

Who Will Answer the Call?

St. Mark Lutheran Church
Second Sunday after Pentecost

Pastor Ken Welsh
June 14, 2020

Grace and peace to you this day from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our message for this day is based on two main Gospel readings. One is in Matthew 9, which we just read. Let me repeat just a small part of that due to its importance. “When he (Jesus) saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.’”

Our message is also based on closely related passages from John 4:35-36, where Jesus says this: “Do you not say, ‘There are four months and then comes the harvest?’ Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see the fields are white for harvest. Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.”

Jesus himself went throughout many cities and villages teaching and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom. There is much support in the Holy Scriptures that this should be a model for us also. Mark 6 tells us that Jesus called the twelve together and sent them out two by two to other towns and villages. Luke 10 tells us that on another occasion he appointed seventy-two others to go out two by two to the surrounding towns ahead of him.

If we were to do this in our community and those communities adjacent to us, where might we go? Are there any places around us that are “white for harvest?” A good place to start would be the very township in which our church is built, Chester Twp., where a 2020 estimate puts the population at about 10,300. If we went north to the City of Kirtland, we would find a population of about 6,800. Traveling east of us would bring us to Munson Twp. and about 6,600 people, and heading west we would find Gates Mills and with 2,200 people. Russell Twp. to our south includes about 5,200 persons. That’s a total of slightly over 31,100 people! I don’t know, but I would be very surprised if 50% or more of them were active in a church home, and the percentage may be much less. These places are only 10-12 minutes from our church! Plus, we are not limited to these adjacent areas. St. Mark has many members and visitors coming from places further away than that. The fields are white to harvest.

What exactly did our Lord mean when he said that the fields are white for harvest? The fields to harvest are people who need the Lord. There are many who are lost, who do not know the Lord.

This month, as we open our doors again at St. Mark, I know of no better way to joyfully mark this occasion than by stressing again that we should seek to find those who do not know the Lord and share with them the good news about the risen Christ.

In today's society, at least in our country, there is nothing wrong with preaching on a street corner or going door to door, but probably not many people are brought to the Lord that way. But we need only lift up our eyes and look. If we are going to school, there are people we get to know there. If we work out, we usually get to know other people at the gym or club. If we are on a sports team, or golf or bowl, we get to know other people there. How about our home and where we live? We can stop by when people have moved into our neighborhood and welcome them into the community, maybe even take a platter of cookies or some small gift. Then we can follow them up later and invite them to our church some Sunday. Where we work is an excellent place to get to know people and find out whether they have a church home.

During my lifetime, the Billy Graham Association has held two crusades here in Cleveland. I was available as a counselor to follow up people who came forward in response to the message at those crusades. During one of our training meetings on follow up, our instructor shared with us something that had happened as a result of the first crusade. A certain man had a friend at work who did not know the Lord. Each day of the week he invited his friend to go with him down to the Cleveland Stadium in the evening. The friend declined each time. Finally, on the last night of the Crusade, the man really put the pressure on and practically begged his friend to come, and his friend said that he would. Billy Graham gave his usual good message that night. Driving home, the man wondered what his buddy thought about it, so he asked him. His fellow worker replied something to the effect that it was interesting, but he really did not believe most of it. That, of course, was a major disappointment.

But it was not the end of the story. His fellow worker eventually became a Christian. When he was asked later on what led him to Christ, he said it all started with something he had heard at a Billy Graham Crusade. Sometimes, one person sows the seed and the Lord sends someone else to water the plant. It is really the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God that brings people to faith. God only asks us to share the good news.

This is something we should keep in mind when we witness to others. You don't have to attend a class to be a witness for Christ, but attending a class or doing some preparation can certainly help, along with giving you more confidence. I have been blessed to attend some classes. I still remember my first class and a line from it that has stuck with me through the rest of my life (quote): "Successful witnessing is sharing Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and leaving the results to God."

So, what shall we share? Our Gospel reading for today tells us that Jesus shared the gospel of the kingdom. Gospel means "good news, the good news about Jesus." We might have more people paying attention to our message these days with this coronavirus going around and all that is going on.

So, what is the good news of the kingdom? Well, people will best understand what the good news is if we can share some teachings from the Holy Scriptures with them. Here are some key points you might share:

POINT NUMBER ONE is that every human being on earth has a serious problem. We are sinners, and we are responsible to God for our sins. Romans 3:23 says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” This is a serious flaw because God has said, “Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. (Lev. 11:44)” But a look at God’s Law, as summed up in the Ten Commandments, shows us that we are a long way from being holy and that we have broken God’s Law many, many times. POINT NUMBER TWO is that despite the fact that we are sinners, God still cares for us, and he has provided a way by which we can be certain that we have been forgiven of our sins. John 3:16 tells us, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” POINT NUMBER THREE is that we cannot save ourselves by our good deeds and works. That is what makes Christianity different from every other religion in the world. It is God who worked out an acceptable plan to save people. He is a holy God and his justice demanded a holy sacrifice for our sins. Thus, his Son Jesus came into the world as was prophesied, lived a perfect life, and in dying on the cross made a perfect sacrifice for our sins which was acceptable to a holy God. POINT NUMBER FOUR is very important. Three days later, Jesus rose from the dead to show that he even had power over death.

This good news is written time and time again in many ways throughout both the New and even the Old Testament.

We can share this good news. We have been called to share this good news. It is the commission that has been given to the Christian church by Jesus Christ himself. There are many different ways we can do it. We can put together a little presentation ourselves, or we can underline and mark a presentation from our Bible. We can invite someone to church or a Bible study or pick up a child for Sunday school or church. We can give someone a Bible, a good Christian book, a catechism or even a pamphlet. We can give a personal testimony about how Jesus has changed our life, and then ask the other person what they believe about Jesus. Trust in the Holy Spirit to help you take it from there.

Jesus is quoted in Luke 15:10 as saying, “I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” Today, we are all reminded that our calling is to find some way to share the message. How about you? Who will answer the call? Amen.

