

## “Be a Missionary? Who, Me?!”

Date: February 27, 2011

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: Luke 4:14-21

Theme: Missions; Do what you can

Occasion: Missions Emphasis

Early in the Gospel of Luke, we read where Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. Full of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the desert, where he is tempted by the devil for 40 days. Victorious over the Enemy, Jesus returns to Galilee, *in the power of the Spirit*, to begin his ministry.

In the reading of the scroll in Nazareth, Jesus gives us his mission statement. He tells us what his ministry is going to be about. Those of us who want to be followers of Jesus would do well to study these verses, because they define the work of Jesus Christ: the good news of forgiveness, the work of compassion *and* justice.

Richard Stearns, the author of *The Hole in Our Gospel*, tells us that this passage has helped him understand, better, what it means to be a Christian in today's world. Those of us in the study group are being challenged by the question - “What does God expect of us?”

Is it enough just to go to church, read our Bible, and occasionally put some money in the offering plate to help our missionaries? Or, is God calling us to more? How are we to follow the Incarnate One of God, Jesus the Christ, in His mission to proclaim good news to the poor, restoration of sight to the blind, setting free the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of jubilee?

Is God asking us to do *more* than what we've already been doing? Maybe. I believe that when a person decides to follow Jesus, it makes that person a missionary. You and I, if we are faithful in following Jesus, are called to be

missionaries. It's part of who we are. Each and every one of us. Not just the chosen ones, but all of us.

Who me? Be a missionary? Yes, each one of us. To be a missionary is simply to be sent by God, to share the love of Jesus Christ with others. Mission work begins at home, because that is where we find the first neighbor that we are called to love. So, it begins with family, our neighbors, our friends, those who live closest to us.

But, like a rock thrown into a pool of water, the circle of love widens outward, in ever-growing concentric circles. You begin by loving your family, but then the circle widens to include the people in our city, then our country, and then it includes the whole world. God is the Lord of the whole world, and with John Wesley we say,

“The world is my parish.”

“Whoa, Pastor Bob, slow down. Are you saying that we all have to sign up to go overseas on a mission trip?” No, I'm not saying that at all. In fact, we may never leave Erie. But we can still be missionaries. Because there are so many different ways of serving, of loving, of caring for others.

Find a need and think about what you can do. Someone has once said that where the needs of the world and your personal talents intersect, there is your mission field.

Do you sense that a lot of kids today are not being loved like they should be at home?

They're not being taught right from wrong, nobody shows them unconditional love?

Have you heard stories about kids that have been abused or neglected? Want to make a difference? Why not become a Big Brother or a Big Sister, volunteer to coach little league baseball or basketball? Can't do that? Add those kids to your prayer list.

Someone in our group, Monday night, shared that her heart melted when she read a recent story in the Erie Times News about the number of homeless families there are in Erie. Not bums on the streets, but parents with kids who have lost their homes. It broke her heart. I suggested to her that she found her mission field.

What could she do? Volunteer at the Refuge, the City Mission or Salvation Army

Our Erie United Methodist Alliance has a ministry to homeless families that is regarded among the best in the state. We also have a transitional housing program, called Hope House, where families that have gotten jobs and become more stable, can live for up to a year until they find their own place. We also have a shelter for homeless veterans called Liberty House, that ministers to men who have served our country and fallen on hard times themselves.

You could visit those shelters and find out more about them. You could volunteer your time. You could find out what their needs are. I think Lakewood's responsibility to the Refuge is to provide toilet paper. Bring it to church and leave it in the lobby. In case you didn't know, Lisa Karle, one of our own members is on the staff of the Alliance, doing data entry. In her own way, she is a missionary for Jesus Christ through her employment.

But what about these situations overseas? We see reports of hurricane disasters, or earthquake disasters. Starving children in Africa. Killer diseases like AIDS and Malaria? Are you like me? Do you get a 100 different requests for

money in the mail? Do you ever feel overwhelmed with all of the requests for money? I know I do.

Here's what I've decided to do. I've found a few organizations that I believe are really doing a super job of carrying out the mission of Jesus Christ. And I support those ministries. I can't do everything, but I can do something. Friends, we can't stop doing good because we've grown tired of being asked to give. Let us never flag in our zeal to do good in the name of Jesus Christ. But let us be smart in how we share our valuable resources.

Next month we will be receiving a special offering for UMCOR, which stands for United Methodist Committee on Relief. It is the relief arm of the United Methodist Church. And it uses 100% of the money you give to help the people in need. Because it is a part of the church, it doesn't pay for advertizing costs like those agencies that send you stuff in the mail. So you know your money is going to help people in the name of Jesus Christ, and not to pay for mailings and big executives' salaries.

UMCOR utilizes mission personnel already in the countries that are affected. So, even before you see the televised appeals for money, your UMCOR dollars are already at work on the ground. Long after the reporters and the cameras leave, UMCOR is still there, providing love and care in the name of Jesus Christ. I am proud to be a UM.

You may not be able to be there in person, to do the disaster relief. But your gift supports the mission of Jesus Christ - of preaching good news, of caring for the poor, of establishing justice, of extending compassion. If you can't go, give as generously as you can.

“But, Pastor Bob. I feel like giving money isn't enough. I want to do more. I

want to serve, not just give.” I’m glad you asked. Your mission committee is in the process of establishing a monthly project, where we invite people to go and do some kind of mission project. Volunteering at a soup kitchen, volunteering at a homeless shelter, helping to build a ramp for handicapped accessibility, building a home with Habitat for Humanity, or going to Kentucky in August, if you are so inclined.

I’m challenging the mission committee to step up, and make it happen. People are eager to be missionaries - here in our own city. Let’s make sure we provide people with that opportunity, so that they can express their faith, and not just talk the talk. People are turned off by religion that is just so many words. But they are attracted to a message that is backed up with action. Are we going to be that kind of a church?

Before I’m finished, I want to offer a special challenge. I believe that God is still calling people to full-time Christian missions. God is not finished with the work that He has begun in our mission fields. There is more to be done. God is looking for people who would like to give their life to serving Him in the mission field.

It could be as a teacher, as a lawyer, as a preacher, or in one of the medical professions. I’m issuing the call, that if there is anyone here this morning who feels God speaking to them - that God wants them to seriously follow Jesus, with a life-time commitment of service, to see me after the worship service. God still needs men and woman who will give their lives in Christian service. Is that you?

Now hear me, church. If God is not calling you to full-time service, you can’t dismiss this sermon and go home thinking, “Pastor Bob was talking to someone else.” Each one of us, by virtue of our baptism, is called to be a missionary. We are

sent by God into the world, to love and serve the poor, to bind up the wounds that the world has inflicted on people, to care for those that nobody else will care for.

We are not left off the hook. You and I are missionaries for the Lord Jesus Christ. His mission statement is our mission statement. And we must take it seriously.

Go, and love the world. Go, in the power of the Spirit. Amen!