

May 8, 2016



## "Christian Basics: Therefore, Go"

Sermon by Rev. Patricia Farris

*Revelation 22:16-17, 20-21*

*"It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star." The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let everyone who hears say, "Come." And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift. The one who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.*

*John 17:20-26*

*"I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*

*Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. "Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."*

The last in our series on Christian Basics comes from the theme of our United Methodist General Conference which convenes this coming week in Portland, Oregon. The theme, "Therefore, go," is based on the Great Commission in Matthew 28: Jesus said to the disciples: "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, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

When the first disciples heard Jesus speak those words, they were gathered on a mountain. Our General Conference logo also features a mountain—it is Mt. Hood, evocative of our meeting place in Portland, where some 680 delegates from all over the world will gather in a spirit of Christian Conferencing to consider petitions and resolutions shaping the structure and priorities of the United Methodist Church, and to worship, pray and discern together.

So far, our Christian Basics series has grounded us in who we are as disciples of our Risen Lord: honest faith. Trust. Grace-based evangelism. A new people known by love. And at the center, the peace of Christ, the keystone that holds the whole structure of life and faith together.

Our Risen Lord has bequeathed all this to us, appearing to his disciples during these forty days of Eastertide, and now, as he ascends to heaven to be at the right hand of God, he sends us forth into the world. Go. Make more disciples. Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you, remembering that I am with you always.

Go. Get on with it. Get out there and do my work. Be my saving mission in the world. Bring life. Be the hope. Love as I have loved you.

When United Methodists gather in Portland next week, it's not like we'll just be hearing this for the first time. From the very beginning of the Methodist movement in England, John Wesley insisted that his little band of church renewers go out every week to be in ministry with the poor and visit in the prisons. He taught that this going out is essential to our life in Christ, that the salvation of the individual and the transformation of the world go hand in hand. Go, he said. Now these were highly educated students at Oxford, more comfortable in academia than in a poor house. But out they went. And they served and they themselves were changed from the inside out. Go.

Wesley sent them out to address some of the critical and pressing issues of his day—child labor, abysmal health care, debtors prisons. And as we know, Methodists were later leaders in Britain and then also in the states in the fight to end slavery. Go, get out there. Get yourselves involved wherever God's people are hurting or in need. And remember that Jesus said: "I am with you always. Go."

Since then, the Methodist Church has reached out in mission all across the world. In Central and South America, in Cambodia, Vietnam, Korea and the Philippines, across the Pacific and the continent of Africa. Going out to share the love of God in Christ through preaching and teaching and through world-changing ministries of health clinics, hospitals, schools and seminaries.

You know, the reason that the Gates Foundation partnered over these last few years with the United Methodist Church in the Imagine No Malaria campaign is because we already had in place the most extensive network of clinics, hospitals, and health care providers in Africa. We have gone, and we are still going.

When I was in Côte d'Ivoire last month, I met the dean of one of our seminaries in Sierra Leone and I asked him to tell me their most pressing needs. First thing he said: textbooks. Textbooks. One of the ministries of the United Methodist Church that I am most excited about these days is our eReader ministry. We are providing kindle tablets to primarily rural Methodist theological schools in Africa and the Philippines which come loaded with current textbooks and reference books necessary for a solid theological education in the Wesleyan tradition. This is a new way to go, and it is making a profound difference in the formation of hundreds of up-and-coming new leaders in the church.

Let me share another example from my trip. I met Rev. Ande Emmanuel, a young pastor in the South Nigeria Annual Conference and a delegate to General Conference. He is spear-heading a peace initiative of the United Methodist Church, bringing together Christian and Muslims in a part of the world torn apart by violence between those two groups. It's similar to what we do in our Standing Together groups, but there, of course, peace is truly a matter of life and death. They are building relationships, building bridges, teaching conflict-resolution skills. Go. Teach, preach. Bring life. Be the hope. Love one another as Jesus has loved us.

Go. This is the same faith imperative, basic to our Christian faith, at the base of our congregation's participation in the Habitat for Humanity build. Heartfelt thanks to those of you who have already sent in financial support. Our former bishop, Mary Ann Swenson, liked to talk about mission in our own zip code. Of course, in this congregation, we come from several zip codes, but her point is well taken. This is mission outreach right where we live. Going to where the need is and working together to do something about it. Just as a reminder: Habitat is an affordable homeownership program and this is an area where, as we all know, affordable housing is a major need.

It takes dollars—together our coalition of eight congregations is committed to raising \$150,000—of which over 1/3 has already been raised!—to see this new home become a reality. We've done it before and we know we're capable of making big dreams become real. And the best part is, once the building starts, lots of us will be able to have the experience our work teams have of actually being part of the build itself. And of course, the deep joy of knowing that a family will be able know the love of God through a roof over their heads, a safe place to gather together around the table for meals, a yard for beauty and play, a place to sleep. What more lasting Mother's Day gift could we ever offer?

So see Jill Obery Dodd or Linda Avdul or Pastor Robert to see how you can get involved. There will be a fund-raiser at the Veggie Grill on Monday, May 23<sup>rd</sup>. Just take in the flyer you can pick up at the Hospitality Table today, buy a healthy dinner, and 1/3 of the profit will go to Habitat. And then keep watching for more ways to support the build of "Patience House" in the next weeks. The message here is: you don't necessarily have to be the one to pick up the hammer or saw, but this Habitat project offers many ways to "go" and show the love of Christ.

As I've said, this is the "love" message, in pictures, blood, sweat and tears. It's the real deal, that speaks powerfully to folks who either don't know a thing about church or don't like what they think they do know.

It's love incarnate that communicates. Love in action. Love visible. Love making a difference in some kid's life, some family's future.

And in all these ways, right here in our zip code and all across the world, as we go and serve and build and love in the name of Christ, the kingdom of God, which is at the very heart of his teaching, becomes visible here and now. Jesus gives us the power to heal, teach, preach and build, and sends us out so that all he was teaching and doing can now be done through every succeeding generation of disciples, through us—with more far-reaching effect. Go!

As for John Wesley's first followers, this "going" may take us into new places and relationships that challenge us, that might take us out of our comfort zone, that break open our hearts in ways we could barely have imagined. We've heard this many times and in many ways from our own youth and adults who've participated in mission trips. Their "going" is not just about going to do for others. It's "going" to work *with* others we otherwise most surely would never have met. People in Haiti. People in Appalachia. People in New Orleans. People in rural Oregon. Others of us have gone to Nepal, to the heart of urban America, and into prisons. All in the name of love. And there we learn people's names, meet their families, hear their stories. We see the world through their eye. We walk alongside them. And our hearts get bigger, our minds become wiser, our faith goes deeper.

You know, when our Risen Savior was about to ascend to God and said to the disciples who would remain on earth to be his very presence in this world, he said: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." The Greek word for "go" here literally means "to depart, to leave, to cross boundaries."

There's a beautiful statement in our United Methodist Book of Resolutions entitled "Called to be Neighbors and Witnesses" that unpacks the meaning of this for us. It states: "Thus, a witness to Jesus Christ is one who can bridge boundaries, be they geographic, sociological, racial, or cultural. The gospels tell story after story of Jesus crossing boundaries and reaching to outsiders, drawing them into his circle. As disciples of Jesus, our outreach draws upon the gospel call to be even more than neighbors. We are to proclaim and witness to the God who has bound humanity together in care for one another, regardless of the differences between us."

It is my prayer for our General Conference that we can be witnesses to this boundary-breaking love of God, daring to care for one another here in our own zip-code and all across this globe, and regardless of the differences between us, show forth the love of God for all God's children and the whole of God's beautiful creation, living into a future shaped by the great good news of God's kingdom where all find peace and a home and a future with hope.

Amen.

Notes:

Bartlett and Taylor, eds. *Feasting on the Word: Year A, Vol. 3*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011.  
The Interpreter Magazine. March/April 2016. "Building Peace in Nigeria."  
"Called to be Neighbors and Witnesses," *UM Book of Resolutions*. First adopted 1980.

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