

“Getting the News Out!”

1 Peter 2:1-10, Matthew 28:16-20

Sunday, October 22, 2023

Pastor David Witt

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Holy God, you have made us in your image, and we belong to you alone. Therefore, we offer ourselves to you, in service, love, and praise. Lord Jesus, open our hearts and minds to receive with humility and with joy the commission you give us. Empower us as we respond to your call, command, and commission to go, to make disciples, to train and equip. Help us share with others the life-giving wisdom and way you have so lovingly revealed. Use us for the glory of your kingdom and the good of your people. And may we never forget Lord Jesus, that you have promised to be with us, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age. In your powerful name, we pray. Amen.

Texts. Emails. Instagram. X, formerly Twitter. Streaming.

Social media with names and platforms I can't begin to know or understand. Livestreamed worship, right now. These are all ways the news gets out today! We've come a long way from smoke signals, carrier pigeons, telegraphs, and personal messengers.

When I was growing up in rural New Jersey, our fire company signaled all the firefighter volunteers, mostly from farm fields and

small businesses, with the blast of the siren, which later the “city folk” who moved in didn’t care for and fought against. While maybe not as prevalent or popular in getting the news out, we still do depend to some extent on pagers, letter-writing, newspapers, books, newsletters, magazines, and telephone calls, though once again we’ve come a long way, from operators and party lines to cell phones that are hand-held computers. Yet, with all these changes and the evolution of technology, you and I can’t or at least shouldn’t deny the power of the human voice in getting the news out. I can’t help but recall what the prophet Isaiah proclaims, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”

You and I are here together this morning to praise God, to pray in unison and personally, to listen to other voices who are serving the Lord in a variety of ways, and to submit to God’s way and will for us through the wisdom of his Word, today, yesterday, and forever. Each of us is a part of this worshiping community

today, in person and on-line, because somehow the news got out to us. We are acquainted with and seeking, belonging to and following Jesus, because an introduction was at some time extended to us, maybe through a parent or grandparent, beloved teacher or neighbor, faithful friend or co-worker, or more directly from God by a transforming experience or epiphany. Somehow God was made known to you, just as God was made known to me. As Peter declares in his first letter, "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." And my hypothesis, my more than hunch sense tells me that you are probably here because some follower of Jesus in some way, shape, or fashion invited you to join them, to join us, oh maybe it was years and years ago, so long that you don't remember the details, or maybe it's today for the very first time. We celebrate your journey to Opequon whenever and however it happened and welcome you in the name of Jesus.

Ten years ago, in celebrating Pentecost, our Evangelism Team, our “good news people,” put together a wonderful collection of stories called, “Journeys to Opequon Presbyterian: The Holy Spirit at Work.” This booklet illustrates how people came to this place within the ongoing 291 years of this church’s ministry. The introduction states, “Long ago, a show of hands survey was taken to determine how people began worshiping at Opequon. Overwhelmingly, most came after a direct personal invitation. Yet there are other very interesting stories that will bring a smile to your face in the ways the Holy Spirit guided folks down Opequon Church Lane. It is our hope that these offerings will inspire you to share your faith by inviting family and friends to worship with us.” I reread the whole booklet this week. Wow, what rich testimonies! If you would like a copy of the booklet, I have placed a sign-up sheet on the nametag table. We’ll make sure you get a copy. But you know something: we’re not simply talking about history here. On Tuesday night, our session met with fourteen newcomers and heard moving testimonies as to how people came here and why

they are here and want Opequon Church to be their home. It sounds like God's fingerprints were placed on them and they want to go forward in leaving fingerprints on others.

Maybe that's how those first disciples felt after Christ's resurrection when they went to Galilee and gathered on the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. Imagine for a moment that we're sitting there on that hillside with Jesus and the disciples. As the disciples worship him, some doubt; we know in other scriptures, that they are fearful and reflect "little faith," reminding us that they are not perfect. As we look at them and look at ourselves, do we feel that way? Maybe even today. Yet, despite their flaws, Jesus does not hesitate to overcome their shortcomings by telling them to go, commissioning them, empowering them, and reassuring them. For followers of Jesus then and today do not live for themselves, but are called to an around the corner and around the world mission that lives out Jesus' teaching and invites people of all backgrounds and traditions to join in. As the good news of Jesus changes and

shapes and directs his followers, the Great Commission, joined with the Great Commandments of Jesus – “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” and “love your neighbor as yourself” – truly becomes the living, beating heart of the gospel.

As my devotional highlighted this week, “Jesus didn’t usurp authority from anyone but was given authority by God. Jesus never used divine authority to manipulate or do violence. To ‘make disciples’ is not to frighten or bludgeon people into some thin profession of belief but to help them know God’s liberating love. We’re asked to teach others to obey the commandments of Jesus, including the challenging teachings in the Sermon on the Mount – like loving your enemies and praying for those who persecute you. The parables and teachings of Jesus require careful, prayerful thinking and interpretation, not mindless box-checking. Love is not enacted through violence, control, or manipulation. The law of love is upheld through doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. For the commission

Jesus gives us truly is great: to share with others a way of life filled with purpose, love, and grace.”

From this small community of faith and mission that swims against the tide of a Roman Empire arises a world-wide community of Jews and Gentiles; only this community is summoned to embrace a power distinct from that of the world, the power of compassion, mercy, healing, and inclusive love. And because we are a people of hope, you and I believe that people of faith can still change the world for good, that we can make a difference in Jesus’ name; that through the authority and power of Jesus, we can train up disciples by calling and baptizing and teaching what Jesus has said; and that we can know that Jesus is with us day after day after day, right up to the end of the age.

How will you and I respond to Jesus’ Great Commission in this new week? How will we be evangelists, messengers of the Good News? You heard what Ann and Mary said earlier, about how we seek to walk the walk and talk the talk and what a

difference that has made. I would suggest that you and I hold in our hearts what Peter said to the early Christians, “But you are the ones chosen by God, chosen for the high calling of priestly work, chosen to be a holy people, God’s instruments to do his work and speak out for him, to tell others of the night-and-day difference he made for you—from nothing to something, from rejected to accepted.” For we are still responsible for getting the news out, getting it out to those around the corner and around the world. As you imagined sitting on the hillside with Jesus, now imagine the places where you can take and share what you have learned, testifying to the goodness of our living Lord through the evidence of God’s grace working in and through you. Let’s get the news out, my friends. Let’s get the news out!