

WORSHIP

Sermon | 1.10.2021



Point to the Cross

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Mark 16: 14-20

Today we continue our sermon series on the Great Ends of the Church. In case you missed it, Pen shared with us that the Great Ends of the church are six statements that were written over a 100 years ago that guide the church who it should be and what it should be working for. Last week, we looked at the Great End “Preservation of the Truth.” Pen shared that truth is not a what but a who. Truth is Jesus Christ. Today, we will be looking at the Great End that states “proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind.” I hope to provide some insight on what this does and does not mean.

Before we read from the Gospel of Mark, I wanted to give a bit of background to this section of scripture. When I told a few friends that I was preaching on this part of Mark they all responded with a concerned “Oh...”. The reason is that this part of Mark is highly contested, argued about, discussed...however you would like to put it. After Mark Chapter 16 verse 8 your bible may have two



headings of “Shorter Ending” or “Longer Ending”. It may even include a note stating that scholars doubt that verses 9-20 were part of the original Book of Mark. The addition was to give a more satisfying end to this book of the Bible. If we didn’t have it, Mark would end with the empty tomb and the woman leaving it, too afraid to do what they were told. They would not have told the good news of that Jesus had been raised from the dead. I will not go in to why or why not these verses should or should not be included, it is interesting and we can do that another day. I will say this, modern scholarship believe that this section was an addition to Mark by the early church around the 2nd Century. Yet, while it is an addition it still serves as a valid witness to the faith of a Christian Community. Additionally, it’s basic themes of unbelief and commissioning of followers are true to the gospel of Mark and significant to the Church today. Keeping that in mind let us listen for God’s word for us today.....

But First let us pray...

Gracious God, give us believing, teachable, and obedient hearts, that we may receive what you have revealed, and do what you have commanded. Amen.

14 Later he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were sitting at the table; and he upbraided them for their lack of faith and stubbornness, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen.
[c] 15 And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news[d] to the whole creation. 16 The one who believes and is baptized will



be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned. 17 And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; 18 they will pick up snakes in their hands,[e] and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

The Ascension of Jesus

19 So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. 20 And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it

Amen.

Well for all of the prefacing and introduction I did you may have thought I was going to read something a bit more shocking. It does speak about drinking poison and handling snakes which is unusual to us but what we read sound familiar. It doesn't seem too far off from Luke or Matthew. The scene that is described can be found in the other Gospels. The eleven disciples are said to be sitting at the table. This is just like Luke's account of what took place after Jesus died. Christ admonishes them for not believing what he told them and not believing other witness. This is in keeping with a constant theme in Mark. The theme that the disciples were often misunderstanding Jesus's message or wrong in their understanding. So of course, Jesus has to correct them. So while the origin of this text may be in question the spirit of the scripture shows an



understanding of Mark and the other Gospels. It *also* shows that it understands what the Good News is.

In fact, our scripture today speaks directly on the Good News that is the Gospel. In verse 15, Jesus says to the Eleven, “Go in to all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.” Again, we can find this elsewhere in the gospels. It sounds very similar to the Great Commission in Matthew 28, where after his death, Jesus appears to his disciples and says “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.”

So, with Mark 16:15 and Matthew 28: 19-20 but one it seems was selected to become a great end of the church. Both being similar, why would have a group of spirit led Presbyterian, select the lesser known and more contested scripture? Why Mark 16 to create the first great end, “proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind?” Perhaps it is because by using the words found in Mark 16 there is room for interpretation, room for the spirit to allow this to take shape for each individual and each congregation.

What is the Gospel we are to proclaim? I ask this as a rhetorical question because we know. The Gospel is the Good News found in the life of Christ. When we say we believe the good news and we proclaim the gospel we are speaking about or showing the world that humankind has been given grace and is saved by Christ through his death on the cross. We say it each week in our assurance of



pardon, “Friends, Believe the Good News, in Jesus Christ we are forgiven.” We say that as an assurance, a reminder, but also as a conviction. We have faith in God’s forgiveness, God’s grace. And we say it together for the benefit of each other. We say it out loud and together so that when one person mumbles it, unsure if they deserve it or believe it, only they say it because it’s in bold print in the bulletin. That person can hear someone say it a proclamation. Hearing this good news is giving life. It is salvation and it brings salvation.

The Good news should be in everything we do. We can be witnesses to how Christ’s life and death have freed us. We are free to “Go” as the scripture tells us to do. We can go and remind others that Christ is their loving God too and gave all for them. When we spread the Gospel we are reminding people to look at the cross. We use an empty cross to remind of us Christ and God’s work. It is not to ignore the pain and suffering that happened on the cross. It is a reminder that that pain and suffering is not the end. The promise of the resurrection and encountering Christ again has been fulfilled. This hope and belief in this promise is what lead some to want to add to Mark so that it was included for all the hearers. This was a community’s faithful attempt at telling the world and the believer to come, that don’t worry it doesn’t end at the empty tomb and the message not being spread. The promise has been fulfilled and Christ is the savior for you and me and the whole world. This truth is too good not to be shared and it inspires life, action, and proclamation.



Now what does a proclamation mean? What does it mean to proclaim? A proclamation can be public, loud, visible. As the Great End says, this is for all of humankind and Christ told the disciples to share the gospel for all of creation. The Bible is full of examples of faithful believers sharing messages from God or sharing their love for their creator. I think of John the Baptist preparing the people for the coming of Jesus. All the other prophets of the Old Testament trying to have their people understand God's will and seek obedience.

Personally, I especially recall the scene of King David and when the Ark of the Covenant, holding the Ten commandments comes to Jerusalem. For the Israelites, the ark was the lord and having it meant God was with them. So upon its final arrival David led a celebratory parade in to the city. David danced in that procession full of emotion. David had felt jealousy, fear, excitement, joy, and love at the prospect of housing the ark. He was a complicated man but at his core he loved God and at this time he wanted to glorify and obey God. All of this led him to strip off his royal garments and leap and dance with trumpets and sounding leading the Lord, the Ark, in to Jerusalem. David was announcing the Ark coming to God's people. David showed his devotion in his personal actions. David sacrificed burnt offerings to the Lord. David extended these to the all God's people who were present by offering them food and blessed them himself. And when David was chastised by his wife for the show he put on. Remember Michal called his behavior shameless and vulgar. David was not to be deterred and



promised to do more if it would serve and honor God. David would not be deterred by the judgements of others or embarrassment because he knew what was right before the Lord. That is a proclamation. A proclamation in act, word and deed. David praised God, brought the Ark in to the city and shared his blessings with the people around him.

We do the same in our lives and worship of God. I may be talking today about proclaiming the saving death of Christ while just last week we were still talking about Christ's birth. During Christmas, we share with the world the light has come in to the world and Emmanuel God is with Us. Like David, we share the wonderful birth in our actions by taking special care to share our blessings with the world and those around us.

This Great End of the Church has been part of our congregation before a committee got together and decided what would help guide and define us. Before there was the Great Ends, our people heard Christ's words to us to go out and tell the world of Jesus Christ and all that he has given us. We read the scriptures and were led by the spirit like the disciples on that day Christ came to them. In verse 20 of Mark 16, we know the disciples accepted the charge and commission because it says, "They went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere." They went out. They went out and they talked. They went out and they preached. They went out and they worked. We have done similarly and we must continue to do so.



Not every time a believer fulfills the charge from Christ is it loud and obvious like David's celebration. Often times, they are quiet but visible. I think of Henry Bridges, the former organist and choir director here. Henry Bridges helped start Community School for the Arts in our building. He wanted to introduce underserved children of Charlotte to music, art, and dance. Henry saw that we had a large building with pianos to offer to students to practice, so Henry and volunteers invited our neighbors in. When asked about it later in an interview with the Charlotte Observer, Henry spoke on evangelism and said "It is not simply a matter of words. It's also what you do – how you embody the spirit of Christian caring."

Living a life that proclaims the good news means a life outside of ourselves. A Life that focuses on God's will for us and not our will thrust upon the world. The Good News enacted will lead to wonderful acts. In Mark 16, the writer talked about how mighty acts will accompany the baptized believers. These included casting out demons, laying on of hands, speaking in tongues, handling snakes, and drinking poison. While these things can sound fantastical or outrageous to us today, we can consider what they meant to the writers. These were costly, self-denying acts that would accompany the Gospel. They were tangible ways that faithfulness could be confirmed. So what would that look like in our world today? We see it as solidarity with marginalized groups. Supporting and helping people to our own discomfort and risking our security. Helping in ways that make us



inconvenienced. As Henry Bridges said, is about what you do how you embody the spirit of Christian caring.

Yet we also must talk about what a proclamation of the good news is not. We have seen people use the influence of Christianity and the name of Christ in defense of actions that contradict the work of Jesus and his teachings. It is not using scripture to subjugate one group to another. Like so many American pastors and theologians did to defend slavery. It is not blocking people from fulfilling their call from God because of their gender or sexuality. It is not pushing one's will and calling it God's will. It is not using the name of Jesus and the message of the Gospel to justify one's hate. It is not using Jesus' name to get your way. This week, we saw angry people storm the Capitol Building. They used violence and fear in an attempt to achieve their goals. They used the name of Jesus as a shield and as justification, caring signs that stated Jesus Saves. These people's action were not the work that Jesus charged us with. _____ We have begun our bicentennial year and only by believing and trusting in the Gospel could we have thrived for so long. And in 200 years, our congregation has weathered the toughest social, political, and theological issues that have faced our nation. We have seen it and we have lived through it. At our worst moments there was division and distrust. But At our best moments we were a community united in love and understanding for one another. We have been willing to seek the truth and share the truth found in the Gospels with the world.



This is not how you proclaim the Gospel, because the Gospel does not raise one group over another. It does not silence voices of the marginalized. It does not seek injustice as a solution. When the Gospel is proclaimed we are witness to abundant life, love among all creation, peace in differences, and equality, justice, and salvation for all of humankind

There signs were correct. Jesus Saves. Jesus provides grace and forgiveness to us all. Jesus loves us when we are like the disciples who misunderstood and got it wrong.

The Gospel is Christ is our Lord and we are saved by his grace. So do as Jesus told the eleven, “Go and proclaim the good news for all of creation Amen.

