

Our VISION: Personal Global Evangelism

(Week 1 of 2 on “Personally Shares the Gospel Locally and Globally”)

Matthew 28:18-20 on October 20, 2024

Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson

Please read Matthew 28:18-20 before going further in this manuscript. Before I jump into this morning’s sermon, I want to express my sincere appreciation for so many of you who worked so incredibly hard on our church’s 100 Year Anniversary Celebration! What an incredible weekend of 8 events over 4 days! Praise the Lord for His goodness and His faithfulness to E-Free Bemidji! A number of people have requested a copy of the Responsive Recommitment that we made together last week, so we’ve included it as an insert in today’s bulletin.^{1 2} At E-Free Bemidji, we share a commitment to following Jesus together for another 100 years! We’re “Becoming Deeply Devoted Followers of Jesus Together.”

In honor of last week’s celebration, we took a brief pause from our new Strategic Ministry Plan. So today we’re going to resume considering where God is leading our church in the future. In fact, could we all please take out the green and white infographic from today’s bulletin?³ Next Sunday, at our Congregational Meeting, we’ll be voting to affirm our Mission, Vision, Core Values, and Discipleship Pathway. Here’s what it will look like on the ballot:

Vote to Affirm: Based on the recommendation of the Strategic Leadership Team and the Elder Board we affirm the stated Mission, Vision, Core Values, and Discipleship Pathway as illustrated on the infographic and detailed in the Strategic Ministry Plan.

Circle YES or NO

If you’re interested in more detail than what’s summarized in the 1-page infographic, copies of our Strategic Ministry Plan are still available on a table in our Connection Café or contact our church office to request one. Please keep praying for God to direct our church, and to reveal His good, pleasing, and perfect will for us. If you have any final questions or input about this plan, please contact one of our elders, or one of the members of our Strategic Leadership Team (their names are listed on page 6 of today’s bulletin).

¹ <https://efcbemidji.org/article/bulletin-october-20-2024/>

² This would be a great document to tuck away in your Bible, or to put up on your fridge, as a regular reminder of our shared commitment to following Jesus together.

³ <https://efcbemidji.org/article/bulletin-october-20-2024/>

Some of you will remember that two weeks ago Pastor Eric preached on our core values, focusing in on the top one: God's Glory.⁴ In his sermon, he explained how God's Glory is the paramount value from which all of our other values derive their importance. In relation to today's message, God is glorified by our final core value of "evangelizing the lost." This matches up well with the final bullet point in our vision Statement: We will be a church who "personally shares the gospel locally and globally." So we're going to take some time today, and next Sunday, to carefully consider what it means for our church to commit to sharing the gospel. We'll talk about sharing locally next week; today's sermon focuses on sharing globally, on "Personal Global Evangelism."

Last month we zeroed in on the 4 G's in our Discipleship Pathway: GATHER, GROW, GIVE, and GO. And we made it clear that what makes these 4 G's so incredibly powerful, is that the 5th G, the Gospel G, is embedded at the very roots of each one of them. So today we want to consider how we can "GO with the gospel," and specifically how we can GO GLOBALLY.

Personal Global Evangelism means that each Christ-follower should...

1) Be involved in global evangelism.

2 Corinthians 2:14-16 says, "But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task?"⁵ The point here is that we're not simply talking about traveling to some other part of the globe so that we can enjoy their food and the culture and the scenery. Nor do we mean simply having a few friends who were born or raised in a different part of the world. What we mean is actively *evangelizing* people who are from a different part of the world, actively spreading the aroma of the knowledge of Christ. So we need to let go of the security of what's familiar to us and comfortable for us, and go out with the gospel to foreign people, even those who live in the most challenging, difficult, faraway places.

Evangelism means investing our lives in very specific ways in order to share and declare the gospel. Investing our blood, sweat, and tears for complete strangers, for foreigners who look and talk and believe, much differently than we do. Evangelism means not being CONTENT with

⁴ That sermon is available here: <https://efcbemidji.org/sermon/declare-his-glory/>

⁵ Verse 17 goes on, "Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God." In John 20:21 Jesus tells His followers, "...As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

keeping the gospel to ourselves, not growing PASSIVE about our mission to reach the lost, and not becoming spiritually IMPOTENT in making new disciples. You see, God hasn't rescued us from our sins just so that we can live good, honest, moral lives, and enjoy His blessings for ourselves. He's rescued us, and kept us here on planet earth, for a purpose: so that we can tell the world about God's love and goodness, and so that we can warn them about how they can be saved from God's coming wrath, through faith in Jesus Christ. We've been commissioned, by our Lord and Savior, to reach out to the spiritually lost all around the globe. Jesus is the one and only hope for this world, not just for Bemidji, or Minnesota, or the United States, but for this whole entire world. And as followers of Jesus we've been given the privilege, and the responsibility, of being involved in global *evangelism*.

Personal Global Evangelism also means that each Christ-follower should...

2) Be involved in evangelism globally.

There's no reason to think that we should limit our gospel sharing to our immediate surroundings. Jesus makes it clear to His disciples, that their *gospel* mandate is a *global* mandate. In Acts 1:8, He teaches them, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Imagine what our world would be like today without the missionary efforts of the early church, without Paul's missionary journeys, or without the missionary efforts over the past 2,000 years. How would the gospel have gotten all the way up into northern Minnesota without intentional, sacrificial efforts by God's missionary and church planting forces? Today's EFCA history video is a wonderful reminder of our church's missionary roots, and the missionary zeal that's fostered the spread and planting of local churches all around the world.⁶

Jesus' words in Matthew 28 have grown quite familiar to many of us, perhaps *too* familiar, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...." WHY "all nations"? Why not just their own Jewish nation? Why ALL nations? Why include the ungodly nations, and the pagan nations that border the nation of Israel? And why include the nations thousands of miles away? I'll tell you why: because "God so loved THE WORLD," that's why. Pastor and theologian, John Stott, addressed God's heart for "all nations" in an opening speech at an event called Urbana back in 1976. It was titled: "The Living God is a *missionary* God."⁷ His words are just as profoundly relevant for us today, as they were some 50 years ago: "Millions of people

⁶ You can watch this video here: <https://helps.efca.org/resources/this-is-our-story-video>

⁷ Read Stott's full article here:

https://perspectivesonmission.com/resources/Session02_Stott_TheLivingGodIsAMissionaryGod.pdf

in today's world are extremely hostile to the Christian missionary enterprise. They regard it as politically disruptive (because it loosens the cement which binds the national culture) and religiously narrowminded (because it makes exclusive claims for Jesus), while those who are involved in it are thought to suffer from an arrogant imperialism. And the attempt to convert people to Christ is rejected as an unpardonable interference in their private lives. "My religion is my own affair," they say. "Mind your own business, and leave me alone to mind mine."⁸

Now if we were to accept this open rejection of global evangelism, then I suppose there wouldn't be any need for today's sermon. I suppose we could just "live and let live," and focus all of our time and attention on ourselves, and what happens within these church walls. But, if Stott is correct that our God is indeed a "missionary God," then keeping the gospel to ourselves isn't really an option, is it? Stott goes on in his speech to mention that God's missionary concern goes back at least as far as Genesis 12:1-3,⁹ "The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (*A promised blessing that was fulfilled in Christ.*)

This promise can be traced through Abraham's Jewish ancestry right up on through the coming of the world's Jewish Savior and Messiah, Jesus Christ. But God's missionary heart wasn't content to save the Jews only. From the very beginning, His sovereign plan of salvation was for all peoples, for all the families of the earth, for all nations. Scripture reveals God's missionary heart, not only early on, but all throughout.^{10 11 12} Later on in history, the Apostle Paul says this in Galatians 3:7-8: "Understand, then,

⁸ John Stott, *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3rd Ed., William Carey Library, Pasadena, CA, p. 3.

⁹ In fact, it goes even further back to God's first gospel promise in Genesis 3:15.

¹⁰ I appreciate how Stott further explains that "we should never allow ourselves to forget that the Bible begins with the universe, not with the planet earth; then with the earth, not with Palestine; then with Adam the father of the human race, not with Abraham the father of the chosen race. Since, then, God is the Creator of the universe, the earth and all mankind, we must never demote him to the status of a tribal deity or petty godling... Nor must we suppose that God chose Abraham and his descendants because he had lost interest in other peoples or given them up. ...On the contrary...God chose one man and his family in order, through them, to bless all the families of the earth." John Stott, *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3rd Ed., William Carey Library, Pasadena, CA, p. 4.

¹¹ Consider Genesis 17:5 where God changes Abram's name BECAUSE He made Abraham a father of MANY nations. (Abraham means "father of a multitude" John Stott, *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3rd Ed., William Carey Library, Pasadena, CA, p. 4.)

¹² Later on in Acts 3:24-25, the Apostle Peter says it this way: "Indeed, beginning with Samuel, all the prophets who have spoken have foretold these days. And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.'" The offspring being referred to here is Jesus. Through the Jewish man Jesus, "all peoples on earth will be blessed." Consider Matthew 8:11.

that those who have faith are children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” Stott states it plainly: “We need to become *global* Christians with a *global* vision, for we have a *global* God.”¹³

Global missions is the very heartbeat of God for this lost and fallen world. So we dare not adopt an aloof or indifferent attitude toward global evangelism; we dare not allow our church to wane in its commitment to missions. We can’t afford to detach ourselves from the compelling global dimension of the gospel, as though the people living on the other side of the globe are someone else’s problem – “let someone else take care of them, and we’ll take care of those living on our side of the planet.” Anyone who wants to become a deeply devoted follower of Jesus needs to develop *a global vision for the gospel.*¹⁴

Personal Global Evangelism means that each Christ-follower should...

3) Be personally involved in global evangelism.

Personally means that each individual follower of Jesus has the privilege, and the responsibility, to be directly involved in Global Evangelism. To be clear, not indirectly, by simply writing a check or whatever and sending someone else, but directly, personally involved. Now, some of us might be thinking, “But Pastor Jerry, aren’t some of us called to live a simple, local life.¹⁵ I mean, we can’t *all* go! Some of us need to hang back and support those who are being sent out, right?” Well... yes and no. Yes, there is something special about those who are particularly called and gifted to be sent out as Global Partners. Absolutely! But here’s the thing: just because

¹³ John Stott, *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, 3rd Ed.*, William Carey Library, Pasadena, CA, p. 9.

¹⁴ As I was reading through our new 100-year church history document this week, I couldn’t help but pause and re-read page 10. It talked about a challenging season in our church’s history around 1984-1985. It sounded strangely familiar, and applicable, to the season our church is in currently. Page 10 begins by noting that “1984 turned out to be the year of pause.” It then goes on to mention that financial giving was down compared to previous years, and the church had to fall back on a contingency budget. Despite this, the page then goes on to highlight missions and outreach. In fact, it’s a bit startling just how much emphasis missions in particular was given. Here’s a partial excerpt from the bottom of page 10: “...around the globe is where our church’s interest and ministry went in 1985. ...Senior High youth... heard a report on a dental team’s visit to Honduras. The church heard reports on Urbana summer mission, the Bemidji Refugee Task Force, ...and Sudan Interior Mission’s work in Ethiopia. One Sunday evening Bibles were packed in boxes for sending to Uganda and Chile. The new sheet, Church Around the World, began being inserted regularly into the bulletin and a special Thanksgiving offering was sent to missions.” In other words, despite some significant financial challenges in the mid 80s, our church ramped up its commitment to Personal Global Evangelism. Even though we may not have been fully on track financially, we made sure that we were fully on track with God’s gospel purposes in the world. This is a good reminder for us today, and it sets a good example of keeping our gospel priorities straight, regardless of finances or other challenging circumstances.

¹⁵ In fact, in 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 Paul urges the believers to “make it your ambition to lead a quiet life....”

we've sent others out, that doesn't mean that our role in "Personal Global Evangelism" is complete, not by a long shot.

Now, before we immediately jump to all of the many ways that we can support global evangelism *without* actually going ourselves, let's stop and think about this. Why not you? Why only other people? One of the most wise, and God-honoring things, that each one of us can do, is surrender our lives fully to God's will (to deny ourselves, and take up our cross). James 4:13-15 reminds us, "Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." Anyone who considers themselves a deeply devoted follower of Jesus, should seriously, and prayerfully, consider whether God may be calling him or her to the mission field. Given God's missionary heart for all nations, He is likely calling some of the people who are listening to this sermon right now. In fact, it's quite possible that He's calling MANY of us to go. (Wouldn't that be a GREAT way for our church to go DOWN in attendance!? If 50 or 100 people from our church left Bemidji to head out and do Global Evangelism!? That wouldn't be a bad thing at all.)

Now, beyond going out as an official, long-term Global Partner, there are also many opportunities to go on a short-term Global Evangelism trip. This is a fantastic way to participate personally. In fact, if you've been following Jesus for more than 5-10 years, and you've never gone on a short-term missions trip, then I would be so bold as to suggest that this may be stifling your growth and maturity as a follower of Jesus. There's simply no better way to truly understand and experience God's missionary heart, than going out globally and sharing the gospel personally. I realize that not all of us may have the ability to go overseas to do evangelism. However, many, many, many of us, do have the ability, so the majority of us listening to this sermon, should seriously, prayerfully, consider it. At a minimum, at least get out of the Bemidji area; outside of Beltrami or Hubbard County, or even outside of the state of MN. Let's take advantage of some opportunity to make a gospel impact beyond our own Jerusalem and Judea, somewhere a little more on par with "the ends of the earth."

Let's close with some specific ways to get involved with "Personal Global Evangelism":

1) Prayerfully consider if God is calling you to long-term missions.

2) Prayerfully consider if God is calling you to short-term missions. I urge you to pester our Global Connections Team about when they're offering our next short-term missions opportunity. Or pester one of our church staff. Pastor Eric would absolutely love it if you asked him about this. You could also research a trip with Reach Global Crisis Response. They are doing various ministry and storm relief in response to Hurricane Helene, and the Maui Wildfire, and several others as well.¹⁶

3) Sponsor a Global Fingerprints child.

4) Join our Global Connections Team and/or join a Barnabas Team. Barnabas teams are a key way to encourage and support our various Global Partners, named after the disciple Barnabas, the "Son of Encouragement."

5) Read and study about Global Evangelism. There's a Recommended Resource list in today bulletin. You could also simply watch for this theme of God's missionary heart as you read your own Bible. It's all over the place in Scripture.

6) Get a Global Partner Flipbook and pray through it. Everyone who considers E-Free Bemidji their home church should be praying through our flipbook. If you're not praying through it, why not? If we're a deeply devoted follower of Jesus, then surely we should want our hearts to resonate with the missionary heart of God, and be praying concerning His work around the world.

7) Sign our new Adoption Certificate for our Adopted People group in South Asia.

Once again, if you consider E-Free Bemidji your home church, then you should sign our adoption certificate and officially commit to praying for and supporting our ministry to our adopted people.

¹⁶ Learn more here: <https://crisis-response.ministries.efca.org/>

This mission to reach the entire world with the gospel of Jesus Christ is an incredibly audacious undertaking, but it flows directly out of the gospel mandate given by our Lord Jesus! It's such a huge mission though, it may cause us to wonder, how in the world are we ever going to get it done?

In Matthew 28, Jesus gives us two key encouragements:

1) Go, on my authority. (Matthew 28:18-19)

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go.” So clearly we're not sharing the gospel on our own authority, or under our own power. We're under the authority and power of Jesus Christ, and He has commissioned us to act on HIS authority. Jesus also said:

2) Surely I am with you. (Matthew 28:20)

“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Jesus gave this encouragement, just a short while before He ascended into heaven, and left His disciples behind on the earth. But clearly He didn't leave them to figure things out on their own. In other words, not only has Jesus commissioned us to “Personal Global Evangelism,” but He remains with us to help us with our commission. Jesus continues to be our Emmanuel, “God with us,” so we needn't be intimidated or overwhelmed by this incredibly audacious undertaking.¹⁷ As God enables and empowers us, and as He provides us with opportunities, let's evangelize the lost, and let's commit ourselves to ***Personal Global Evangelism***.¹⁸

¹⁷ In Acts 1, Jesus told His disciples not to leave for the mission field, until they received the gift our Heavenly Father promised. He's referring to the promised Holy Spirit, who empowers us as believers for “Personal Global Evangelism.”

¹⁸ A number of people have told me recently that they're already preparing for Christmas. Believe it or not, Advent season is only about 6 weeks away, and we're looking forward to remembering back to when Jesus first came to this earth. A number of other people have also told me recently, that they're looking forward to Jesus' 2nd coming. With all of the difficult things that are happening in our world these days, Jesus' return doesn't seem too far away. With these two key historical events in mind, let me ask you a question: between Jesus 1st coming, and His 2nd coming, what are we supposed to be doing with our time? Dear Friends, the answer is obvious: We're supposed to be evangelizing the lost, we're supposed to be personally sharing the gospel both locally and globally.