

## **“Are You on the Travel Team?”**

Luke 4:16-30

Essentials for Frontline Workers

Week 6. Sharing with Others By Giving and Serving

The Rev. Douglas C. Hoglund

The Woodside Church

March 28, 2021

Thirteen thousand. That’s how many fans can cram into Crisler Arena in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The thousands who sit in those seats have seen many historic events. In 1971, John Lennon, Yoko Ono and hometown boy Bob Seeger performed a protest rally there. In 1980, I saw Bruce Springsteen start The River tour there. Hometown boy Bob Seeger also sang. And in April, 1983, the most earthshattering event was the graduation of Doug and Lisa Hoglund in Crisler Arena...although for some reason you won’t find that on Wikipedia. The guest speaker was hometown boy Bob Seeger. Actually it was Lee Iacocca – the head of Chrysler...which seems appropriate for Crisler Arena.

Yet what Crisler Arena is most known for is being the home of the University of Michigan Men’s and Women’s Basketball teams. Today, March 28, at 5 pm the Michigan Men’s Basketball team will take on Florida State University in NCAA’s Sweet Sixteen Tournament in Indianapolis. Now with all the home field advantage going for them at Crisler Arena, why in the world would the Wolverines take a risk by going down to Indianapolis? Wouldn’t it be better to stay at home and play before screaming Mazin’ Blue Wolverines? Sounds like a winning formula. There’s only one problem: if the team doesn’t travel to Indy and show up on the court tonight, they forfeit the game.

So why do millions of Christians think the point of church is to only gather in our building, to serve God only where we have home field advantage? Every team in every sport plays about half their games at home. Yet all teams must also travel to the opposing team’s field if they want to be in the game. When the Church of Jesus started, there was no home field advantage. There were no church buildings. Christians always played out on the world’s field. They faced intense opposition, sometimes in real stadiums against gladiators and lions. Yet the church grew exponentially. But in the fourth century A.D., when the entire Roman Empire became Christian, the Church began to build sanctuaries. Nothing wrong with that. For the first time we had a home field advantage. Unfortunately, it was not long before the word church became synonymous with the building. Now Christians say, “I go to church” or “My church is on the corner of Edgewood and Heacock Roads” or “Church is on Sunday at 9, 10, 10:30 a.m. or 6 p.m.” We think church only occurs in this place. We like the home field advantage so much we decided to stay here for good. Yet like basketball, when it comes to faith, that’s a forfeit. The mission of Christianity is not to get players and spectators into our building, but to get our team out into the world. Covid is proving if church only happens in the building it’s not going to last. We have to take our faith to the frontline.

As Frontline workers for Jesus, these are the Essentials: To Love God, Grow in Grace and Share with Others. That’s our mission. Jesus equips us with six tools: Loving God is Worship – “Am I Gathering with Believers Frequently to Worship?” and Prayer – “Am I Praying Daily?” Growing in Grace is Welcoming – “Am I Welcoming All

People?” and Learning God’s Word – “Am I in a Growth Group?” Today we focus on Sharing with Others which involves Giving – “Am I Sharing My Spiritual and Financial Gifts?” Serving: “Am I serving others and inviting them to follow Jesus?” Instead of keeping our faith on the home field, Jesus wants us to take it out to the frontline. His question to us is: “Are you on the travel team?”

Today is Palm Sunday, the end of Jesus’ three year mission. Yet I want to take you back to the beginning. When leaders launch a campaign for office or throw a victory party on election night, they usually choose their hometown. When the winner is sworn into office, it’s customary to deliver an inaugural speech to outline the priorities and goals of the new administration. Jesus launches His three-year ministry by preaching on the essentials of His mission as the Messiah. He delivers His inaugural address in the arena you would expect Him to have the best home field advantage: Nazareth. Unfortunately, it doesn’t turn out that way.

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. Luke 4:14-16

After His baptism by John, Jesus returns to the tiny village where he spent the first thirty years of his life. The buzz about Him is spreading like wildfire. The question is whispered everywhere: is Jesus of Nazareth the Messiah? Will He choose their humble village synagogue to reveal His true identity? Every eye is riveted on Jesus as He carefully selects a passage:

He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” Luke 4:16-21

So Jesus does reveal He is the Messiah, the Anointed One. Using the prophecy of Isaiah, He describes what His Kingdom will be like. He does not declare war on the Romans. His focus is not on the high and mighty but on the lost and lowly, not on the rich and famous but on the poor and nameless.

**Jesus’ Mission is to Share Good News and Good Deeds.** Of all the passages Jesus could choose, He selects one which says He is anointed to “proclaim good news to the poor” followed quickly by freedom for prisoners, healing for the blind, and deliverance for the oppressed. Jesus is all about Show and Tell. He never separates

showing Good Deeds from telling Good News. All four categories - poor, prisoners, blind and oppressed - refer to both physical and spiritual conditions. Jesus ministers to both.

For some reason, the Church today is divided into two extremes. On one side there are churches which only tell the Good News to save people's souls. On the other hand there are churches which only do Good Deeds to meet physical needs. It's either/or. Baptists and non-denominational churches tend to fall in the first camp while Presbyterians, Methodists and Lutherans make up the second. Yet why must it be one or the other? Why must we choose between meeting people's spiritual needs and their physical needs? Imagine flying in a plane at 30,000 feet and the pilot suddenly comes on the p.a. and says, "Ladies and Gentlemen, we've decided it's really unnecessary for us to have two wings on this plane. The crew and I took a vote and decided we are going to be a left wing plane so we'll be dropping the right wing momentarily. Enjoy the rest of your flight...it'll just last a few more minutes." Everyone knows you need both wings to soar. When the Church shares Good Deeds *and* Good News it soars with the Spirit.

At its brightest moments, the Church shared Good News and Good Deeds. When the Roman Empire persecuted the first Christians, they responded by caring for orphans, slaves, children who were left to die. In AD 165, a pandemic called the Antonine Plague devastated the Roman Empire killing 5,000 people a day in Rome. The Empire lost 20% of its population. Christians cared for the victims of the plague tossed out by their families. These acts of compassion won many hearts and eventually the whole empire over to the Lord. In fifth century Ireland, a former slave named Patrick preached from one end of the Emerald Isle to the other. St Patrick was the first to speak against the Irish slave trade. He planted 700 churches, ordained 1,000 priests and saw 150 tribes come to Christ. Near the end of his life the slave trade ended and murder and violence decreased.

At the time of our American Revolution, John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, led revivals which brought thousands to Christ, campaigned for prison and labor reform, promoted the building of orphanages and schools, battled the slave trade, provided medicines and treatments to the poor and gave away nearly all his wealth to the needy. He preached to his middle class followers,

If those who gain all they can, and save all they can, will likewise give all they can; then, the more they gain, the more they will grow in grace, and the more treasure they will lay up in heaven.<sup>1</sup>

We don't do good deeds in order to get them to believe the Good News. Sharing the message of salvation is our ultimate motive but not our *ulterior* motive. We serve people and invite them to follow Jesus because that's what Jesus did.

I was recently invited to join the Board of Trustees for the Outreach Foundation – a global mission organization with roots in the Presbyterian Church. It was through the Outreach Foundation that Woodside heard about and supported the Holistic Evangelism Project in Tete Province Mozambique. You may remember visits from Sebber Banda and

---

<sup>1</sup> Rick Rusaw & Eric Swanson, *The Externally Focused Church* (Loveland, CO: Group, 2004) 115.

the late Nedson Zulu. They are transforming thousands of lives by planting 80 churches, digging wells, training pastors and elders, teaching on health education and AIDS prevention, and providing safer child birth. And you have been part of all of that through your gifts. This is only one of Outreach's many mission partners in Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Latin America. Giving and Sharing Good News and Good Deeds – that's what it means to be on Jesus' travel team.

You'd think everyone would agree. Yet not everyone thinks the Church exists to go out and serve the lost and the least. Some believe the mission of the Church is to take care of me and my family. Jesus found this belief in his hometown. It was no home field advantage. At first, they loved what He said,

All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked. (Luke 4: 22)

Can you imagine their pride? 'Our little Jesus is going to be the Messiah.' 'I always said he would be great someday, didn't I Gertrude?' 'I was his first grade Sunday school teacher.' Their pride swelled so big they almost couldn't get out of the synagogue. But the next thing Jesus said burst their bubble:

Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself!' And you will tell me, 'Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'" "Truly I tell you," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian." (Luke 4:23-27)

Translation: my Kingdom is not just for Jews. It's for Gentiles too. The people in the Nazareth synagogue saw themselves as the poor, imprisoned and oppressed. They believed God sent the Messiah to save them *from* the Gentiles. They never dreamed God intended to save the Gentiles. When they cried for justice they really meant just-us.

All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. (Luke 4:28-30)

Imagine that: the people of Jesus' hometown were among the first who tried to kill Him. They wouldn't be the last. What started in Nazareth ends this Holy week in Jerusalem.

Make no mistake, if you follow Jesus and start sharing Good News and Good Deeds you will face opposition. The world is in a mess and some in power will not like you cleaning it up. But at the end of the day, which side would you rather be on? Ignoring hunger or investing in hope? Avoiding need or planting seeds? Running from doubts or reaching out with faith? Throwing up your hands or rolling up your sleeves?

Next Sunday we begin our celebration of Woodside's 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. This is not a time to pat ourselves on the back but to reach out our hands. As we start to arise out of Covid, let this be our rebirth. Starting on Easter, I ask everyone to pray and read the Book of Acts over the next 75 days. We will learn from the birth of the Church in Acts how we can be reborn as a church today. Are you willing to sign up for Jesus' travel team? If so, here are some next steps:

1. Invite someone to Easter services online or in person through a personal invitation or social media.
2. Download and follow the 75 Day Prayer and Scripture Calendar
3. Join a Growth Group or Start a Microchurch
4. Sign Up for one of the Mission Projects during the 75 Days of Service.

Woodside is known for its travel teams. Sue Harris Miller tells about one last week:

This past Sunday, March 21, TASK and NJ Rise worked together to host the second "Rise to the TASK" drive-thru food distribution in East Windsor, NJ. More than 100 volunteers worked together to distribute 100,000 pounds of food to roughly 1,320 families to help to alleviate food insecurity in Trenton and the greater Mercer County region. Each family received more than 60 pounds of groceries including milk and juice; fish and poultry; paper towels; and a variety of fresh produce. It was a wonderful day serving others and God blessed us with beautiful weather on top of it all!

Let's get out the stands and onto the field!