

## “Mission 3:16”

Date: June 19, 2011

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: Matthew 28:16-20

Theme: Inviting, Evangelism

(Play the song “Mission 3:16” by Carman, dressed as a spy, sneaking around the church, passing out invitation cards, asking people to tell someone else, “God loves you.”)

Wow! That was different, wasn’t it? The name of the artist who sang that song is Carman. How many of you have heard of him before? Oh, he’s got some exciting Christian music that is both fun to listen to, as well as inspirational.

Does anybody want to take a guess what that song was about? (*Wait for responses*) What does “Mission 3:16” refer to? It refers to one of the most famous passages in the Bible - John 3:16. Can you recite it with me? “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in him would not perish but have eternal life.”

In the album notes that came with the CD, Carman says that taking the Gospel to the streets is like a spy mission. And the greatest verse about salvation is John 3:16. He connects it with today’s gospel lesson, when Jesus tells his disciples to go out into the world and to make disciples in His name.

That fits right in with our vision statement. Would you turn to the front of your bulletin cover, and look at Lakewood’s vision statement? Let’s repeat it together: “Our vision is to help people discover, experience and know the love and presence of Jesus Christ.” That’s the mission of the church - to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

You may have noticed that when our new members joined, we asked them *first* if they would be loyal to Jesus Christ first, and secondly if they would do that through the United Methodist Church. I think for too long we have pledged

allegiance to our denomination, as though we worshiped the institution. I believe the General conference got it right when they changed that language. We pledge our loyalty first and foremost to Jesus Christ. That's what we're in the business of doing - making disciples of Christ, not making Methodists. Can I get an Amen?

Please understand me, I love our United Methodist Church, but we are first and ultimately disciples of Jesus Christ. We are to learn of Him, to grow in His grace, to follow His teachings, and to share our faith in Him with others. I believe that people today are growing weary with our denominational promotions, and they are becoming more and more attracted to our witness to the love of God in Jesus Christ.

Churches that want to grow will once again make **Jesus** the priority of their church business. Hear me again, I love our United Methodist Church. I was baptized a Methodist; I went to Methodist Sunday School; I was confirmed in the United Methodist Church; I went to a United Methodist college and a United Methodist seminary. I am a dyed in the wool Methodist.

But the one to whom my heart belongs, the one who I will die for, is Jesus Christ. Jesus is my forgiver and my leader. Jesus took away my sin when he died on the cross. Jesus promised to live in my heart through His Holy Spirit, and lead me in the ways of God. To show me how to love, like He loves. That's what we mean when we say that Jesus is Savior and Lord. He is our forgiver and our leader.

In the Gospel lesson this morning, Jesus did not say, "Wait inside the church until somebody shows up, then try to convert them." Jesus did say, "Go into the world and make disciples in my name." When I talked to the new members about what we expect of them, now that they are members of Lakewood United Methodist Church, I talked to them about sharing their faith.

If you find a new ice cream store where you really like the ice cream they serve, you tell your friends. You can't keep good news to yourself. You want to tell others about it. If you find a favorite TV show, discover a helpful website, or see a funny video on You-Tube, you want to share it with your friends. You don't keep good news to yourself, you want to share it with others.

My friends, the good news of Jesus Christ is that God loves the world, and does not hold our sin against us. Rather, God is willing to forgive and forget, so that we can have a better life. God is willing to empower us with His presence so that we can live a full and abundant life. God is not vindictive. God is gracious. And God wants to have an ongoing relationship with each of us.

Now, if you know that, you know what a difference that makes in your life. You are not bound up in sin and guilt. But you're free and joyful. Your life takes on new meaning and purpose. And God continues to work on your life, constantly making you a new creation. When you accept Christ you are not instantly made into a perfect person. But you spend the rest of your life growing up, to reflect the love of Jesus.

O People of God, it breaks my heart to realize that so many people do not know the love of Jesus. Perhaps they've been turned off by Church. Maybe they've got questions that nobody has taken the time to help them answer. We live in a time of cynicism, where people just don't want to believe in anything. But the world is desperately hungry for the love of God, expressed through His Son, Jesus the Christ.

Sadly, the Church has been a little shy about our mission in recent years. Somehow we have become uncomfortable talking to others about our faith. Maybe we thought that sharing our faith meant forcing someone to believe like we do. But

that's not what it means to share your faith. It is not the same thing as forcing your beliefs on someone else.

It is simply that - sharing. And the message that we carry is a simple one. "God loves you." We tend to make it a lot more complicated than that, but that's the core of the Gospel. "For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in Him would not perish, but have eternal life."

It's a message of love. God loves us dearly. God wants to have a friendship with us, a relationship. Jesus tells us to share that message with other people. We are simply to extend the invitation. It's up to them to decide if they want to follow Jesus. Our job is simply to invite them.

You see, it's God's work, it's the work of the Holy Spirit to convert people. Not me. Not you. Not even Billy Graham. It's the Holy Spirit who changes people's hearts. We just offer the invitation and share the message, "God loves you." It's up to God to change people. We just carry the message.

While I was acting like a spy, doing a very poor imitation of James Bond, probably more like Professor Clouseau of the Pink Panther, I was passing out little cards that offered an invitation to people. I invite you to share that little card with someone you know. It's an invitation to come worship at Lakewood.

If you've found a place to worship, that helps you to connect with God, and that is helping you to grow in love and grace, why not share that with the people you care about? Help them to discover, experience and know the love of Jesus Christ.

I think that Lakewood is an amazing community of believer. I believe that Jesus Christ lives among us. I think that people can easily meet God through Christ by being a part of this amazing fellowship. I invite you, to invite your friends,

family, neighbors to join you - for worship, for study, for strawberries, for service projects, for concerts, for any of the ministries we offer at Lakewood. Just offer the invitation.

Mission 3:16 - we are to share the love of God in Jesus Christ. The key word in Jesus' Great Commission is to GO. Go into the world to make disciples. Not wait for them to come, but GO. Let us be about the business of making disciples. Amen? Amen.

### **Pastoral Prayer**

Almighty God, holy is your name. We worship you and we glorify you. Words alone fail to give you the honor and praise that you deserve. And so we dedicate our whole lives to serving you, and praising you. When we've been there 10,000 years, we've no less days to sing your praise, than when we first begun. Almighty God, How Great Thou Art.

O Lord our God, our Heavenly Father, on this day we give you thanks and praise for the gift of earthly fathers, the men who helped to give us life. Thank you, Lord, for our fathers. And we thank you for the role they have played in helping to shape the character of our lives. We thank you, Lord, for fathers who taught us to do our best, who taught us how to love and how to treat people with dignity and respect. Fathers who taught us how to be both strong and gentle. Fathers who taught us how to be successful in our family life, as well as our careers.

Lord, for all that our father's taught us, especially about loving you, we give you thanks and praise. We thank you, Lord, for fathers who take their faith seriously, and who demonstrate by example what it means to be a person of faith. We thank you, Lord, for all of those shining role models of Christian manhood.

But we also pray for fathers who did not, or who do not live up to the ideals. And so we pray for fathers who were absent from their children, who neglected their needs, and at their worst even abused their children. Yes, Heavenly Father, we pray for these men who fall short of the ideal. We pray for fathers who cannot or will not say "I love you" to their children. Melt their hard hearts. By your great love, soften their character, change their hearts, and help them to be the loving Dads their children need.

We pray also, Lord, for all those persons here today, whose fathers has passed

from this life, to life eternal. Grant us the comfort of your Holy Spirit as we remember those men who were so important to us. May the memory of the saints be ever blessed.

Merciful Lord, we pray for our friends, family and loved ones who are sick or afflicted in any way. Remind them of your love, and your constant care. Grant them strength and courage, and peace of mind. If it be possible, and we know all things are possible for you, we ask that their illness be healed. But if that is not to be in this world, we pray that you would heal them through the power of the resurrection, and give us the faith to accept what cannot be changed.

Lord, we thank you for our faith in Jesus Christ. And we pray for the courage to share our faith with others, so that they may come to know you, and grow in His likeness. In the power and the name of Jesus we pray, and as He taught us, we are bold to say together: "Our