

St. Paul: On The Same page

for 09.14.14

Day One: Acts 5:42

Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.

Our staff chose this verse as a theme for the program year, 2014/15. We have always said that St. Paul desires to be an “outreaching congregation.” It’s the entire reason for our existence. But does this really describe us?



This little image is our effort to represent what the early church was doing in the verse above. They continued “day after day.” Whether day or night, whenever they had opportunity, not just on Sundays, not just on

weekends, but at every chance God gave to them they witnessed to what they knew.

“In the temple courts,” of course they told about Jesus in their worship. But not only in church, they also “from house to house” brought the good news to their neighborhood, and to their workplace. We are called to the center of the City of Ann Arbor, to high rise apartments and to the U of M. We are called to the suburbs and the quiet side streets.

“They never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news...” They never stopped. What does it take to stop us? A school activity? A golf game? Some stuff we wanted to get done around the house? A bit of bad weather?

Jesus has redeemed us, not just for a day, but for every day until eternity. Jesus has given us gifts every single day. Jesus washes away our sins day after day. Don’t we have good news to share every day?

Can we walk together in Jesus, every day?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, let me begin today, and by the power of your Spirit let me continue every day in you. Fill me with good news to share. Amen.*

Day Two: 1 Corinthians 11:1

“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”

We almost never hear this sort of advice anymore. Our culture has absorbed such a heavy dose of egalitarianism that we don't like to think of anyone being before us, or above us. At least not in a way that we would look to them as an example to follow.

Children were once encouraged to imitate George Washington, and never to tell a lie. We were taught to be like Benjamin Franklin and to be early to bed and early to rise. We even aspired to be like Superman who stood for “truth, justice, and the American way!”

But for the last many decades we have paid more attention to the faults of George Washington and the other founding fathers. Even our super-heroes now are flawed characters who are tempted by dark sins or haunted by a dark past. And the “American way,” if there is such a thing, is not considered any better than any other way.

Who would you encourage your children to imitate today? Whose lifestyle could you

confidently hold up as an example of love, honor, kindness, mercy, courage, hard work? As soon as we think we have identified that person, their sins become public.

Instead, Paul says we ought to imitate him – a man who describes himself as the chief of sinners – a man who once persecuted innocent people – who says that he was once a blasphemer. But we are not to imitate all that he does. We don't need to follow his manner of speech or dress, the way many follow a movie star.

No, we are to follow him, as he follows Christ. We are to follow his example of being an imitator of Jesus.

How can we reach others with the good news? Only if they see Jesus in us.

How can they see Jesus in us? He is visible not only through our acts of mercy and generosity, but also through our humble repentance, when they see that we live without the burden of guilt, because Jesus has washed our sin away.

Prayer: *Dearest Shepherd, lead me. And let me lead others to follow you into safe pastures, beside still waters. Lead us together to eternal life. Amen.*

Day Three: Matthew 4:18-22

While walking by the Sea of Galilee, [Jesus] saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen.

¹⁹ And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹ And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them.

²² Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

The booklet "Make Him Known" is serving as the outline for our sermon series on outreach. The author, Andrew Fitzgerald of Lutheran Hour Ministries, begins his first chapter with last week's theme, "Come." There he argues that before we can go out, we have to come in.

In his 2nd chapter he points out that when Jesus called his disciples to be "fishers of men," he first called them to "follow." Before he would send them out, and before they could lead anyone else to Jesus, they

first had to be followers of Jesus themselves.

What does it mean to follow Jesus? That is the definition of a disciple. The moment we believe in Jesus, the moment his Holy Spirit creates faith in us, we have eternal life. But being a disciple is a life-long growing process. We learn to follow, just as Jesus' disciples had to learn.

What do disciples do? Watch them in the gospels. They remain in Jesus' word, listening to him every day. They learn to love the people that Jesus loves. They pray as Jesus prayed. And they begin to see the world through Jesus' eyes.

Instead of seeing fish, and a good income, these men began to see lost crowds of people and to have pity on them. Instead of seeing Gentiles and enemies, they began to see God's lost children. Instead of loss and death, they saw life and gain.

Prayer: *Jesus, Savior, let me be your student. I have often failed, but you can help me learn and grow, and ready me to serve. Amen.*

Day Four: John 13:33-35

Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.'³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

We said that we need to learn to follow Jesus ourselves before we can lead anyone else to Jesus. And one of the aspects of a follower, a disciple, is that we love those whom Jesus loves.

I remember a collection of old folks that I knew as a child. An old man whose hands were badly bent from arthritis, and from playing baseball back in the days before they used gloves. An old lady who was shorter than most of the children, and terribly shy, but very kind. I would not have known or cared about such people on my own. I would not have sought them for friends. But I loved them because my parents loved them. And they loved me because of my parents.

This is how we learn to love. In the 13th chapter of John, it is the night before Jesus' death on the cross. He has just washed his friends' feet. He has told them that he will soon be gone. And now he gives them this new command. He makes sure they realize that these are very important words.

"Love one another, just as I have loved you." And he even says that this will be the way that others will be able to recognize that they are disciples – followers – of Jesus.

Are we followers of Jesus? Are we disciples? If we wish to be, then we need to realize this, that that all that Jesus did was out of a deep love for others as well – including our fellow believers – and including those who make themselves Jesus' enemies.

We need to look about us and see what Jesus sees – people that need his love.

Prayer: *Jesus, you have called the Church your bride and your beloved. Teach me to love your Church, and to love all those who are not yet a part of her. Help me to display your love that invites your sheep to follow you. Amen.*