his hamstring and was now picking himself up in a brave effort to go and not stop. Jim Redmond left the stands. He raced down the stairs, brushed aside a security guard and bounded over a 4½-foot wall, rushing onto the track. When Jim reached his son, he told him, "You don't have to do this." Derek was

determined to finish. So arm in arm the young sprinter and his father limped toward the finish line. As they did, the stadium fans arose and applauded what was unfolding before their eyes. Millions of viewers across the world watched an unforgettable demonstration of a father's love (Branon).

So often has God done this very thing for you and me? Hurt and limping, He comes by our side to help us to go and not stop. The beauty of this is that He has already secured the victory for us. Yet, as we run the race set before us, He is there by our side to assist and strengthen us. Remember Caleb's words and faith: ". . . *but the Lord helping me, I will drive them out just as he said*" (Joshua 14:12). So many times I have experienced this when in a quiet moment His Word has spoken to my heart at just the moment when I no longer wanted to go, when I just wanted to stop. So often He has come by my side through the workings and teaching of the Holy Spirit, as He did with the men on their way to Emmaus. So often He has sent Christian friends to walk along my side who encourage me and remind me that I am not alone.

Go and don't stop. Along the way, should you find someone else limping in their race, take the time to walk by their side and remind them of these words:

*"But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance"* (2 Thessalonians 3:3-5).

### **Perseverance**

When all the world is looming dark  
And things seem not so clear,  
When shadows seem to hover 'round  
Lord, may I persevere.  
When it seems everything's been tried  
And there's no way to go,  
Just let me keep remembering

Sometimes the journey's slow.  
I may just need to stop and rest  
Along the path I trod,  
A time to try to understand  
And have my talk with God.  
As I gain new strength to carry on  
Without a doubt or fear,  
Somehow I know things will be right,  
And so, I persevere.

(By Anne Stortz from Chicken Soup for the Unsinkable Soul; Copyright 1999 by Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen)

When the going is a little rough . . .  
When you find your strength sagging a bit  
. . . Remember Caleb. Forget about going  
down hill. Say with Caleb, "Give me the hill  
country," and start climbing. Go and don't  
stop.

**Prayer:** Send me anywhere, only go with me. Lay any burden on me, only sustain me. Sever me from any tie but the tie that binds me to your service and to your heart. **Amen.** (David Livingstone)

**Challenge:** Who do you know that is a bit discouraged right now and wants to stop? Pray for them. Ask them how you might be able to encourage them in what they are facing.

**Scripture Reading:** Hebrews 11-12

**From the Book of Concord:** "From these things it is clear that James does not contradict us when he distinguishes a dead faith from a living faith in order to condemn idle and complacent minds who imagine that they have faith when they do not. He says that faith which does not bring forth good works is dead, but he says that faith which brings forth good works is alive. Furthermore, we have frequently shown what we mean by faith. We are not talking about an idle knowledge, such as is also to be found in the devils, but about a faith that resists the terrors of conscience and which uplifts and consoles terrified hearts. Such faith is not an easy matter as the opponents imagine; nor is it a human power, but it is a divine power by which we are made alive and by which we defeat death and the devil. So Paul says in Colossians [2:12] that faith is active through the power of God and conquers death, 'You were also raised with him through faith in the power of God.' Since this faith is a new life, it necessarily produces new impulses and new works. Accordingly, James rightly denies that we are justified by a faith that is without works" (Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article IV: Justification, pp. 158-159.248-250).

# 40

## Go the Extra Mile

*“If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.” (Matthew 5:41)*

Jesus is a master—not only *the* Master, as in Lord and Savior, but *a* master—at teaching. He has a knack for saying something that on the surface seems so simple, yet when you look at it more closely, the depth is difficult to fathom. I see this especially when I read His Sermon on the Mount as it is recorded in Matthew 5-7.

I fear many of us have become so accustomed to these teachings that in our familiarity they lose their edginess, the radical nature of the life Christ calls us to live.

In a simple phrase, He has a way of turning the world, mine included, upside down:

The way to be first is to be last.

The way to be strong is to be weak.

The way to gain is to lose.

The way to be free is in surrendering everything to Him.

The way to live is to die.

The way to find yourself is to deny yourself.

Then there is this from Matthew 5:41: *“If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.”*

On the surface, this appears innocent enough. Understood in the culture of Jesus’ day, it is hard to stomach. The Jews were living beneath Roman occupation. It was understood that if a soldier asked a Jewish citizen to carry his pack, then that person must carry it for 1000 steps—the equivalent of one mile. It was insulting. It was an infringement to the rights of all Jewish citizens. They hated

the Romans. They hated being asked to do something this demeaning.

Do you see why this is hard to stomach? *“If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.”* Why would Jesus ask this kind of thing? Making matters worse, Jesus also said:

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you” (Matthew 5:38-42).*

The tunic was the long linen or cotton inner garment. People normally would have more than one of these. The cloak, however, was the blanket-like garment that was worn as an outer layer. This is the one that would keep them warm. People normally had just one of these. The cloak was important enough that God sought to protect the ownership of it:

*“If you take your neighbor’s cloak as a pledge, return it to him by sunset, because his cloak is the only covering he has for his body. What else will he sleep in? When he cries out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate” (Exodus 22:26-27).*

Literally adding insult to injury, Jesus now says, *“If someone strikes you on the right*

*cheek, turn to him the other also.*” Slapping the cheek was a way of insulting a person. Jesus is not addressing passive resistance to all evil. Nor is He suggesting that we never fight or defend ourselves. There is ample from Scripture that would say otherwise. He is, instead, dealing with how we handle it when someone insults us.

In a world of bumper stickers that say, “I don’t get mad, I get even,” what are we to make of this? As I said, so much of this Sermon on the Mount confronts us with radical truths that challenge one’s mind and soul, not to mention day-to-day life.

Those who are called to follow Christ have a higher calling than to seek revenge. We are not called to a life of fairness but to a life of righteousness. We are citizens of a Kingdom guided by much different values.

*“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17).*

We are people of a kingdom that Jesus said is not of this world. We are called to live up to a different standard.

This is not to say or suggest that those who bear the name of Christ or His cross must then become doormats and open ourselves up to abuse. Jesus put limits to His teaching. He did not say that we should go as far as they would like. He said “go with him two miles.” He did not say that we should not resist evil. There are times that the Christian is called to bear arms into war. He did tell us, though, to not resist the evil person. There are boundaries that we must maintain. Jesus himself, when He was being questioned and beaten before Pilate, asked why they did not ask for witnesses. He also asked why He was being struck. These were His lawful rights that belonged to Him according to Jewish law. There is no doubt a tension that we walk as Christians in an unredeemed world between going the extra mile and yet holding up healthy boundaries.

What is the point of it all? What exactly is at stake in all of this? It is by this that we live as salt and light. Just prior to this teaching, Jesus said:

*“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:13-16).*

Salt and Light. I have taught my share of devotions on how salt adds flavor and seasoning to the lives of people that are otherwise stale and flat. Salt, however, is also known for cleansing and preserving. That is not always a pleasant process. It can cause great pain.

In regard to light, I love to sing “This Little Gospel Light of Mine ” with children and adults. It is a fun song. But let us not forget that light also exposes those things that love the darkness. That is not always a fun tune to sing. When we live our lives in such a way that we are willing to forfeit our rights or even our property, we will not be hiding our light under a bushel basket. We will be serving as salt and light in a world that walks according to a different call.

Jesus recognized that we live in a world that operates by different values and principles than what He taught. Trying to mesh those two doesn’t work. It is like trying to mesh together two different computer operating systems. Several years ago, our school operated with the Apple system. Later we shifted to a Windows-based system. The old computer disks would not work on the new computers. They operate on two different systems. One would not recognize

the other. Jesus Christ calls us to operate under a different operating system than that of society—a different way of thinking and a different lifestyle. One does not recognize the other. But how will the world ever know that unless we demonstrate it, not only in our speaking but in our willingness to go that extra mile?

Those who saw Jesus ascend understood that the mission challenge He gave would require them to go into a world functioning under a different operating system. As the Spirit gave them power, I believe their willingness to not insist on fairness, and even willingly forfeiting their rights, gave them credibility before an unbelieving world. We today have that same mission challenge before us in a world that is not unlike the one they entered in the first century. As we do this, we reflect the very image of Him,

*“. . . who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness” (Philippians 2:5-6).*

Of course, this same teaching applies not only to our relationships with unbelievers but with believers as well.

*“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:10).*

“Go the Extra Mile” makes a perfect theme for a wedding sermon. The wedding

text that most couples want at their wedding is 1 Corinthians 13. It is a beautiful text—flowing beauty and rhythm. But, have you considered what it calls the bride and groom to embrace within their relationship?

*“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8a).*

This is a higher love than what the world is familiar with, for those who have been married a while know that for these verses to be a reality, one must be willing to go the extra mile and then some. It requires that one be willing to give up the rights associated with “me” in favor of “we.”

When Jesus said, “*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations. . .*”, He knew their going and our going would be into a world that would be unfair and would take advantage. It is in this light that His promise becomes even sweeter: “*Surely I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*”

**Prayer:** Lord, it is so hard to go that extra mile. You know that better than anyone. How did you do it? Help me. Give me a heart that is willing to go the extra mile with those people that are so hard to live with at times. I can do all things as you give me the strength. **Amen.**

**Challenge:** For whom might you be able and willing to go the extra mile this day?

**Scripture Reading:** Matthew 5

**From the Book of Concord:** “Therefore it is God’s real intention that we should allow no one to suffer harm but show every kindness and love. And this kindness, as I said, is directed especially toward our enemies. For doing good to our friends is nothing but an ordinary virtue of pagans, as Christ says in Matthew 5[:46–47].

Once again we have God’s Word by which he wants to encourage and urge us to true, noble, exalted deeds, such as gentleness, patience, and, in short, love and kindness toward our enemies. He always wants to remind us to recall the First Commandment, that he is our God; that is, that he wishes to help, comfort, and protect us, so that he may restrain our desire for revenge.

If we could thoroughly impress this on people’s minds, we would have our hands full of good works to do” (The Large Catechism, The Fifth Commandment, pp. 412-413.193-196).

# 41

## Go and Wash Feet

*“Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them” (John 13:17)*

It had been such a hectic day. The week had been a roller coaster of emotions. But each of them looked forward to this moment and this evening. At some point in the middle of their evening and gathering, he got up from the table and grabbed the two objects that everyone seemed to be ignoring. Slowly, he took off his outer garment and picked up the basin and wrapped the towel around his waist. Then one by one (one foot at a time), he began to wash their feet. Twenty-four feet—each of which would run away from him in the matter of a few hours (or in the case of one, within moments).

What he was doing should have been done by a servant—in fact, by the lowest of servants available in the house. Maybe no servant was available, we do not know. What we do know is that no one else was stepping up and volunteering. Why? You know the reason for that. It is the same reason that would have prevented anyone of us from offering to do it. So he did.

*“When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. ‘Do you understand what I have done for you?’ he asked them. ‘You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” (John 13:12-15).*

Ever since that night, the gentle splashing of water from that basin has been heard in those who follow after Him.

A basin and a towel. Touching images, but let no one be fooled. Washing feet is rarely easy. Ask Jesus. He knows the future of the feet He washes, and yet He bends down to wash each one of them. I like the way Max Lucado expresses it:

“Hands that shaped the stars now wash away filth. Fingers that formed mountains now massage toes. And the one before whom all nations will one day kneel now kneels before his disciples. Hours before his own death, Jesus’ concern is singular. He wants his disciples to know how much he loves them. More than removing dirt, Jesus is removing doubt . . . Behold the gift Jesus gives his followers! He knows what these men are about to do. He knows they are about to perform the vilest act of their lives. By morning they will bury their heads in shame and look down at their feet in disgust. And when they do, he wants them to remember how his knees knelt before them and he washed their feet. He wants them to realize those feet are still clean. ‘You don’t understand now what I am doing, but you will understand later’ (John 13:7)” (pp. 18–19).

Jesus’ act of service is a beautiful story of love. It is also the mission that He asks each

of us to wrap around our waist as well. *“I have set an example for you to do as I have done for you” (John 13:15).*

Washing feet is not easy. Ask Mary. She knows. She shared the following with me:

“‘Love your enemy.’ I knew that the time had come to take this biblical command to heart. I had an enemy—my assistant who I worked with every day. She became my enemy due to her intense ambition to have my position, and my increasing fear that she just might get it.

“Things came to a head one morning when I called her on a deliberate act done to disparage me. We have had confrontations like this before, and she would later apologize for her attitude. This time, however, she argued and turned the blame back on me: ‘You don’t approve of anything I do.’ ‘You think you’re so superior because of your position.’ ‘I can’t do anything to make you happy.’

“At the end of this onslaught, she stormed out of her office in tears. She went to a colleague of mine with a tale of terrible persecution by me, and my colleague bought it and went to my boss. The result was that I was told to be nice to her or she would quit. I decided, ‘Fine. I’ll just be sweet as saccharine, and I will only speak to her about business.’

I was polite and soft-spoken, but I gave nothing of myself. Lo and behold, she began to be the same. Soon it seemed we needed insulin to deal with all the fake sweetness. The sweeter she acted, the more I seethed with resentment. Finally I realized I could not keep this up. I was going to crack and when I did, it wouldn’t be pretty.

“I knew the Lord wanted me to love her. Love her!? It was all I could do not to slap her! Finally, in absolute desperation, I prayed, ‘Lord, I can’t find anything about her to love. But I know you love her. I also know I cannot do this

using my own will. Love her through me.’ Every time I started to think a scathing retort, I reminded myself to let the Lord have it in His own way.

“Meanwhile, I did a good deed anonymously for another person in the office. While I was feeling really good about doing this good deed in secret, I heard a sentence in my head. It was in my voice, but it was most certainly not my thought: ‘Now do the same thing for (my enemy).’ I literally stopped in my tracks, took a deep breath and said, ‘Go ahead, Lord.’

“Soon after, my enemy got a phone call from her mother who was berating her for forgetting to pack her son’s ‘show and tell’ object. Being in the same room, I could hear her answers and could even hear her mother’s screaming voice over the phone. When she hung up, she sobbed quietly, trying not to be noticed. I said, ‘How about we walk outside for a break?’ At first she was skeptical of me, but as I spoke to her, saying things like, ‘That sounded like a difficult conversation’ and ‘It must be really hard to have to depend on your parents for help only to get criticized so,’ she yielded to my invitation.

“As we started to go outside, another co-worker who overheard the conversation came along and also offered her support. This was the first in a series of chain reactions that seemed to ripple through the office. Tempers were calmed; people were smiling and laughing more; the tension evaporated. Did my attitude start this change? No, the Lord came into that office through me and blessed us all. Do I feel better about her now? In a way. We’re still not close friends, and I don’t know that I can ever trust her. But none of that matters. I see what the Lord can do if I will only give up my selfishness and let Him have His way. The peace that I have now in my heart truly passes my understanding . . . and it is wonderful!”

Washing feet requires a humbleness that goes against our nature. We are so in the habit of making everything about us. Washing of feet is anything but that. Yet, this very act can transform our going into the world and lives of people into such a powerful witness. The world grows tired of power that struts. It is hungry to witness power that serves. Yet, our human nature is so apt to resist this mission Jesus places before us. Leslie Weatherhead, a British minister whose church was gutted by Nazi bombs, wrote in the midst of that destruction:

“When I am hot and rebellious, bitter and cynical and sarcastic; when it seems evil can win in the world and the battle is to the strong; when it seems as though pride possesses all the high places and greatness belongs to those who can grab the most; when it seems that faith is mocked and humility is trodden in the dust; when pity seems weakness and sympathy folly, what a foul egotism rises up within me bidding me assert myself, serve my own interest and look out for number one; then, O my God, as I listen down the corridor of the years for the voice of the Almighty, may I hear the gentle splashing of water in a basin and see the Son of God washing his disciples’ feet.”

How does one get beyond the pride or the fear? What enables us to look beyond the feet of those we are called to wash when we know that they are bound to disappoint us and let us down? The key is at the beginning of John’s account of that night:

*“It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love” (John 13:1).*

Jesus knew who He was. He knew where He was going—back to the Father. He had nothing to prove. So often people are reluctant to offer help in an area because they see it as beneath them. They are afraid that in doing so, it will hurt their image. When we know our purpose in life and our identity, we are freed to serve others without fear or resentment.

Has it ever struck you that our lives are lived out of three basins? One is the basin used to wash feet. Another is the one Pilate chose to use to wash his hands. The second is the basin of indifference that lacks passion and conviction. The first is the basin of servanthood out of which we serve as He has served us.

Jesus calls us to go out into the world and wash feet in service to others as He has done with us. Just as the disciples let Him down, so we are bound to disappoint Him as well. Many times over we will choose to live out of the basin Pilate chose rather than the one Jesus used. That is where the third basin comes in—the basin that holds the water of our Baptism. It is here in this basin that we not only can know who we are and to whom we are returning—it is in this basin that we are cleansed again and again for all those times when our feet are the ones that turn and walk away from Him. It is in this basin that we are cleansed and renewed in His baptismal grace. It is in this basin that the gentle splashing of water can still be heard in our hearts as Jesus cleanses more than just our feet.

**Prayer:** Your servanthood humbles me. Who are we that you are this mindful and humble before us? Thank you for cleansing me through your servanthood. Help me to follow your example this day. **Amen.**

**Challenge:** Who is that person in your life for whom it is difficult to “wash feet?” In the course of the next couple of days, how could you offer a humble act of service to them?

**Scripture Reading:** John 13

**From the Book of Concord:** “This should serve God’s purpose to break our pride and keep us humble. He has reserved to himself this prerogative: those who boast of their goodness and despise others should examine themselves and put this petition uppermost in their mind. They will find that they are no more righteous than anyone else, that in the presence of God all people must fall on their knees and be glad that we can come to forgiveness. Let none think that they will ever in this life reach the point where they do not need this forgiveness. In short, unless God constantly forgives, we are lost

“Thus this petition really means that God does not wish to regard our sins and punish us as we daily deserve but to deal graciously with us, to forgive as he has promised, and thus to grant us a joyful and cheerful conscience so that we may stand before him in prayer. For where the heart is not right with God and cannot generate such confidence, it will never dare to pray. But such a confident and joyful heart can never come except when one knows that his or her sins are forgiven” (The Large Catechism, The Fifth Petition of The Lord’s Prayer, pp. 452-453.90-92).

# 42

## Go into the World

*“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.” (Acts 1:8)*

I grew up in a small church in Massachusetts. On a few occasions we would have a guest missionary come in with his or her slides. I was fascinated to see a part of the world that seemed light-years away. Their stories not only gave witness to a world far away, but in those stories I had the strong sense that these men and women had been with Jesus. Those evenings captured in my heart a desire to one day be a missionary myself. I dreamed of the day that I would travel to far away places and carry the Word of God to people of a different culture and language. I still have that desire—to take the Word of God to those who are lost. But, since that time, the world has changed a lot.

Through the progress of technology, transportation and communications, the world has become much smaller. A couple of years ago, I traveled to Tanzania to teach Christian leaders in the city of Moshi. I had never been that far from home. The fourteen-hour flight was the longest I have ever taken. Home seemed very far away. Yet, I realized in another sense just how much smaller this world has become. My dad served in World War II. He served in North Africa, Italy and France. During that time, he and my mom would write letters to each other. It could take up to one month for some of those letters to arrive at their destination. As I sat in the Internet café of Moshi, sending my emails, I thought to myself, “What must it have been like to live without a sense of immediate access?” It gave me new admiration and respect for my parents’ generation. It also

gave me a new perspective for what it means to be a missionary in today’s world. Immediate access not only makes many things convenient; it opens doors for getting the Word out about Jesus.

When one looks at this world that is getting smaller, a study of its population reveals a snapshot that looks like this:

If the world were a village of 1,000 people, by continents there would be:

- 564 Asians
- 210 Europeans
- 86 Africans
- 80 South Americans
- 60 North Americans

By religions, there would be:

- 329 Christians
- 174 Muslims
- 131 Hindus
- 61 Buddhists
- 52 animists
- 3 Jews
- 34 believers in other sects and religions
- 216 people with no identifiable religious belief

In this village of 1,000:

- 60 people would have half the total income
- 500 people would be hungry
- 600 people would live in shantytowns
- 700 people would be illiterate

What makes this even more interesting is that one does not have to travel the world to see this picture. It is right here in America. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (1995), Caucasian domination of America will diminish substantially in the years to come, falling from 76 percent of the population in 1990 to just 52 percent by the year 2050. By contrast, the Hispanic population will rise from nine percent to 22 percent, and the Asian population, almost nonexistent a generation ago, will comprise 10 percent of the nation (Hower, pp. 59-60).

The dream I had as a young boy of carrying the Word to people of different cultures and languages is much more within reach right here in America. However, as the world we live in gets smaller, the thinking and vision of the Church needs to expand beyond the walls of the local congregation.

I love the imagery of the church as a ship. The sanctuary at St. Luke, as in many churches, is adorned with a beautiful wooden, tongue and groove ceiling. When you look up, it is like looking at a hull of a boat upside down. It reminds me each time I look at it that we are to be a ship—not a cruise ship, but a rescue ship. On a cruise ship, the goal is the comfort and the pleasure of those who are passengers—all the food you want to eat, games, entertainment and more than one can possibly imagine. The church is not a ship that is built for the comfort of the passengers. Imagine if you will, a cruise ship sailing along with its passengers dancing the night away with fine wine and tables overflowing with food. Meanwhile, in the waters below many people are screaming for help as they flail and drown. I ask myself what kind of ship is our church? What kind of ship do you want to sail on in the name of Christ? Jesus has charted the course for our journey:

*“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” (Acts 1:8).*

This verse serves as an outline for the Book of Acts. The mission begins in Jerusalem. It then spreads to the surrounding area of Judea. Then it expands to Samaria and finally by the last chapter, Paul ends up in Rome, which for him was the remotest part of the earth. God has a global vision for the early Church. Their thinking went way beyond their walls. Can it be any different for us?

*“For God so loved the World, that He gave His one and only Son. . . “ (John 3:16).*

He loved the world, and in Acts 1:8, He asks us to do the same.

Acts 1:8 is not only a great outline for the Book of Acts, it is great strategy for the local church. God is calling us to be His witnesses. Let it begin in our Jerusalem (the town in which we live). Let it then expand to the county surrounding us (our Judea). From there, let us not be hesitant to enter into our Samaria. When Jesus asked the early church to go into Samaria, He was asking them to go into a different culture and to people they found difficult to like or trust. Where is your Samaria? Finally, to the ends of the earth. That may mean going as far as your neighbor who just moved in from China. It could also mean volunteering on a mission trip or sending someone to another country. What are some of the ways that you can think of to fulfill this command of Jesus in going to the ends of the earth?

Years ago, the slide shows I saw as a young boy told me of the wide gap between those in foreign lands and my small church in Massachusetts. That gap has closed a lot because of travel and communication advancements. In another way, however, the gap is widening between the Church and the culture of the world.

Compare the world with the Christ we preach. The gap is huge between His call to selflessness and the world's self-obsession. Jesus declares that He is the truth and the way and the life. This does not match well with a world that rejects any absolute truth. More and more people no longer see Christians

or the faith they profess as an influence in society. Six out of ten Americans believe the church is irrelevant. Here in America there are 170 million non-Christians (making us the third largest mission field in the world) who view what the church offers as useless (Lewis, R., p. 23).

How are we to close that gap? First, recognize that this view of the world is not much different from the world into which Jesus said to the disciples “. . . *you will be my witnesses. . . .*” There is no need to become pessimistic or anxious. The world is ripe unto the harvest. It is a wonderful time to be in the Church and in the world as His witnesses. He has created and called us for a time such as this.

Secondly, one of the best ways to close a gap is to build a bridge. Saxonburg, Pennsylvania was the home of John Roebling, a famous bridge designer and the inventor of wire rope. His wire rope design was used in the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge in the 1860's. A bridge is a good visual for the church of the twenty-first century. Years ago, back in that small church where I grew up, it was enough to build a bridge between the church and culture on truth alone. “God says” was usually enough to get people to listen with respect and openness. Today, the bridge we seek to build, both in our churches and in our personal lives with the world around us, needs to be designed differently. As I contemplate how to fulfill God's mission in Acts 1:8, I have found the following words helpful:

“We need bridges that balance public proclamation with congregational incarnation. Bridges that are suspended by the steel cables of the Great Commandment as well as the Great Commission. In the twenty-first century, the church must understand, as never before, that faith—without works—is dead. So will be our influence. As a result, the chasm between the church and the world only grows wider and more disingenuous. Says George Barna,

‘Americans are not going to patronize an institution which appears incapable of living what it preaches’” (Lewis, R., p.40).

Jesus has given to us the mission of being His witnesses. We are not called to be promoters of a program or even of a church, but first and foremost, a witness to Him. Read the book of Acts and you will see that they do just that. They talk about Him and the difference He has made in their lives. The world is both listening and watching. The world is hungry for things spiritual. In “The Present Future,” Reggie McNeal writes:

“People may be turned off to the church, but they are not turned off to Jesus. Jesus is popular. He still makes the cover of *Time* and *Newsweek* every year (generally around Easter). As I write these lines he's just come out on the cover of a prominent scientific journal. Church people sometimes get excited by this but fail to understand that people in the nonchurch culture don't associate Jesus with the church. In their mind, the church is a club for religious people where club members can celebrate their traditions and hang out with others who share common thinking and lifestyles. They do not automatically think of the church as championing the cause of poor people or healing the sick or serving people. These are things they associate with Jesus” (p. 12).

Our call is to stand firm in the truth of His Word while at the same time presenting our lives as living proof of a heart devoted to loving Him first and our neighbor as our own self.

The third way in which that gap will be closed is by relying on His power, not our own. “*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. . . .*” (Acts 1:8). Jesus did not expect them to do this on their own. Nor does He expect that with us. I find it amazing that when Jesus left, the disciples did just what He said. They waited. They waited for ten days until the Spirit came upon

them. After all, they had been with Him for three years. They knew what the message was that they would speak. Yet, they waited. They depended on His power, not their own. We need to do the same, for it is only in His Spirit that any of us will have the boldness that is needed.

*“After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly” (Acts 4: 31).*

When I consider those believers of the early Christian Church, I see ordinary folks. What made them different was not their education or their background. What made them different was this one truth:

*“When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13).*

“These men had been with Jesus.”

That simple phrase is what I want others to say about my life and me. “He’s been with Jesus.” I want my witness of Jesus to be marked with words and actions that will be a bridge by which the world I live in gets a little smaller and a little closer.

**Prayer:** Father as you have loved the world, so let your love fill my heart. May my life and the ministry of my church be motivated out of love for those your Son died for on the Cross. Help us to build those bridges that will enable the lost to be connected with you. **Amen.**

**Challenge:** How can your church take on a more global emphasis? Where would you say is your Jerusalem? Judea? Samaria? Outer most parts of the Earth? What can your church do to build bridges in these places?

**Scripture Reading:** Acts 1-2

**From the Book of Concord:** “All people, whatever their calling, should seek perfection, that is, growth in the fear of God, in faith, in the love for their neighbor, and in similar spiritual virtues” (Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XXVII: Monastic Vows, p. 283:37).

**In Your Own Words:** Write below or in the margins the key thought or lesson you have learned in this chapter on Go and/or a thought you would like to explore further.