

Outreach Means Witness Key Focus: *“And you will be my witnesses.”*

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August 15, 2021

I became a follower of Jesus when I heard someone a few years older tell me at our church: *“God loves you and I love you.”* These “witnesses” were total strangers. I thought they were totally weird. I had never heard anything like that before. We did not use that kind of language ... anywhere. It was confusing and deeply troubling. That weekend experience (called a “Lay Witness Mission”) did not teach Bible trivia, but the result was I had a personal experience with Jesus. God’s love transformed my heart: *“God loves you and I love you.”* Until that weekend, our youth group was just a fun gathering of kids my age where I found a place to fit in. Larry and Verla Richardson were our volunteer youth sponsors. Not only did my sister, Kathy, and I have conversion experiences, but my parents and the Richardsons did, too. Overnight, we went from a group of kids having fun to a group of people with a brand-new identity in Christ. A new and better way replaced my old life. Had my parents not insisted that I attend that weekend experience in April 1969 chances are slim that I would be in ministry today. Had it not been for those witnesses who came to Rose Hill UMC in Tulsa that weekend when I was fourteen, so many people, including me, would not have found faith.

APPLICATION: All our experiences are different. What is your story? When have you felt God’s love? How have you opened your heart to the Lord? Is there someone you would like to talk to? How are you sharing your faith with others?

“The Magnificent Story” is Jesus. God came in the flesh and moved into our neighborhood. We saw his glory. He taught the scriptures in a new way, had a healing ministry, made disciples, was crucified for our sin, but God raised Him from the dead. He appeared to His disciples over a 40-day period and spoke about the kingdom of God.

Last week our text was from **Matthew 28:18-20**: *And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”* Jesus gave a **commission**. A commission is a command or instructions usually given to a group of people, not just one person. Here’s **Jesus Commission** to them/us: *“Help Others Follow Him.”* He commissioned them to preach the gospel and make disciples of the whole world. God the Creator, the eternal Father, the Owner of all things has handed over to Jesus and the redemption of the world to Him.

If they thought killing Jesus had silenced Him, they were wrong. Jesus was just getting started. He is still alive. The **Book of Acts** describes His further acts. The Book of Acts is not comprehensive. It isn’t ALL the actions of all the disciples; but is some of the actions of some of the disciples. The first 12 chapters are about Peter in Jerusalem with the Jewish background believers, while 16-28 is about Paul in Antioch with the Gentile background believers. The

gospel that began in Jerusalem will go worldwide. Actually, the Book of Acts isn't about the Apostles at all – it's still about Jesus.

**Acts 1:6-11** *So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" <sup>7</sup> He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." <sup>9</sup> And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup> And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, <sup>11</sup> and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."*

We mention "The Ascension" in the Apostles Creed: ("He Ascended into heaven"). V 12 says it happened on the Mount of Olives. There is a church there – (picture). Yet, the Ascension is not the point of the story, and certainly not the application. Luke seems more concerned about what is **SAID** rather than what **HAPPENED**.

1.) **They asked Jesus a QUESTION:** "Now will you restore the kingdom to Israel?" They wanted a political solution: "When will you Make Israel Great Again?" A natural Q. They wanted the Romans out. But, they are off mission. Their attention is diverted from making disciples. You can almost see them with charts/maps looking for the end time signs.

2.) **Jesus has 3 ANSWERS** (These are the last words He speaks on the earth)

A.) The **END TIMES** are none of their business. Eliminate this question. Do not ask it. This is God's secret, and He is not telling. God will take care of it.

B.) You will get a gift. You will be **EMPOWERED** by the Holy Spirit. The Greek word for power is "dunamis" ("dynamite"). Dynamic. Explosive. Powerful. Strength. The birthday party for the church that was born will happen in 40 days. When the church was born, and they opened their birthday present – it was a stick of dynamite. You don't have to do this on your own strength or ability.

C.) You will be my **WITNESSES**. "Witness" in the Greek = "**martyrs**." You are to focus on winning the world for me. This will be a worldwide **Mission**. It will happen first in Jerusalem, then Judea (Jews), then Samaria (yikes! You know who lives there?), and to the end of the earth. The scope is worldwide.

Having answered their question and giving them their marching orders, Jesus ascends to heaven. Picture the scene. Jesus is rising into the sky. The disciples are looking at him – all they can see are in sandals. It's like watching a Cape Canaveral launch. "I think I can still see his sandals!" They are in awe. Wouldn't you be? They did not want Jesus to go away. Now they are dawdling. The next verse says they were at the Mount of Olives. If you go to Jerusalem, there is "The Church of the Ascension" (picture) When Jesus is literally out of sight, two angels showed up and brought a gentle, mild reproach: "Why are you looking into heaven?" "What are you looking at – you've got work to do."

On September 5<sup>th</sup> we will begin a church-wide study on a book, "**The Magnificent Story**." The author, Jim Smith, will be with us that Sunday. This is the story of Jesus – He is the Magnificent

One. Our stories have touches of greatness, but they aren't magnificent because we cannot end our story with, *"And they all lived happily ever after."* Like the song by Kansas goes, *"All we are is dust in the wind."* Instead of magnificence, Jim Smith has a new way to describe our stories: "shrunken." Our stories are of abuse, abandonment, addiction, emotional and mental health issues, employment and financial problems, family dysfunctions, health issues, and so on. We have huge failures, limitations, imperfections, and inadequacies. Pride, envy, anger, lust, greed, gluttony, and sloth eat away at us. Peter had a shrunken story. He had moments of brilliance – he got out of the boat and walked on the water. When he told Jesus, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* Yet no sooner had he hit that homerun than he struck out a moment later when he tried to tell Jesus what to do. Jesus told Peter, *"Get behind me Satan."* Peter, who swore he would never deny Jesus, did so, not once or twice, but 3x in front of a servant girl who accused him of being a disciple. He was a no show at the crucifixion. Afraid for his life, he and the other disciples went into hiding. Yet, when the Magnificent Story was resurrected, his shrunken story changed. Filled with the Spirit of Jesus, Peter stood up on the Day of Pentecost and empowered by the Holy Spirit, preached a powerful message. 3,000 men made commitments to follow Jesus that day.

Then we met another shrunken story. A Pharisee named Saul, felt God would be honored if he held the coats while others stoned Stephen, who became the first martyr. Saul, breathing hatred, consented to murdering followers of Jesus. He was a shrunken man. Then he met Jesus. He became the Apostle to the Gentiles, had his name changed to Paul (meaning "small") and took the Gospel worldwide. I love the next to the last verse in my favorite book in the Bible, Philippians (4:22) *All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.* The Magnificent Story was even being whispered in Caesar's kitchen. Jesus didn't come to get rid of the Romans, but to change the Romans from the inside out. He would use the power of Rome for the advance of the Gospel.

We have shrunken stories, too. *"All have shrunken and fallen short of the glory of God."* Nobody can throw rocks. I can witness to my failures, limitations, inadequacies, and imperfections, - not to my magnificence – but only to Jesus and His magnificence. Our entire message is not "We're good" or "We're better than someone else." Our whole message is God not only made the world, He owns it and controls it. God didn't create and take off – He is intricately bound to His world and to humans. God is concerned. God loves. God acted. And God uses some of the most unlikely people – Peter, Paul, you and me, to share the Good News.

### What are you asking me to do?

Our Mission, "Go, Make Disciples," of Matthew 28, and "You Shall Be My Witnesses" of Acts 1, has not changed. At Asbury we call it, "Helping Others Follow Jesus." **Why?** Because Jesus is the Magnificent Story. All people are living with shrunken stories until they meet Him. We are to be disciple-makers and witnesses on His behalf. We want to have passion about leading others to Christ.

**How?** Asbury, as a **church** is engaged in both Global Outreach and Local Outreach Ministries. Followers of Jesus yearn for the whole world AND the local community to know The

Magnificent Story. This reaches across all ethnic lines. About 10% of what you give to Asbury goes directly to these outreach ministries. We invite you **personally** to engage with us in these ministries. For instance, yesterday we had 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday in which a # of people were deployed for about 4 hours in the Tulsa community in service. Singles, couples, and families can all participate.

To witness means to share part of your experience with another. If you think of a witness on a stand in a trial, they do not do most of the talking. They answer questions. To be a witness means to share with another, but should be done in a way

1 Corinthians 13:4 *Love is **patient and kind**; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude.* Be generous with your time and money. Slow down. Pay attention to people. Show **hospitality**. Again, we have a hospitality ministry. We have so many ways to greet and serve. There is a special opportunity coming our way beginning on September 5<sup>th</sup>. Please buy/read the book, "The Magnificent Story," and be in a small group. Consider starting a group. It lasts 6 weeks. We can help you with this. Talk to folks at the CLC. We can get you guides and can help coach you on this – but the small groups are about invitation, making friends, and growing together.

**E. Stanley Jones** was a great missionary and evangelist. He struggled in his youth with his calling in life – be a lawyer or be a preacher. When he gave his very first sermon in his home church, about six sentences into it he used a word that didn't exist ("indifferentism"). A young lady smiled when he said it. Her smile completely made him speechless. Awkward and embarrassed, after a long silence he told the congregation, "Friends, I'm sorry, but I've forgotten my sermon." As he started to walk back to his seat in the front row, he felt God spoke to him: "Haven't I done anything for you?" "Why, yes, of course you have." "Why don't you tell them about that?" So, instead, he turned back to the congregation and said, "Well friends, as you can see, I can't preach, but I can say this – you knew me before I gave my life to Christ and you know the difference in me since, and while I can't preach, I can say this – I love the Lord and I want to witness for him for the rest of my life." After the service, another young man came to him and wanted to know about following Jesus.

This is exactly what we're saying – WE are not The Magnificent Story. But we can point you to Him. And He can change our lives.