

Beyond These Walls

Romans 15:1-8

This is the Sunday when we are having an abbreviated sermon so that we not only worship God, but we can tend to some important matters upcoming in our congregation. We would like all the ladies to remain seated here in the auditorium after the dismissal prayer and all men and children head to the basement.

As the Elders have mentioned repeatedly 2020 is going to be a year that we refocus on reaching out to the lost. I want to give you an introduction to a sermon series that we will be preaching in weeks to come. Our God is a welcoming God. He welcomes all who believe that Jesus is the Son of God, confess that fact, repent of their sins and are baptized to have sin washed away into His family. While He lived on earth, Jesus always welcomed anyone into His presence.

With Jesus as our example, we should never be shy about welcoming others. Whether it's welcoming friends into our home, visitors into our church, or just saying hello to a stranger on the street, as Christians we should display the welcoming attitude of God.

Historically, churches of Christ have been very good about sharing the good news with others. In the last 30 years however, we've fallen away from that as our emphasis and taken on the role of keepers of the aquarium. Brethren, we're not that, we're fishers of men. That word picture is one of men and women who are constantly fishing!! Not watching fish already caught.

West Side is a very caring, welcoming group of Christians. We have a fellowship and work here second to none. I've heard often from visitors how comfortable they were made to feel and how loving the folks here are. I agree with that analysis completely. Joyce and I are in Akron, OH in December rather than Hawaii for that very reason!! We chose to come to the frozen tundra that is Akron over paradise because of the love of the members of this church!! We know that love first hand as you have shared it with us for more than a decade now. No argument there.

The problem is I believe we have relied on that element of our work to be our focus and we have gotten away from outreach. In the movie “Field of Dreams” a spooky voice says, “if you build it, they will come”. We in the church have for quite some time felt that if we build a nice building, make our membership friendly and have a decent speaker and a few programs then our work is done. That is a great way to keep saved people saved but it really is not a good way to “seek and save the lost”. We’ve reduced it to “if we build it, they will come” yet Jesus sent out His people to find those who were asking, seeking and knocking. We have a responsibility to share what we know with others.

I want to call to your remembrance that at one time in your life you were as lost as anyone could be. Even if you were raised in the church you at some point realized what you needed to do to wash away that sin. We live in a nation of 300+ million folks. Polls say there are about 1.5 million of us Christians. I’d suggest that the fields are white to harvest!! Everyone you meet pretty much is lost. What can you do about it?? That is the question that I hope we can work on together in the months to come.

I’m not a “professional personal worker” by any means. But I am a Christian. I’m not a Bible Scholar, but I am a good Bible Student. I’m not a great orator, but I can talk. What am I lacking?? **Time?** We all have exactly 168 hours per week – no more, no less. **Talent?** Everyone has at least the knowledge of what they did to become a Christian and can share that if nothing else. **Desire?** I cannot imagine a single person in this audience that would be willing to say that they don’t care if people go to hell. We all want people saved.

Harry Pickup once told me that when he first started preaching the hardest thing in the world for him was to begin a conversation with someone about their soul. He said he always felt awkward. I asked him how all that changed. He said, “son, I did not suggest to you that it had changed, did I?” Here was a preacher of 60 years who still found it awkward to broach the subject with others!!

So, what are we going to do? How are we going to start this process of beginning something that we find awkward and cumbersome? Should we begin with an evangelistic program? We can ask several groups to come work with us for a month and see what they can help us do. We can start having gospel meetings and hire a man to come and preach for a few days with some special messages. We can have lectureships and talk about current events considering God's word. Or, we can accept the challenge the NT give us to go out and share with others like our brethren in the first century did.

Brethren, I'm going to suggest that we adopt a theme of "Beyond These Walls". Yeah, I know there are denominations that are using that title to go out into the streets and even have street churches by that name. Nonetheless, it is what we must do if we are to fulfil the mission that God gave each of us to do.

I want to challenge each of you this morning to take time this afternoon after you have lunch to sit for a half hour with a pen and paper and write down the names of 10 people that you know that are outside Christ that you would like to see come into the kingdom. As you write their names picture them in your mind. Think of your part in this. See them coming up out of the water of baptism washed clean of their sins in the blood of Jesus and know you had a part in this process.

I want to assure you of this. If you feel inadequate, if you feel apprehensive, if you feel uncomfortable – welcome to evangelism. I'll also assure you of this. If you approach someone and feel that you need help, you have four elders here – two of whom are preachers – who would help in any way possible to bring a soul to Jesus. Just let us know. We want to grow the West Side congregation to 120 in 2020. We know this is an achievable number because we serve an Omnipotent God and His word is the power to salvation. But we must go to work.

I'll have more on this subject in weeks to come. Pray – pray – pray for the work here and for those who have not named the name of Jesus.

