

Made for A Mission
40 Days of Purpose
March 13, 2005
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Today is Palm Sunday, the day we ride with Jesus into Jerusalem. This event signals the ending of Jesus' earthly ministry. As we know, he won't leave Jerusalem. Palm Sunday triggers the events of Holy Week leading up to Good Friday. Today, as Jesus makes his way into the city, he is concluding his journey.

We also are finishing a journey today, one that started six weeks ago. Our 40 Days of Purpose journey has helped us discover what God's plan is for us and how we can live that out, thanks to Rick Warren and his book, "The Purpose Driven Life." We have learned that we were created by God to be loved by God and to love God back. We've learned that we were formed by God's family, that we were created to become like Christ, and that we were shaped for God's service.

We have one more purpose to talk about today, one that ties together all that has come before us. Just as Jesus' ministry built up to the events of Holy Week, so our Lenten journey has built up to this last purpose, this last charge given to us by Warren. We were made for a mission.

Jesus came to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday knowing his mission. He knew what he had to do to bring glory to God on earth. He knew about the confrontations he'd face, about Judas' betrayal, and his arrest in Gethsemane. He knew that his disciples would abandon him, that he would be unfairly tried before the Jewish council and King Herod. He knew he would be beat, spat upon, and mocked. He knew Pilate would cave into the crowd's protests. He knew he was going to die. He knew his mission.

None of us are called to walk that path. None of us could. Our mission is not nearly as extreme and may only effect only one or two people, not millions. And yet, our mission is in some way just as important. Just as Jesus fulfilled his mission, we are called to fulfill ours, with the same faithfulness and dedication and conviction. It is this last purpose, this mission, which brings all the other purposes together.

It is also this mission, more than any other, which stands out in the Bible. Jesus made our mission very clear. When he prayed to God on behalf of the disciples near the end of John's Gospel, he said, "In the same way you gave me a mission in the world, I give them a mission in the world." Later, he said to them, "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you."

To do what? Our reading from Matthew tells us. Jesus' last instructions to his followers, his final words of wisdom, hold within them the key to our mission here on earth: Go and make disciples of all nations, baptize them, and teach them about Jesus. This passage is so central to our faith we call it the Great Commission. There's a reason why it's not called the Great Suggestion. This is not an optional part of following Christ.

Why is this mission so important? Why does Jesus give it such prominence by making it the subject of his very last words to the disciples? Simple. People matter to God. Everyone. Jesus told parables of lost sheep and lost coins and prodigal sons to make this one point: every person matters to God. If even one person is not in God's fold, God will use all means at his disposal—including you and me—to bring that person back. If you want to be used by God, you have to be passionate about what God is passionate

about. And God is most passionate about every one of his children being brought into his family of believers. It's our job – each one of us – to make sure that happens.

In other words, we are called to be – dare I say it? – evangelists. Now, stop right there, I know what you're thinking. If some of us are reluctant to call ourselves "ministers," most of us are down-right terrified of thinking of ourselves as evangelists. That word carries with it a lot of baggage, thanks to wavy-haired TV preachers and hellfire-and-damnation revival meetings.

But that's not what evangelism is all about. The word in Greek simply means "Good News." And if you look closely, the word "evangelism" contains within it the word "angel." We are simply called to be God's earthly angels who share the good news with others.

That's easier said than done, though, isn't it? The prospect of talking to someone about God can be frightening. One of the reasons is that we don't want to be pushy. When you think about talking with someone about God, you probably envision a Jehovah's Witness rapping on your front door peddling the newest issue of "The Watchtower" while you hide under the kitchen table pretending you're not home. We've all been on the receiving end of those awkward conversations. We all could tell stories of when we've had the loving grace and generous mercy of God shoved down our throats. No one wants to be thought of as pushy.

Another reason people are afraid of evangelizing is they feel they aren't prepared. What do I say? In his first letter, Peter writes, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you give the reason for the hope you have." We could interpret that as always be ready to quote the Bible or give an eloquent prayer or outline the five steps to salvation. Being prepared means we need to know everything. What if I invite someone to church and they ask me a question? What if they say, "I'll come to your church if you tell me your church's position on the definition and understanding of the sacramental theology found in the synoptic gospels?"

I've never had anyone ask me that. I don't even know what that means. But that's not why Peter wants us to be prepared. He says we are to be prepared to give the reason for the hope you have. We are to talk about what gives us hope. The alternative to being pushy isn't to say nothing at all. We are called simply to share our story, to share what we know and have seen and experienced.

I've told you all before that I'm a bit of a "Law and Order" addict. And my favorite part of those shows is when they get to the courtroom and Jack McCoy the prosecuting attorney gets all excited and his bushy eyebrows start going up and down and interrogates the people on the stand. This is the climactic point where we find out the truth from the only people who know it: the witnesses.

What's it take to be a witness? First, you have to have seen, heard, or experienced something. Second, you have to be willing to talk about it. An expert's testimony is powerful, because it's hard to dispute someone with first-hand experience. You could bring in all kinds of forensics pathologist and behavioral psychologists, but none of them have what the witness has: a first-person testimony.

You are called to be a witness. You have seen something, you have heard something, you have experienced something that has brought you to your faith in Christ. You have encountered the living God in your life. And there are people out there who want to hear about it. Do you believe that knowing God and being a part of this church

has made a difference in your life? That's your first-hand testimony. Do you believe that knowing God and being a part of this church can make the difference in the life of someone you know? Tell them.

How you do that is up to you. For example, if you notice that a new couple in the neighborhood has young children, you may want to mention our Sunday School or VBS to them. If you know a person who lives alone, you can tell them about the great sense of community we share here. If a person talks about their lack of bible knowledge and church experience, you can talk about how we are informal and laidback, and that we offer Bible studies. If the person looks too thin, tell them about all the great treats during Coffee Fellowship. There are as many ways to share the Good News as there are people who need to hear it. And there are people in this world whom only you will be able to reach, because of where you live and who you know and who God made you to be.

I heard a story once about God telling an angel, "My plan is to give the Good News to my children on earth and ask them to share it with others." The angel asked, "But what if they don't? What is plan B?" And God said, "There is no plan B." We are God's plan for sharing the Good News. The fact of the matter is that you and I wouldn't be here this morning if someone, somewhere, somehow hadn't told us about the good news. And now it's up to us. That's our purpose.

We have been given the greatest privilege imaginable. We get to partner with God in the building of his kingdom. And we have been given our marching orders: God wants us to love him, to be part of his family, to become like him, to serve him, and to introduce others to him. That is your purpose. No one else can do it for you. No one else can do it like you do. God is at work in this world, and God wants you to join him. Go and live your life to fulfill that purpose.