

Time of Grace Ministry
Roots and Fruit: Go and Tell
Matthew 16:14-16
October 6, 2019

Pastor Mike Novotny

And so, it doesn't matter how messy your life is. It doesn't matter if you're still struggling with addiction. The point of Christianity is not that we Christians are a bunch of really good people who gather every Sunday to become a little bit better. The point of Christianity is that all of us are still pretty messed up and we need to gather to be reminded that there is still a Savior for broken people like us.

The nones. N-o-n-e. None. Are you Catholic? Lutheran? Presbyterian? Non-denominational? Evangelical? Protestant? Over 47,000 people right here in our county would say, "Actually, I'm none of that."

And some of you understand that number because you're part of it. If I asked you about your spiritual life, you wouldn't self-identify with any church or any Christian denomination; any specific kind of religion. Maybe your parents didn't raise you with a close connection to a church; maybe they did just a couple times a year. Maybe they were every Sunday kind of people but, you know, stuff happens in life and we start to question the beliefs of our parents or sometimes we repeat them and we end up without a church, without a religion, without a real passion for spiritual things.

And if that's you, if a roommate or a significant other or a friend or a coworker invited you here today, I just want to say we're so glad that you're here. And I was thinking, you know, today might be a little bit awkward; here I'm going to talk about reaching people just like you but I hope as I speak today you find a "why." Why we Christians believe that Jesus Christ is so amazing that if we didn't tell you, if we didn't invite you, we'd be like the worst people on planet earth that we would keep this good news to ourselves. So thank you for being here!

But for those of you who are Christians, I hope when you hear that number, I hope it like messes with your heart just a little bit. But that's the hard part, isn't it? You go. Because no matter who you are, how much you know about Jesus, it doesn't matter your personality type, Jesus said that not just to some of us but to all of us. All of us should go and that's pretty complicated. There's this picture we sometimes have here at our church that we call the five roots. And I've started to learn that the last two roots are really difficult. It's like, coming to church and gathering as Christians, that's not too difficult. And joining a group and getting to know other Christian people, doing life with them, is not incredibly difficult. Growing, you know, praying at home, opening your Bible, okay, it's a challenge to get into the habit but these last two - like giving of ourselves generously and going and talking about Jesus - it feels impossible sometimes. And I wonder if you felt that before? You've seen someone at work, there's someone in your neighborhood that doesn't go to church, they don't believe in Jesus, and maybe part of you wants to but there's like something or maybe some things that kind of get in the way. Like maybe your personality just isn't the type, right? When you go out to Applebee's, you want to eat Applebee's;

you're not thinking about the spiritual and eternal future of the woman who's waiting on your table and to just start some conversation would just be weird and awkward, wouldn't it? Or your kids or grandkids have a sporting event, you sort of watch them and take pictures and enjoy your family. You're not thinking about like how can I talk about Jesus with the guy sitting next to me on the bleachers? When you're at work, you're just trying to get work done, you're just trying to enjoy life, and so like intentionally going into every room, every place that you are and thinking like an evangelist, like a missionary, that can be awkward. And once you start talking, it can get even more awkward. Talk about the Packers or the Brewers or the weather and perfect strangers will feel comfortable. But talk about the Bible and church and Jesus and it can get kind of weird. And no one wants to be weird. No one wants to be like that Jesus freak, cram it down your throat, awkward, where did that come from kind of conversation. We want to be liked and accepted and loved and sometimes that doesn't happen when you talk about spiritual things.

Or maybe you just don't feel qualified. Maybe you have no clue what you would even say if someone asked you to describe your faith. Maybe you feel like your life is too much of a mess to be any kind of example to the people in your world. Maybe the people in your life know that you struggle with addiction or drugs or that you go to AA or to recovery meetings; maybe they've seen your anger problem or they know that you've been through a divorce or two. You're not the perfect example of the Christian life so who are you, like right now, to tell them to follow Jesus when you're still figuring it out yourself? And so if you're one of those on the fence people who maybe hasn't talked about Jesus with a non-Christian for days or weeks or months or maybe even years, I want you to pay attention to Jesus' words because they're beautiful and powerful and they can change you and help you join this great mission that God has given to all his people. So if you have a Bible that you brought with you or you just want to follow along on the screen, we're going to do Mark 16 today and here's how verse 14 begins. It says, "Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen."

I love that verse so much. But for context, you should know in the next verse, in verse 15, Jesus is going to say, "Go and preach the good news." And what happens in the immediate verse before it? He rebukes his apostles. The "Eleven" refers to the eleven guys that Jesus handpicked. They were like in the Jesus Christ School of Theology. They followed him, they heard Jesus, they saw his miracles. I mean, if anyone should have known what they were doing it was these guys. And what does he do? He rebukes them. He calls them out because they were stubborn and imperfect and they didn't get it. After Jesus had risen from the dead, he appeared to his female followers and they went and they told these guys and they stubbornly refused to believe that the women were right and so a verse before he sends them, Jesus calls them out. And I love that that's in the Bible. I mean, number one, if you're kind of a skeptic of thinking the Bible is just a manmade book, this is such great proof that it isn't. I mean, some people claim like Peter and James and John, they wanted like power and fame and money and so they kind of handpicked, you know, what would make it into the Bible and what wouldn't. But tell me this - if you were Peter and James and John and you were crafting the Bible, why would you let this passage stay in the Bible? Like, "Yeah, you know, after we walked with Jesus for a while, yeah, he called us out as stubborn idiots. Yeah, so you should follow me." Like no, no, no; you certainly edit that out and you wouldn't let it make it in the Bible so here this is and it is such good news for us because what is this saying? That if you're imperfect and if you're flawed

and if your faith is far from where it should be, you're not disqualified. In fact, you're the very kind of people that Jesus originally sent on this great mission. If you're taking notes in your program, this is the first thing I want you to write down here. Why would a person like you go? Well, because Jesus sends sinners, stubborn people, flawed people, broken people. Jesus sends them; it doesn't disqualify you. The Christian faith isn't based on how strong you are but on how strong Jesus is. So you and I and all of us who follow Jesus can go.

It kind of makes me think of this dad I knew from my last church. Really solid guy, I'd see him in church a lot, he loved his wife, he loved his daughter, he loved to worship. But a few years into attending our church, he noticed that his daughter was kind of drifting from the Christian life that Jesus had laid out. And he was worried and he was concerned and he asked me to pray, maybe to even speak to his daughter, and I asked him, "Well, have you talked to her yet?" And he said, "Well, no, Pastor." I said, "Well, why not? You love her. You love God." And this was his answer. He said, "Well, Pastor, when I was her age, I didn't exactly do things right myself so like who am I to speak to her?" And you know, in a sense, I had a lot of respect for that dad. He didn't want to be like the overly cram it down your throat religious parent. He was humble enough to know that he was imperfect and sinful and flawed but I think at the same time he forgot one thing: That Jesus sends sinners. Sometimes, when we've messed it up, we've actually learned that not doing life Jesus' way tends to backfire. Sometimes, we've learned some wisdom that people who haven't sinned haven't gotten. And more than anything, I think he forgot that when Jesus sends us, he doesn't send us to say how great we are but how great he is. This isn't like self-proclamation; this is Christ exaltation. We don't go into conversations like pounding our chest. Instead, we go pointing to the cross. And so, it doesn't matter how messy your life is. It doesn't matter if you're still struggling with addiction. The point of Christianity is not that we Christians are a bunch of really good people who gather every Sunday to become a little bit better. The point of Christianity is that all of us are still pretty messed up and we need to gather to be reminded that there is still a Savior for broken people like us. And so if we used on Friday night and we had too much to drink on Saturday night and we got in a fight on the way to church with our family, that there is still hope and there is still grace because there is a Jesus who is bigger than every single sin.

In fact, I think if you're really messed up, you might be the perfect poster boy or poster girl for the Christian mission, right? If the best person, the like saint of our congregation, would go and tell her friends about Jesus Christ, they might be intimidated and say, "Well, I'm not that good; I wouldn't belong in a place like that." But if you're jacked up and really messed up and your friends and family know it, well then, maybe they would realize that they too could be forgiven and accepted and included and chosen and saved. And that door might be wide open because you've loved those people and they've come to trust you and you've invested in their lives. You're not just some stranger knocking on doors with a handout, a pamphlet, and a clipboard. You're a person that they know and love and trust and so God is sending you.

And he's sending you to say something beautiful; that's what we find out in Mark 16:15. "He," Jesus, "said to them," the apostles, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." That is an ethically important verse for the Christian faith and so let me break it down to you. Jesus starts with this word, he says, "Go." He says if you're a Christian, I don't want you to stay, I don't want you to wait; I want you to go. You know, there's sometimes when we have to pause

and wait for the door to open. I mean, I don't think standing on a soapbox with a bullhorn and a sandwich board is a great way to spread the message of Jesus but still, there should be this itch in every Christian's heart. There are people who just don't know, like they don't know where to find unconditional love because no one has ever told them clearly so I hope there's like this urgency that keeps you up sometimes at night that I've got to go! Like, that guy I know from my job, someday, God, open a door because I've got to go and tell him. Those guys I play soccer with? Lord, like they don't know! They're going to die sometime. They're going to stand before you and maybe no one's ever told them how to stand before you without shame or being condemned so go, Jesus says.

And where do you go? Well, that's the next part; you go into all the world. You go into the Christian world and the Muslim world and the Hindu world and the Buddhist world and the world of the "I'm not sure" and the world of the "None's." You go into the straight world and the LGBTQ plus world. You go into the world of democrats and republicans and could care less about politics. You go into the world where guys are wearing Make America Great Again hats and you go into the world of suburban people with hybrid cars and a lot of liberal bumper stickers on the back. You go into that world, into this world, 'cause that's the world that God loves. Sometimes, Christian people make this huge mistake where we assume that, you know, "those" people would never, ever come to my church or believe in my Jesus, which is crazy. I mean, please just take that thought if it's in your head and throw it in the garbage can right now because tell me, does Jesus have a type? And the answer is no. He's been surprising people and doing crazy things for all of human history. Like who would have thought that God can change the hearts that he's changed and what's stopping him from changing the heart of the person you're thinking about right now? Do you know the story about the guy who wrote about half of the New Testament named Paul and before he became a Christian, do you know what he did? He murdered Christians. And do you think at any Christian prayer meeting they said, "Do you know who we would invite to church? Yeah, that guy who's been killing the guys from our church!" Like, no one would have ever thought that that guy would become a Christian, yet, he does because God can do the unexpected. So never, ever, ever look at someone in your life and say, "Well, they probably would say no," because the Holy Spirit has a way of making the human heart say yes when they see the beauty and the power and the love of God so Jesus is saying go to the people that you know, go into all the world. And what do you do? I love this verb; he says "go preach." Preach. You know, sometimes people say "don't preach at me." They shouldn't say that because preaching is a beautiful thing.

The word "preach" in the Greek language essentially means to repeat a message from the king. Like if there was a king in the castle and I was his messenger and he said, "There's going to be a feast in the kingdom," I would go and preach if I came with his royal authority and I told you what the king said. And that's essentially what Christians are called to do. We don't make up a message, we don't just share our story; we preach. We say, "Here is what King Jesus has done and said. Here's what he wants you to know. Maybe you haven't heard him; maybe you've never seen him in this book. Maybe you've never read his words but he has a beautiful message and it's for you and I want to preach. Not my opinion, not my suggestion, but the words of the King himself." And what do you preach? Well, here's my favorite part. "You go into all the world and you preach the gospel." The gospel.

You know the word gospel? It literally means good news. And if you're one of the "none's," if you're not really a church person, if you had kind of a bad experience with Christian people, I wonder - I know there are a lot of things that keep people away from church - but I wonder if it's because you were part of a religion that didn't specialize in the gospel. You see, there's two teachings in the Bible - the law and the gospel. They're both good teachings but church is bad when it only preaches the law and not the gospel. When all you hear are the do's and don'ts, you shouldn't like this, you shouldn't talk like that, make sure you give this much - like if that's all you hear, eventually you rebel against it. You realize I can't do all that stuff, I don't even know if I want to do all that stuff. Why would I do that stuff? Which is why Jesus says don't just preach the law; preach the gospel. And the gospel is the good news about all the things that Jesus did for you. The fact that he knew that you would break the law, that I would struggle to love everyone in my life as much as I should, that all of us would try to replace God with something as the first thing in our life, the sun at the center of our solar system, he knew we would struggle and mess up a million times and so the gospel is that God himself came down from heaven and every single day of his life, Jesus - who is God - he lived perfectly and he loved everyone. And when he died on the cross, he made an incredible trade with you. Like, everything messed up you've ever done, everything you think like God is going to judge you for, Jesus took it all to the cross and he died to pay the entire debt.

But not just that - he didn't just send you back into God's presence with a blank spiritual bank account - instead, he gave everything good he ever did. The Bible says it's like Jesus wraps us with this perfect garment, this stainless outfit, so that when we walk into God's presence, we're not stained and flawed and dirty; we're beautiful and we're perfect and he rose from the dead to prove that that's true.

And if a Christian has never told you that, I'm sorry. If you were raised by Christians and you worked with Christians and played sports with Christians and no one has ever told you that Christianity is about that, it's about the gospel, about a God who loves us when we don't deserve it, a God who did what we couldn't so that we could end up in a place that we wouldn't have without him, I'm sorry. But I'm glad you're hearing about it today! And I hope you know this is why Jesus is the greatest thing in the world. There are a million philosophies, there are countless religions, but there's just Jesus and he is unlike any other.

And that's why Jesus has one more verse for us today. In verse 16, here's my favorite part. Jesus says, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." Now Jesus is real; he loves the world but he says if you don't trust in him, if he's not the center of your universe, you will not be able to stand before God. One day you will die and God will not compare you to your siblings or your culture. He will compare you to his standard: Did you love me with your whole heart? Did you love every neighbor as yourself? And if you try to do that without Jesus, Jesus himself knows you won't make it. You will be condemned. But it doesn't have to be that way because whoever believes the gospel and is baptized, is saved. You will be rescued through simple faith. I love that verb: Whoever believes. Like right now, you can believe that. You don't have to follow 12 steps or have 50 boxes to check. You trust in Jesus. You put your faith in him, you stand before God. You say, "I couldn't make it without you, Jesus. I'm holding onto you and your cross," and you will be saved.

And that could happen to the person you've been thinking about tonight - your son, your daughter. Can you picture them coming here? Hearing the gospel? Believing in Jesus? Can you imagine this next Christmas, this next Easter, like here they come and maybe for the first time when we pray as Christians, they close their eyes and they start to communicate with God. Can you imagine five years from now, the people you never, ever thought would join you in your faith, they're singing the same songs and are praying the same prayers because they love the same Savior Jesus Christ. It can happen. For 2,000 years, it's been happening because the gospel works and whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.

So why would you go? Why would you take the chance? Why would you share your faith? Well, here's my last fill in the blank for you: Because Jesus saves sinners. The people you love, the people who don't seem like they're the type, Jesus can save them. He can rescue them, just like he rescued you.

You might recognize this guy Alex and his friend, Nate. Alex on the left is one of the guys who was passing out programs as you came into church today. These are two really good friends who have really incredible roots. They love to gather here in Jesus' name. They've been part of life groups and Bible studies. They grow in the word and they read the Bibles at home. They give generously and volunteer and they have gone into the world to spread the gospel with the people that they know. But did you know it wasn't always like that? You see, years ago, only one of the guys in this picture really knew God well; the guy on the right. Nate and Alex had become really good friends playing baseball together in college. They eventually became roommates but only one of them went to church and trusted in Jesus. In fact, I asked Nate, "Do you have any pictures of you and Alex from together in college?" and he sent me one. He actually sent me this picture. I hope that was a Halloween party. I never asked them; I'm really, really hoping. There's Nate and Alex. And I asked Nate, like, what did you think back in the day? When here you are, your roommate, one of your best friends, isn't a follower of Jesus and Nate said this. He said, "Alex was always the one I prayed about." Just like I'm challenging you today; he started with that. "I just prayed and prayed for my friend. But you know what? Weeks and months and in fact, years went by and Alex never came. Until recently." I'll let Alex tell the story. He said, "After a dozen of Nate's invitations, I finally agreed to come to The Core. My decision was based partly on my respect for Nate and my desire to attempt to feel what made him feel so content. But mostly, I wanted him to stop asking me to show up." "I thought I would go to church, tell him it was wonderful, and then continue with my life. But I showed up once and I was hooked." And that small step kept rolling in an incredible way. I asked Alex what it's like now to know Jesus and to follow him and he talked about the change in his life, in his marriage, in his faith. He talked about the peace and the joy that he had. And then I asked Nate, "Well, what's it like to see your friend here?" Nate said this: "I can honestly say it is one of the neatest things I have experienced in life. If you had told me 10 years ago that Alex would be ushering, joining in groups, banging on the drums in church and leading at the same church I attended, I would have said you were crazy. It brings me so much joy knowing that we share the same faith in Jesus."

That is crazy. But God is pretty good at crazy things and he can do something crazy in your life, too. So brothers and sisters, followers of Jesus, go. Go into all the world and preach the gospel because whoever - whoever, whoever, whoever - believes and is baptized, will be saved.

Let's pray.

Dear God, I thank you for unconditional love. There's just no one in the world who would stick with us like you have, who would know everything bad we have done, and yet, still love and reach out and forgive time and time again. Jesus, we love you and there's so many people who don't know that. And so, I pray in the upcoming weeks and months, you would help our light to shine so brightly but not our light, our goodness, but your light. Like the moon, Jesus, help us to reflect the glory and light that comes from you. And I pray, God, for those of us who are Christians that you would help us to realize how incredible this is. And I can't imagine going to sleep tonight trying to convince myself I'm a good person instead of knowing that I'm a perfect person because you've forgiven me for everything. And so, help the gospel sink deeply into our hearts until we love and trust you more and more and we talk about you not because we have to but because we want to.

I pray, God, for all people who are unsure about you today - those who are here in this service, listening to this podcast, watching on TV - I pray, God, that you'd be glorious and beautiful and worthy of everything. And we would give up anything just to be with you because no one would love and forgive like you.

Jesus, we know that there are people and we can't change their hearts, we can't force them to believe, but you can change hearts. So use us as part of that great mission, God, that hearts would be changed and that eternities would be saved. We pray this all, Jesus, in your beautiful, powerful, and amazing name, and all God's people, they joined their voices and they said, "Amen."



TIME OF GRACE®

Roots and Fruit: Go and Tell

Study Notes

Summary

Sharing the good news about Jesus is an obvious way to produce joy in other people's hearts. But the apostle Paul was convinced that it was a key to producing joy in our own hearts as well. He prayed for his friend Philemon to be active in sharing his faith in order to grasp all the good things we have through Jesus. The same is true today. A "Go root" produces incredible fruit!

- **Mark 16:14:** Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen.
- Who? Jesus sends _____.
- **Mark 16:15:** He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation."
- **Mark 16:16:** "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."
- Why? Jesus saves _____.

Points to Ponder

1. Read Matthew 28:16-20. Find two similarities and two differences with this description of the Go root as compared to Mark chapter 16.
2. Do the same exercise with Luke 24:45-49.
3. **Agree/Disagree:** If you expect everyone you invite to come to church/believe in Jesus, you will quickly give up on your Go root.

4. **Challenge:** Write down the names of four people whom you know who do not go to church. Start to pray for them by name each night before you go to bed.

Homework for Next Week

Read Mark 12:41-44.

“If you had the cure to cancer, wouldn’t you share it? You have the cure to death. . . . Get out there and share it.”
—Kirk Cameron.