

DWJD: Spread the Word

Part 4 in “The Jesus Priorities” series

Matthew 4.18-22

April 3, 2011

Rev. Daniel M. Duncan, UMC of the Dunes

(Scripture intro) We’ve been looking at Jesus’ priorities in this season of Lent, based on what Jesus both said, and did, in his earthly ministry. Today we see both the “Priority” (spread the word), and part of his strategy...

Let’s just right away admit that this priority, “spreading the word,” is one of the more difficult ones to do effectively. Perhaps you have been accosted by someone in a mall or airport, who demanded to know “Do you know how to get to heaven?” or “Are you saved?” Frankly, most people find such folks obnoxious, and counter-productive. We have a lot of defenses ready to go on high alert when we sense someone trying to change or convert us.

But, Jesus talked with many people about the direction of their lives, and the direction of the world, and it opened up doors to new life for them, and that is what this priority is about. We’ll look at three aspects of “spreading the word” today.

1) Share the Mission

Jesus did a lot of preaching, and teaching, but he clearly did not see that as **his** work alone. Through his several years of leading and hanging out with his disciples, we can see that he was equipping them to continue spreading the “Word” about the Kingdom of God. Jesus invited many to follow him, either one at a time, or in small groups. The story we read just now uses that wonderful metaphor of fishing; Jesus on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, calls three fisherman—Peter, James, and John—and tells them that he wants them to aim for a different kind of “catch” other than fish. Eventually, he sent the twelve disciples out ahead of him (Matt. 10.5) to “preach the kingdom of God and to heal.” Luke’s Gospel tells us that Jesus commissioned seventy others to go forth with the instruction “Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you; heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you’ (Luke 10.8-9).

Jesus drove the many demons named Legion from the man in the region of Gadara, on the northeast side of the Sea of Galilee. Once healed, the man wanted to accompany Jesus. “But Jesus refused, and said to him, ‘Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you...’ (Mark 5.19-20) Jesus knew that he would need to “share the mission” in getting the word out, and it would be most effective in the package of a person.

2) Invite Everyone

If we spend any time at all in the Gospels, we notice that Jesus continually surprised people by spending time and respect on those who seemed last, least, or lost. Jesus seemed to believe that all people were loved by God and that all people could respond to God’s call. We are to “do as Jesus did.” The prophetic Christian sociologist,

Tony Campolo, has an intriguing story along these lines. He has been invited to speak all over the country, and some years ago he was invited to speak in Honolulu, Hawaii. Coming from the east coast, he had a hard time with the time difference at first, and found himself awake at 3 in the morning, so he went down to the local diner. Small, the kind with just a few booths, and a lot of stools along the counter. Didn't want to pick up the menu, because it was so greasy. Harry, the night cook comes out, cigar in his mouth—"What'll it be, mac?" Just ordered a donut and some coffee. Next thing he knows, a group of about 7 women come in, dressed pretty thinly, very loud, sit down on either side of him. They are prostitutes, at the end of their work day. In the midst of their chatter, one next to him, who is exceptionally bubbly, says to the one next to her, "Tomorrow is my birthday." Her friend say "So what?! You want me to get you a cake or something? You want me to throw you a party or something?" "No, I was just telling you about it. I'll be 39. Actually, I've never had a birthday party in my life."

After they left, Tony Campolo asked the cook, "Do they come in here often?" "Every night, about this same time," said Harry. Campolo said "What do you think about throwing a party for that woman?" "You mean Agnes? GREAT idea!" "Would you mind if I bring in some decorations?" "Mister, you decorate to your heart's content." "How about if I bring a cake?" "Oh no, I've got the cake, the cake is my thing."

Next night, the little diner is transformed, and the word got out on the street, so the place is filled with prostitutes. And Agnes and her friends walk in, and there are balloons, and streamers, and a banner that says, "Happy Birthday Agnes." Tony leads them all in singing "Happy Birthday," as they bring out the cake with 39 candles on it, and Agnes is speechless. She is stunned, and is just overcome with emotion. Harry says, "Hey, you better blow out them candles, or I'll have to do it." Agnes finally manages to blow out the candles, but she can hardly speak, then she says "Do I have to cut the cake?" Campolo says, "It's your cake, you can do with it what you want." She says, "I'd like to show my mother the cake. She only lives a couple of doors down; I'll just show it to her and be right back." While she was gone, Campolo looked around, and said "What do you say, we pray?" Here is where Campolo, who has written something like 15 books, spoken all around the world, is a professor of sociology at a Christian university, quips, "Here I am, a sociologist, leading a prayer meeting with prostitutes at a diner at 3 in the morning. It's weird looking back on it, but it was the right thing to do." Campolo said "I prayed that God would deliver her from all the filthy things that had been done to her, starting probably with some kind of abuse in childhood, which is a common experience for these folks, and I prayed that God would make her new because no matter where you've been or what you've done, God can lead you into a new and joyful life."

After the prayer, Harry leaned over and said "Hey Campolo, I thought you said you were a sociologist, but you're a preacher; what kind of church are you from?" Campolo says that that was one of those few times in life when just the right words come to mind: "I'm from a church that throws parties for prostitutes at 3 in the morning." Campolo says he'll never forget Harry's response: "No you don't, NO YOU DON'T, because I would JOIN a church like that."

We are in a church that invites all people to make a new start in life, to put behind being a victim, and acting out

3) Challenge with Love

Everything we do, once our identity is known as a Christ follower, witnesses to him. “I will make you fishers of people.” Okay, I get the image. The thing is, not very many people want to be “caught,” if you know what I mean. They are not “caught” by us, anyway, but by the Spirit of the living God, invited into an adventure that leads us to our true life.

Next week, we receive more folks into the life of this church; they will promise to reveal the life of Christ in five “outward and visible ways”, and we will renew our promise to do the same. Christ is made visible in this era through our “prayers, presence, gifts, service, and **witness**.”