

“Core Values: Making Christ Known”

Isaiah 12:1-6 • 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • March 5, 2017

This morning we're looking at the last of our core values as a church. Last week we talked about the importance of knowing Christ and what that means. Today we want to talk about the value that makes up the second half of our mission statement: Making Christ known.

All of our core values are important, which is why we have them. And I don't want to say that this one is more important than the others. But I think perhaps making Christ known carries a little more weight because it's not just a value, it's an action. It's why we exist as a church and it's our job as Christians, as followers of Jesus. After his resurrection and just before he ascended to heaven Jesus was with his disciples and he said, "Go make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." The book of Acts is really about those disciples doing just that.

But Jesus intends for you and I to do the same thing. WE are charged with making disciples. WE are to help other people meet and follow Jesus. This is what the Apostle Paul means in this passage from 2 Corinthians 5 when he says, "we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us." We've been hearing in the news a lot about ambassadors over the past few days. That's because an ambassador is an official representative of his home country. The ambassador's job is to promote his own country's interests to the country in which he serves.

Paul is saying that you and I are official ambassadors for the Kingdom of Heaven. We are to represent Jesus here in this world, which is not our home, promoting Christ's interests. As Paul says, God is making his appeal through us. Our job description as ambassadors is to make Christ known and so this morning we're going to talk about how we go about doing that. But first, I think it's important to point out that

you aren't going to be very successful making known what you yourself don't know. That's why last week we talked about knowing Christ.

In theology we talk about the person and work of Christ. What that really means is "who is Jesus and what did he accomplish?" If you were here last week hopefully you remember that we talked about who Jesus is. The Bible is very clear that Jesus is God incarnate – God in person. In fact, Jesus said that about himself. He said, "If you've seen me you've seen the Father." He even reminded them that the kinds of works that he did are things only God can do.

But we're also interested in why Jesus came here. What was his mission, his purpose? Paul spells it out pretty clearly in verse 21. "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Jesus came to deal with the problem of sin. He came to fix our broken relationship with God. In verse 18 he tells us that through Christ God reconciled us to himself. Because of sin you and I are alienated from God. But because of Jesus' life and death and resurrection we are reconciled to God. That's good news. That's THE good news. And it's good news that we want other people to know. So we value making Christ known. We have said that "We believe the primary mission of the Church and the calling of all Christians is to make disciples of Jesus Christ, sharing the good news with 'all who are far off,' which comes from Acts 2:39.

As we try to figure out how best to go about making Christ known, I think the three ways of knowing that we talked about last week will be helpful. Just to review, I said that there are basically three ways of knowing. The first is that we can learn something. We are taught or we read about something. This way of knowing is primarily about knowing facts. You could call it head knowledge. It's knowledge that comes from someone else. This way of knowing is important. I saw a bumper sticker not long ago that read, "Try to learn from other people's

mistakes. You don't have enough time to make all of them yourself."

That leads us to the second way of knowing – personal experience. I'm not always willing to learn from other peoples' mistakes. Sometimes I prefer to make them myself. And so I learn those lessons the hard way. This way of knowing comes from what you experience yourself. Nobody has to teach you those things.

The third kind of knowledge is the most personal. It's when you know SOMEONE. You can know a lot about a person without actually knowing him. This kind of knowing is all about relationship. It's a two-way street. When you know someone they also know you. Knowing can't be separated from being known.

These three categories can help us understand how we are to make Christ known. Learning about Jesus is an important part of knowing him, especially since he is not here bodily. Paul says in verse 16, "Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer." We can't see and hear and touch him with our physical senses. Making Christ known in this sense means teaching people about who Jesus is, what he said, and what he accomplished on the cross. As our reading from Isaiah 12 says, "make known his deeds among the peoples."

Sadly, many churches and Christians stop with that kind of knowing. Some time during the twentieth century, mainline churches replaced discipleship with "Christian Education," which was primarily about teaching *about* Jesus. God as called us to make disciples of Jesus and teaching them the Word of God is a big part of that but it's not the only part.

The second way of knowing is through personal experience. We experience Jesus in worship and in prayer. We can make him known to other people in the same ways. We can pray for people and we can pray with people. We can invite them to experience worship with us. Some of the most convincing evidence for the truth of the Christian faith is Christians genuinely worshipping God.

There's another way that people can

experience Jesus through us—when we serve others. The danger for us in evangelical Christianity is to see the good news of salvation as primarily personal. We see our personal salvation as what's most important and if we have some time we might participate in some of the church's activities. You won't find that anywhere in the Bible! Paul says in verse 15, "Christ died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for *him* who for their sake died and was raised." When you and I willingly sacrifice to serve others simply because we love them we are tangibly demonstrating the sacrificial love Jesus has for us.

Ultimately we want people to know Christ by entering into a relationship with him. This may surprise you but the way a person enters into a relationship with Jesus is by entering into a community of people who are in relationship with Jesus. Paul describes the Church as both the Body of Christ and the Bride of Christ. Both of those images are very personal.

What this means is that for us to make Christ known we need to be in committed Christian community and we need to invite people to experience that community for themselves, a place of knowing and being known. Paul calls this the ministry of reconciliation. The work of the church is to participate in what God is doing in the world which is restoring what was lost in the fall. One of the main consequences of sin is broken relationships. You and I are entrusted with the message of reconciliation. We are to work to heal broken relationships and we can do that best when we are in intentional community.

So what can you do to make Christ known? Find a small group of people and start getting together once a week. Study the Bible together. Pray together. Eat together. Go fishing or play golf or go antiquing together. And then invite people who are not connected to a church to spend time with you. It's that simple. We don't need a program or a curriculum or a committee to do this. And then watch what God does.

Amen.