

New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario
Palm Sunday, September 10, 2017
Rev. Andrew Reid
Psalm 111; Luke 15:1-10
“Go ye, go ye...”

Mission. It's a word you hear a lot in church circles and others. Mission field. Mission trip. Mission statement. Missionaries called to follow Jesus and fish for people in Mark 1:17. The missionary who was told to go back home and tell people how much God had done for him in Luke 8:39. The great commission in Matthew 28:19 to *go therefore and make disciples of all nations...*

Mission has meant different things and taken different forms over the years and through the different approaches and theologies that Jesus' followers have taken. Just think about some of them.

- Saint Jean de Brébeuf, Jesuit missionary to the Huron people of New France, killed in 1649 in a war between the Huron people and the Iroquois people at Ste Marie among the Hurons, and later patron saint of Canada.
- Dr David Livingstone, Scottish missionary and explorer who spent the best part of 32 years travelling through enormous areas of Africa that no European had visited, before developing health problems and dying in 1873, and now greatly respected and fondly remembered in Malawi especially.
- The evangelistic crusades of the 1950s and 1960s in North America and the United Kingdom that came to prominence under the work of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, and the enormous impact they had on churches in general and the evangelical movement in particular.
- The work of Mother Theresa, now St Theresa of Calcutta, and the Missionaries of Charity, the order she established, serving the poorest of the poor –refugees, former prostitutes, the mentally ill, sick and abandoned children, people with leprosy and AIDS, without charge and regardless of religion or social status.
- The mission trips that became popular in the last couple of decades of the 20th century and into the 21st century, that allowed people to experience church life in different cultures and lands. I am fascinated and

excited when I hear of mission trips now being organised by countries that were once the targets of these trips, now sending people back on mission to countries that once were sending people out on mission trips.

Mission. Evangelism. The sharing of the Gospel. Reaching out in the name of Jesus Christ to touch human need with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Mission can take many forms. What is that saying again? Preach the Gospel at all times. Use words if necessary.

Several years ago, I saw a post on Facebook that irritated me at first. It was from a colleague who announced that he had decided that his congregation was not going to be a welcoming congregation any more. Instead, it was going to be an inviting congregation. Rather than waiting till people came through the doors and being nice to them, he was telling people to— well, not exactly to go out into the highways and byways and compel people to come in, but certainly to go out and invite people, and encourage people, and attract people to come.

Which brings us round to the Gospel lesson for today. Because Jesus' parables about the lost sheep and the lost coin are about being inviting, not welcoming; about getting up and going and searching, not sitting back and waiting till the things that we seek show up of their own accord; about being proactive, not reactive.

I said last week that my plan for my remaining Sundays in this pulpit is to revisit some of my favourite texts, and that as I began to prepare, I was delighted to see how that would allow me to honour so many things in the life and ministries of New St James. This week is a perfect example of this.

Over the past year, one of the things that really opened my eyes and kind of blew my mind – though it shouldn't have done either of these things –is the realisation of the number of mission and service activities New St James people are engaged in, both in the congregation and in the wider community. Count 'em all up and the final total is – or was, at the last count – in the mid 80s.

And there are some more to add to that, new activities in our life and ministries that are just getting under way this fall. Activity Day has been up and running for a while, but starts again on Tuesday. Likewise, Indoor Playground starts up again on Wednesday. As does Junior Youth on Wednesday. A brand new Mom's Group starts up for the very first time on Thursday. Senior Youth starts on Wednesday of next week. A seven week session of boys' basketball – another brand new activity – starts up on October 16. And today we begin a new season of Church School.

In a few minutes, we will honour the two young boys who are moving up from nursery into the regular church school programme. And then we will commission our teachers and leaders as well as our students. And we will commit ourselves as well as a congregation, to support the program, the teachers, the leaders and the students, with our prayer, our encouragement, our interest and our compassion.

The ministry we exercise among our children and young people is itself one of our missions as a community of faith. If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a congregation to raise a person of faith. It's your mission too.

I was sorely tempted by an article I read a while ago. So much so that I may just give in to that particular temptation before I am done. It was about a congregation that had decided to post signs around the church building, directing people to different places and activities that went on in the building: the office, the washrooms, the nursery, the fellowship hall, that kind of thing.

When they completed the task, they stood back and congratulated one another on the great job they had all done, and admired their handiwork. When they arrived for worship the next Sunday, they discovered that the minister added a sign of her own. On the back of every exterior door, the doors that people came face to face with as they left the building, she added the same sign. It read: you are now entering the mission field.