

Holy Trinity Sunday, June 7, 2020
 “Go!” (Matthew 28:16-20)

The word “go” is an action word, an energy word, a motivating word. Think of this word in terms of a football game. A player has received a pass and is headed toward the end zone, but defenders are quickly closing in. The crowd is on their feet, shouting *go, go, go*, encouraging the receiver to move as fast as his legs will carry him. Or you are sitting at a traffic light waiting to turn left and the guy in front of you has sat through the third light change. You begin yelling *Go! Just go already!* You want him to get moving so you can be on your way.

Yes the word “go” is an action word, an energy word, a motivating word. It is with this mood that we approach the gospel for today.

Jesus was preparing to say his final goodbyes to his disciples before he ascended into heaven. And when it came time for his parting remarks – his farewell address – what did he say? He said *GO... go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

Even though he had spent three years with them, even though he had taught them over and over again, he wanted to tell them one more time what they needed to do: *Go...go and make disciples...* The word “go” is an action word, a motivating word, and Jesus wanted his disciples – then and now – to move into action and bring others to him.

Now we said last week that even though Jesus instructs his followers to be his witnesses and to make disciples, it is actually the HS who does the disciple-making. The HS works through human beings as we plant the seeds of Christ in people’s lives.

Some of you have planted gardens, and you understand what your role as gardener is. You can plant, water, and harvest, but you cannot make anything grow. It is God who gives the growth. Likewise, it is God who makes disciples, not us. Yet, our planting and watering does influence the harvest. That’s why Christ calls us to partner with him in his mission to bring the world to himself, to plant the seeds that the Holy Spirit will sprout and grow.

Today, as we complete our series on evangelism, I want us to focus on three questions: who...where...and why.

Who? is the first question. Who is to make disciples? Contrary to what many people think, it’s not just pastors, missionaries, evangelists, and the super-religious in the church who are called to practice evangelism. Jesus called common and ordinary men to this task, and he still does the same today. Common and ordinary people like you and me are called to be God’s mouthpieces and tell others about Jesus Christ. And God will work through us.

In fact, lay people are much more effective at making disciples than pastors or paid professionals. Consider these statistics. When first-time visitors to a church get called on by a lay person within 36 hours, 86% will return to worship the next Sunday. But if the pastor calls on them, only 43% will return the next week. Studies show that lay people are twice as effective as

pastors. Why? Because the pastor is paid to do it – and the visitor knows it. Visitors are more impressed with a call from a lay person because a lay person’s call is more authentic.

God always uses common and ordinary Christians to do his work in the world. If this weren’t God’s intention, then Jesus would have chosen 12 rabbis rather than fishermen and tax collectors to be his disciples. Who is to go? YOU, common and ordinary Christians. And when you do, the church begins to sparkle with new life.

The next question is where? Where are we to go? Jesus didn’t say go to the church, or to your Sunday School class, or to your men’s or women’s group. He said go out into the world and make disciples. Again, we don’t have to beat people over the head with the gospel. But out there in the world, at work, at play, in our neighborhoods, we have opportunities each and every day to speak a word for Christ.

People won’t come up to you and ask, *What must I do to get right with God?* That just won’t happen. But you will hear things like

You always seem to be so happy. Why?

I don’t know how you manage to cope through all the heartache you’ve had to face.

Why are you always so positive and confident?

And right there is the open window for you to speak. It doesn’t have to be a dramatic life story, but you can share a genuine slice of your own life. You could say something like:

I’m happy because I trust that Jesus is my Lord.

I’m able to cope with life’s difficulties because I don’t have to face them alone.

I know that Christ is with me.

That’s how simple it can be. We respect their space, leaving the door open, giving them an invitation to ask for more. And then we let God begin to root around in their hearts and minds.

We can also share the message of Christ with saws and hammers as we build a ramp or repair a home for someone in need, with casseroles and other dishes as we comfort someone who is sick or bereaved, or with a hug or shoulder to lean on as we support someone going through a hard time. Such things can often speak louder than any words and can demonstrate very concretely to others the love and grace of God.

Where do we witness? In the world, in our friendships and acquaintances, among the people we know and like. Evangelism begins in the relationships we’ve developed.

The last question is *why?* Why should we practice evangelism? Well, first of all, we do it because Christ commands it. But on a deeper level, we do it because we want others to have what we have. We know that God is good, that the Christian life is good, that Christian values are good. And knowing Christ is good for a person’s life and health. People who come into the Christian faith and let God grow that faith have better marriages, better kids, better self-images. Walking with Christ and being a part of a Christian community helps us to know Christ more intimately, and ultimately makes life more fulfilling.

That's what God desires for every person in the world, and it should be what we desire for our friends and neighbors.

Let me also say again this week that evangelism is not recruiting members. How many times have you heard someone say, *We need to get some more members in here to help us pay the bills.* Evangelism is not a tool to help us meet our budget. We're more than capable of doing that on our own. When every member of a church – Reformation included – makes a commitment to be in worship on a regular basis, finances will never be a problem. Members will bring their offerings with them. Evangelism is about making disciples, about planting the seeds that the Holy Spirit will grow to bring people to new life in Christ Jesus, whose love is the most powerful and personal force in the world.

There is a legend that recounts the return of Jesus to glory after his time on earth. Still bearing the marks of his suffering on the cross, the angel Gabriel approaches him and asks, *Master, do the people on earth know all about how you loved them and what you did for them?*

No, Jesus replied, *not yet. Right now only a handful of people in Palestine know.*

Gabriel was perplexed. *Then what have you done to let everyone know about your love for them?*

Jesus said, *I've asked Peter, James, John and a few others to tell people about me. Those who are told will then tell others and my story will be spread throughout the earth. Ultimately, all humankind will know about my love.*

Gabriel frowned and looked rather skeptical. He knew well what poor stuff men were made of. He said, *But what if Peter denies you again? What if James and John grow weary? What if the people who come after them forget? What if people way down in the 21st century just don't tell others about you? Do you have another plan?*

Jesus answered, *No, I'm counting on them.*

And he is counting on us, as well. Go is an action word, a motivating word, a get-up-and-move word. Jesus wants us to move into action and tell to all the world the old, old story – the story of Jesus and his love.