

“GO: Evangelism”

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Beavercreek, OH
February 25, 2007
Text: Matthew 28:16-20
#2 in a Series of 10**

It has been a very special experience to be part of the Mission and Vision Team and watch God lead us so deliberately along the road He had planned for us. For the next nine weeks all of us will be in the process of learning about our Mission Statement: Go, Grow, and Glorify. We begin today by examining the first directive: GO, and the first of the three core values connected with Go: Evangelism.

About three years ago I bought three Rex Begonia plants. If you are not familiar with the Rex Begonia, I will tell you that you do not grow them for their flowers, for they are unspectacular, to say the least. But their leaves are just wonderful. The plants I bought had three colors: burgundy, metallic green and metallic grey and the leaves were all crinkly. They were just so special in the garden. For two years I lovingly dug them up in the fall and kept them sheltered and watered all winter, then replanted them in the spring. With all this attention they'd gotten pretty big. Last fall, I decided I could just do some plant propagation and keep them over the winter. Then I not only would have my plants but additional plants to share. I'd never done this before but I took many leaf cuttings and many stem cuttings and dutifully dipped them in rooting hormone before putting them in soil. And, just in case, I used the old-fashioned methods and stuck a few leaves with their stems in water. Over the weeks, I watched my stem and leaf cuttings fail miserably. All I have now is one very small plant from a leaf I stuck in water. This is not the success I'd hoped for.

Just as there are many ways of propagating plants, there are many ways of propagating our faith with others. We can approach complete strangers and download all we know of the story of Jesus. We can browbeat our loved ones on the four spiritual laws. And our results would likely be about the same as my plant propagation: complete failure. And, to tell the truth, either of these ways scares most of us near to death. Another way is to live our lives outside the church walls as we live our lives inside, demonstrating the love of Jesus so that others know we are different from the rest of the world. We can reach out to family, friends, co-workers and be interested in what they do. We can listen to them until they finally ask us about our lives. Then we have earned the right to tell them of our relationship with the risen Christ. If we play basketball or golf, or paintball or laser tag we can invite friends or casual acquaintances to join us and get to know them. Who knows what might come up in conversation? We can spend time together in a garden, if we have such an interest. We can visit new neighbors, maybe even take them a Welcome folder the Outreach Team has available for just such a purpose. Make them feel welcome to the neighborhood and let them know you're there to be helpful. We can spread the love of God by revealing in our attitude the peace that is beyond understanding. All of these are ways to do Outreach.

You may have heard the phrase, “God has no hands but our hands, no feet but our feet....” While that sounds just lovely, I must tell you I have a problem with that. You see, when the God of creation can communicate through a burning bush, or a donkey or can still a storm with the words, “Peace, be still,” I don’t really think He is dependent on me. The other day I was baking cookies with my granddaughter who is 3½. It’s a familiar recipe to me because these are my husband’s favorite cookies. The process takes a little longer with a 3 year old. “Mammaw, can I put that in?” “Mammaw, can I do that?” The answer is always “Yes.” Then we came to adding the eggs. “Mammaw, can I put them in?” Hmmm... “Yes, but let Mammaw show you.” So I cracked the first one and put it in a cup. Then I gave her the second egg. She cracked the egg gently at first, then just enough to get the egg out. Truthfully, I could have done it all faster and easier. But I wanted to include her. As we read Acts 9:15 it takes us to the scene when the apostle Paul is in Damascus, after he has been blinded by Jesus on the road. A Christian named Ananias has been sent to Paul but it’s a real understatement to say Ananias was not eager to see this man Paul who had been doing his best to destroy the followers of Christ. The verse reads, “But the Lord said to Ananias, ‘Go! (Note the exclamation point!) This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.’” Just as Paul was chosen, we are chosen. Not because God is dependent on us but because that is His gracious choice. An evangelist was visiting a small, remote village in China. After he had brought his message of salvation through faith in Jesus to the people who lived there, he was approached by an elderly woman. She thanked him for telling her the name of her God. She had known for many years that the multiple gods popular in her village were not the true God. She had known and served the one God most of her life but never knew His name. God had revealed Himself to this child of His without a human instrument. God will do what God will do. He is not dependent on us. But for whatever His reason, He most often chooses to use us as His instruments to tell the world about Him, just as He chose Paul.

Even after we realize we are chosen by God, few of us are chomping at the bit to get outside and do Evangelism. Evangelism is such a scary proposition that here at Kirkmont we call it “Outreach.” Over the years there have been many Sunday school classes given here with really excellent material to help us hone our Outreach skills. And, I think I can speak for our Director of Christian Education when I say that there are few classes that can boast such consistently low attendance. Yet we have been given the last words Jesus spoke to His disciples here on earth and we call it the Great Commission. “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations.” The original translation is “While going, make disciples.” In other words, as we’re going through our lives, share the Good News. If we are directly told by Christ to perform this task, why aren’t we eager to do so?

I believe the answer is just, plain fear, and fear is the opposite of faith. When I saw the preview of the movie, “The Passion of the Christ,” I e-mailed many friends to urge them to see this movie. After having dinner with a cousin and his wife, she said to me. “I have a question for you. I went to see that movie and I want to know, why did He have to die?” Now, I have been working in Evangelism here at Kirkmont for a few years. I’ve taken and helped lead the course called Becoming a Contagious Christian; I’ve attended 2 Alpha conferences; I helped lead Alpha; I’ve read the 4 spiritual laws; I know the bridge illustration. I’ve been told by some of you here, “Oh, evangelism is easy for you, Cecilia. You just have the gift.” Well, it’s time the truth came out. You see, I’ve taken the Spiritual Gifts test, too. Evangelism is not number 1. Or number 2. Or number 3. I think it was number 12. And when I was asked this question by someone I hold dear and desperately wanted to tell of Christ, I was so excited that the

opportunity had come! And I felt everything I had ever learned about evangelism drain right out of my ear. I couldn't remember a thing. Oh, I answered her. I told her and her husband and my husband of salvation through the atoning work of Christ on the cross. Seeing that didn't receive an "AHA!" response, I explained about the need for a blood sacrifice for the children of Israel in the Old Testament. I explained about the Day of Atonement and how we needed Christ to make that sacrifice because we could not. The response was underwhelming. And all the way home I was saying to myself, "I can't believe what I said! After all the classes and reading and talking about Outreach, I just blew it so badly!" After a few days of beating myself up I was reminded of Isaiah 55:10-11, "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." We do not need to have a Divinity degree to be evangelists. We only need to be obedient to the call we've been given by our Lord. We need to be willing to say, "Here I am, Lord. Use me as you please." Whether we do our Outreach one to one where we work or shop, or at the Gospel Mission serving those in need, or in Nicaragua, it is being obedient to this commandment we've been given. It's being willing to step out of our comfort zone and let God lead us to faith-filled and not fear-filled witness. Bill Hybels in his Outreach material, "Just Walk Across the Room," tells of a Muslim gentleman who works in sales. After "working the room" one day, he was resting against the wall when a man excused himself from the group he was with and came over to talk to this gentleman. After discovering they had much in common they began to meet for lunch on occasion. The man one day said to his new Muslim friend, "I really don't know much about Islam. Would you tell me about your beliefs?" After a number of conversations, the Muslim said, "Now, tell me what you believe." This Christian had earned the right to tell of his faith in Jesus Christ. Today this former Muslim is a believer in Christ. It's hard to believe, but when we are willing to do what our Lord has commanded, this is what He says: "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" (Isaiah 52:7)

So there you have the way to "Go" and do Evangelism. The way to do Evangelism is what works for you. The reason we do Evangelism is because God chooses us and has commanded us to do so. And all we have to do is be obedient and God will do the rest. We who believe the Good News of Jesus Christ cannot help but have a bias, a desire to seek and serve those who are lost. We, through no merit of our own, have been adopted into the family of God and have been given all forgiveness, grace and mercy and the gift of eternal life lived with our Lord and Savior. We need only to show our readiness to meet those in the world who do not know Christ with the spirit of these words: "Good News! Good News! Jesus loves you!" Amen