

WOULD YOU SAY NO TO GOD?

THIS MORNING I'M GOING TO USE A WORD THAT SOME PEOPLE SAY SHOULDN'T BE USED FROM THE PULPIT BECAUSE IT WILL RUN OFF ANY VISITORS WE HAVE. I'M GOING OUT ON A LIMB THIS MORNING AND USE THIS WORD, SO I HOPE IT DOESN'T OFFEND YOUR FEELINGS TOO MUCH. I'M TALKING ABOUT THE "E" WORD.

EVANGELISM.

I HOPE THAT YOU'LL FORGIVE ME IF THAT OFFENDED YOU BUT I THINK THAT THE SCRIPTURE THAT WAS READ IS ALL ABOUT THE "E" WORD.

LET'S LOOK AT MATTHEW 18: 16-20;

NOW THE ELEVEN DISCIPLES WENT TO GALILEE, TO THE MOUNTAIN TO WHICH JESUS HAD DIRECTED THEM.

WHEN THEY SAW HIM, THEY WORSHIPED HIM; BUT SOME DOUBTED.

AND JESUS CAME AND SAID TO THEM, " ALL AUTHORITY IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH HAS BEEN GIVEN TO ME.

GO THEREFORE 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 THAT I HAVE COMMANDED YOU. AND REMEMBER, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, TO THE END OF AGE."

DON'T YOU AGREE THAT THIS PASSAGE IS ABOUT THE "E" WORD? THEN THERE'S THAT KEY LITTLE WORD: "GO" AND THEN ALL OF THOSE OTHER WORDS LIKE, MAKE, BAPTIZE, TEACH AND OBEY THAT FOLLOW AND SORT OF MAKE IT LIKE MILITARY MARCHING ORDERS.

"GO" IS SUCH A SIMPLE WORD WITH A SIMPLE MEANING. "DON'T JUST STAND THERE, DO SOMETHING." WE USE IT TO START RACES, " ON YOUR MARK, GET SET, "GO". THERE'S NOT A RACER ANYWHERE WHO UPON HEARING THOSE WORDS AND THE STARTERS PISTOL SAYS: "WHO, ME?"

THIS MORNING I WANT TO DEAL WITH THE WHO, WHERE, HOW AND WHY OF THE "E" WORD. THE WHO, WHERE, HOW AND WHY OF THE COMMAND TO GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES.

THE FIRST IS "WHO". UNFORTUNATELY, MOST OF US ACT LIKE THE OUT-OF SHAPE, OVERWEIGHT MAN WHO DECIDES TO TAKE UP TENNIS. HE TOOK LESSONS FROM A PRO. HE READ SEVERAL SELF-HELP BOOKS WHICH ADVISED HIM TO "THINK POSITIVELY" AND "DEVELOP A WINNING ATTITUDE".

A FRIEND ASKED HIM HOW HIS TENNIS WAS GOING. WITH A POSITIVE, WINNING ATTITUDE IN HIS VOICE, THE MAN REPLIED, " WHEN MY OPPONENT HIT'S THE BALL TO ME, MY BRAIN IMMEDIATELY BARKS OUT A COMMAND TO MY BODY: RACE UP TO

THE NET. THEN, IT SAYS, SLAM A BLISTERING SHOT TO A FAR CORNER OF THE COURT. THEN IMMEDIATELY JUMP BACK INTO POSITION AND RETURN THE NEXT VOLLEY TO THE OTHER FAR CORNER OF THE COURT. AND THEN MY BODY SAYS, "WHO, ME?"

I'D BE WILLING TO BET, IF WE COULD GO BACK IN TIME, THAT THE FIRST WORDS OUT OF ALL THE DISCIPLES AFTER JESUS SPOKE THESE WORDS WERE THE SAME: "WHO, ME?" YOU HAVE TO REMEMBER THAT THE EVENTS OF THIS PASSAGE ACTUALLY TOOK PLACE BEFORE PENTECOST AND THE OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. BUT THE QUESTION IS STILL PERTINENT. "WHO, ME?"

AND THE ANSWER, OF COURSE, IS, "YES, YOU." PAUL IN 2 CORINTHIANS 5:20 SAYS: "WE ARE AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST, SINCE GOD IS MAKING HIS APPEAL THROUGH US."

YOU BECAUSE YOU ARE MUCH BETTER AT IT THAN PASTOR BOB OR MYSELF. YOU SEE, IT'S BECAUSE IT'S PART OF OUR JOB DESCRIPTION. MOST PEOPLE EXPECT PASTOR BOB, MYSELF AND EVERY OTHER PASTOR IN THE WORLD TO WITNESS AND DO THE "E" WORD THINGY. BUT YOUR SORT OF LIKE SECRET AGENTS. MOST FOLKS DON'T EXPECT YOU TO TALK ABOUT YOUR FAITH OR BE INVOLVED IN THIS WHOLE EVANGELISM DEAL. BUT YOU KNOW, YOUR EXACTLY WHO JESUS WOULD HAVE CHOSEN. JESUS CALLED FISHERMAN, TAX COLLECTORS, AND THE EVERY DAY ORDINARY KINDS OF PEOPLE. HE DIDN'T HAVE A SINGLE PHARISEE, SADDUCCEE, PRIEST OR LEVITE ON HIS STAFF. IT WAS ALL RUN BY LAITY. AND AFTER PENTECOST THEIR MINISTRY EXPLODED.

BISHOP WILLIAM WILLIMON SAID: " IN BAPTISM WE ARE INITIATED, CROWNED, CHOSEN, EMBRACED, WASHED, ADOPTED, GIFTED, REBORN, KILLED, AND THEREBY SENT FORTH AND REDEEMED. WE ARE IDENTIFIED AS ONE OF GOD'S OWN, THEN ASSIGNED OUR PLACE AND OUR JOB WITHIN THE KINGDOM OF GOD."

SO YOU SEE, IT IS ALL ABOUT YOU TELLING ALL ABOUT HIM!

THAT LEADS US TO THE NEXT QUESTION OF, "WHERE". REMEMBER THAT OPERATIVE WORD IN THE PASSAGE IS: " GO". IF WE DON'T "GO" SOMEWHERE WE'LL BOLDLY GO.....NO WHERE.

DID YOU KNOW THAT ALL THE RESEARCH ABOUT PEOPLE WHO JOIN THE CHURCH SAY THAT 75-80 % OF THEM WERE BROUGHT INTO THE CHURCH BY THEIR FRIENDS AND PERSONAL ACQUAINTANCES. ONLY 9% WERE BROUGHT BY PASTORS AND ONLY 2% BY SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHERS.

I DON'T WANT TO MAKE LIGHT OF THE SEMINARY DEGREES THAT PASTOR BOB HAS EARNED OR THE CLASSES THAT I HAVE TAKEN. BUT THE POWER OF THE LAITY, THE POWER OF FRIENDS AND FRIENDSHIP IS MUCH MORE VALUABLE THAN ALL THE

DEGREES AND CLASSES THAT WE COULD HAVE TAKEN.

THEN THERE IS THE “HOW”? HAVE YOU SEEN THE STAPLES OFFICE SUPPLY COMMERCIALS WITH THE EASY BUTTON? DON’T YOU WISH WE HAD ONE OF THOSE WHEN IT CAME TO EVANGELISM? KNOCK ON SOMEONE’S DOOR AND PUSH THE EASY BUTTON.

IN A SENSE, WE DO. BECAUSE THE “HOW” IS REALLY PRETTY SIMPLE. THE FIRST THING WE DO IS TRUST THE SPIRIT OF THE RISEN CHRIST. AND TRUST THE HOLY SPIRIT. AND TRUST THE MIRACLE OF GOD WHO WORKS IN OUR LIVES IN SUCH A WAY THAT OUR LIVES ARE TRANSFORMED INTO AN INVITATION TO A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD THROUGH CHRIST.

YOU SEE, WE CANN’T FORCE OR MAKE ANYONE TO BE A DISCIPLE OF JESUS. BUT WE CAN PRAY FOR THEM. AND IN THAT PRAYER WE CAN ASK GOD TO ENTER THEIR LIVES IN SUCH A WAY THAT JESUS BECOMES REAL AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD GROWS DEEP. AND THEN ASK GOD FOR THE RIGHT WORDS AND THE POWER OF GOD’S SPIRIT TO SPEAK TO THEM WHEN THE OPPORTUNITY ARISES.

WE CAN ENGAGE IN CONVERSATION ABOUT THEIR FAITH AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD IN A NON-CONDEMMING MANNER. WE CAN ENCOURAGE. WE CAN INVITE. WE CAN OFFER COUNSEL. BUT LEAVE THE HARD WORK, THE HEART WORK, UP TO JESUS AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. YOU SEE, WE ARE NOT ON SOME SORT OF SPIRITUAL MUGGING MISSION.

REBECCA PIPPERT, THE AUTHOR OF OUT OF THE SALT SHAKER: INTO THE WORLD, TELLS OF A TIME SHE WAS SITTING IN HER CAR AT A TRAFFIC LIGHT WITH HER WINDOW ROLLED DOWN. AS THE LIGHT TURNED GREEN A CAR DROVE BY AND ITS OCCUPANT THREW SOMETHING INTO HER CAR HITTING HER ON THE CHEEK. IT DIDN’T HURT HER BUT SHE WAS SO STARTLED THAT SHE IMMEDIATELY PULLED HER CAR TO THE SIDE OF THE ROAD. WHEN SHE UNROLLED THE PIECE OF PAPER, SHE DISCOVERED IT WAS A GOSPEL SCRIPTURE. SHE SAYS SHE WAS THE APPARENT VICTUM OF WHAT SHE REFERS TO AS “TORPEDO EVANGELISM”.

I’M SURE THE ATTACKER MEANT WELL. AT LEAST I HOPE SO, BUT THEY DID THE WRONG THING FOR THE RIGHT REASON IN THE WRONG WAY.

THE “HOW” IS SIMPLE. PRAY. LISTEN. LOVE. LIVE YOUR FAITH. AND BE READY TO “GO” WHEN THE START SIGNAL COMES. BE READY TO TELL OTHERS IN YOUR WORLD OF INFLUENCE. “WHY” IT’S IMPORTANT TO YOU.

AND NOW THAT BRINGS US TO THE FINAL QUESTION OF “WHY”? AND THE OBVIOUS ANSWER TO THE “WHY” QUESTION IS SIMPLE: “BECAUSE JESUS SAID SO.”

BUT I DON’T FIND THAT VERY COMPELLING. PROBABLY EVEN LESS COMPELLING THAN WHEN WE TELL OUR KIDS “BECAUSE I SAID SO.” OH, THERE’S THAT WHOLE

OBEDIENCE THING AND WE CAN'T OVERLOOK THAT. BUT REALLY THE MOST COMPELLING REASON IS BECAUSE OF WHAT JESUS HAS DONE IN OUR LIVES. WE WANT OTHERS TO KNOW AND EXPERIENCE THE LOVE OF GOD WHICH WE'VE EXPERIENCED. WE WANT OTHERS TO EXPERIENCE THE SAME FORGIVENESS AND NEW LIFE WE'VE EXPERIENCED THROUGH CHRIST'S DEATH AND RESSURECTION, THAT WE HAVE.

AND HERE IS ANOTHER REASON "WHY" TAKEN FROM EXERPTS FROM DR. S.M. LOCKRIDGE'S SERMON.

THE BIBLE SAYS MY KING IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. HE'S THE KING OF ISRAEL. HE IS THE KING OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. HE'S THE THE KING OF THE AGES. HE'S THE KING OF HEAVEN. HE'S THE KING OF GLORY. HE'S THE KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORD'S. NOW THAT'S MY KING. WELL, I WONDER DO YOU KNOW HIM.

HE'S THE GREATEST FIGURE THAT HAS EVER CROSSED THE HORIZON OF THIS WORLD. HE'S GOD'S SON. HE'S THE SINNER'S SAVIOR. HE'S THE CENTERPIECE OF CIVILIZATION. HE'S UNPARALLELED. HE'S UNPRECEDENTED. HE'S THE LOFIEST IDEA IN LITERATURE. HE'S THE HIGHEST PERSONALITY IN PHILOSOPHY. HE'S THE FUNDAMENTAL DOCTRINE OF TRUE THEOLOGY. HE'S THE ONLY ONE QUALIFIED TO BE AN ALL SUFFICIENT SAVIOR. I WONDER IF YOU KNOW HIM TODAY.

MY KING IS A SOVEREIGN KING. NO MEANS OF MEASURE CAN DEFINE HIS LIMITLESS LOVE. HE'S ENDURINGLY STRONG. HE'S ENTIRELY SINCERE. HE'S ETERNALLY STEADFAST. HE'S IMORTALLY GRACEFUL. HE'S IMPERIALLY POWERFUL. HE'S IMPARTIALLY MERCIFUL. DO YOU KNOW HIM?

HE SUPPLIES STRENGTH FOR THE WEAK. HE'S AVAILABLE FOR THE TEMPTED AND THE TRIED. HE SYMPATHIZES AND HE SAVES. HE STRENGTHENS AND SUSTAINS. HE GUARDS AND GUIDES. HE HEALS THE SICK. HE CLEANSED THE LEPERS. HE FORGIVES SINNERS. HE DISCHARGES DEBTORS. HE DELIVERS THE CAPTIVES. HE DEFENDS THE FEEBLE. HE BLESSES THE YOUNG. HE SERVES THE UNFORTUNATE. HE REGARDS THE AGED. HE REWARDS THE DILIGENT. HE BEAUTIFIES THE MEAGER. I WONDER IF YOU KNOW HIM?

HE'S THE KEY TO KNOWLEDGE. HE'S THE WELLSPRING OF WISDOM. HE'S THE DOORWAY OF DELIVERANCE. HE'S PATHWAY OF PEACE. HE'S THE ROADWAY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. HE'S THE HIGHWAY OF HOLINESS. HE'S THE GATEWAY OF GLORY. DO YOU KNOW HIM?

WELL, HIS LIFE IS MATCHLESS. HIS GOODNESS IS LIMITLESS. HIS MERCY IS EVERLASTING. HIS LOVE NEVER CHANGES. HIS WORD IS ENOUGH. HIS GRACE IS SUFFICIENT. HIS REIGN IS RIGHTEOUS. HIS YOKE IS EASY AND HIS BURDEN IS LIGHT. I WISH I COULD DESCRIBE HIM TO YOU.

HE'S INDESCRIBABLE. HE'S INCOMPREHENSIBLE. HE'S INVINCIBLE. HE'S IRRESISTIBLE. YOU CAN'T GET HIM OUT OF YOUR MIND. YOU CAN'T GET HIM OFF YOUR HAND. YOU CAN'T OUTLIVE HIM AND YOU CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT HIM. WELL, PHARISEES COULDN'T STAND HIM, BUT THEY FOUND OUT THEY COULDN'T STOP HIM. PILOT COULDN'T FIND ANY FAULT IN HIM. HEROD COULDN'T KILL HIM. DEATH COULDN'T HANDLE HIM AND THE GRAVE COULDN'T HOLD HIM. YEAH, THAT'S MY KING.

I WISH THAT I WOULD HAVE WRITTEN THIS BECAUSE IT SURE SOUNDS LIKE MY KING.

IN CONCLUSION, MOST OF US DON'T LIKE THE WORD EVANGELISM, BUT THAT IS OUR PRIMARY MISSION. THAT'S WHAT JESUS MEANT WHEN HE SAID: GO THEREFORE 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 THAT I HAVE COMMANDED YOU. AND REMEMBER, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, TO THE END OF AGE.

WE HAVE TO "GO". THAT'S PART OF BEING A DISCIPLE. BUT WE'RE CALLED TO REMEMBER THAT WE DON'T GO ALONE. GOD IS WITH US. CHRIST IS WITH US. THROUGH THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AND WE NEED TO REMEMBER THAT WE DON'T HAVE A COMMUNICABLE DISEASE, WE HAVE A COMMUNICABLE CURE FOR SIN, LONELINESS, LOW SELF-ESTEEM, LACK OF PURPOSE, LACK OF DIRECTION AND GUILT. AND WHAT WE WANT TO DO IS INFECT EVERYONE THAT WE MEET. NOW THAT YOU KNOW THIS WOULD YOU SAY NO TO GOD OR HIS SON JESUS?