

**“We’re Better Together: Reaching Out”**  
Mark 6:34-44, Colossians 4:5 (NIV)

**“Lent.”** As Shakespeare asked, ‘What’s in a name?’ As some of you may have already seen, in this month’s Chimes I used the definition of this word found in that great theological resource, Webster’s Dictionary. Besides describing just WHEN Lent occurs, the dictionary defines “Lent” in terms of its emphasis on **sacrifice...** focusing on repentance, of ‘turning away’... from sin, from food, from ‘certain pleasureable activities.’ That in so doing, we recall the **suffering**, the **sacrifice**, that Jesus Christ endured.

In my ‘word search,’ I also consulted a Worship Resource book that we use each Sunday for worship planning. It defined “Lent” as follows: *“a season of **preparation** and repentance... in order to make hearts ready to **remember** Jesus’ **passion** and **celebrate** His **resurrection**. ... As a period of **preparation**, it can include **instruction** for baptism and **profession of faith**, the **calling back** of those **estranged** from the church, and to **deepen** the church’s **devotion**...”*

Notice any difference in ‘tone’ between the two? For me, the former focuses on what is being **given up**... that which has to be **denied**, or **lost**, as a follower of Christ. The latter, however, speaks more to what needs to be **taken up**... that which needs to be **gained**, or **found**, as Jesus’ disciple. To **remember** Jesus’ suffering, yes... BUT with the ultimate goal of **celebrating** His **resurrection**. To **prepare** believers by **instruction** in their **profession of faith**... to **deepen** their personal **devotion to God**... and therefore, to be better able to **call back** those who have become ‘estranged,’ or **separated**, from the church community.

It is these latter goals of Lent -- to learn more about **professing** that **faith** that we share ... our ability to ‘**call back**’ those who have **wandered** from the faith... **deepening** our **devotion** to the Triune God... that we will be focusing on as the community of faith that IS ‘First Presbyterian Church.’

As the basis for this Lenten series of **preparation**, we will consider 5 different aspects of what **MAKES** us ‘the church’... 5 different components of what it takes to be a healthy ‘community.’ Those 5 come from the work of Pastor Rick Warren of Saddleback Community

Church in Orange County CA in his epic book, "The Purpose Driven Church" ... on which our Current SS Bible study is based. Among other things, that study challenges us, the church, to give thought to the question: *"What on earth are we here for?"* a question that I think we have ALL asked at one time or another... either about ourselves, or about others. 😊

Particularly as our move to the 'mission field' that is 'MorganField' becomes more of a reality, it is important NOW that we consider the answers to that question. As 1<sup>st</sup> Presbyterian Church, 'what on earth ARE we here for?' WHY are we being led... we sure HOPE by **God...** to purchase a little piece of 'earth' out on Corbina Road? And aside from all of the legal documents and negotiations that have gone into our preparations to develop that land, how are WE to be 'prepared' to 'develop' our-**selves** for that journey?

Well, today we begin a pre-journey.' One that will hopefully challenge us all to better understand 'what we're here for.' Today we will consider how we are 'better together' when we are **"Reaching Out."**

Now, in case there might be some confusion as to just what is meant by 'reaching out'... which sounds like 'outreach,' the name of our church committee entrusted primarily with **mission**, both locally and globally... you are likely familiar with another word synonymous with this use of the term 'reaching out':

**'EVANGELISM.'** (*Bom-bom-bom-bom...*) Yes, that word that strikes *fear* in the hearts of so many of God's 'Frozen chosen.' That may be, at least in part, why Pastor Warren chose "reaching out." A LOT less intimidating. Too often, when we think of that word, too many negative connotations come to mind. I came across this quote by Rev. Leith Anderson: *"The simple definition of evangelism: Those who know, telling those who don't."* There's been a lot of controversy lately over the 'telling,' the reporting, of 'fake news.' Well, there's nothing 'fake' about what we have to 'report'... for we know THE **'GOOD NEWS.'** And it's up to us to tell that 'good news' to those who don't know it...

And yet, when I opened up the chapter in our SS Bible study about 'reaching out' with that 'good news,' what Scripture did I find? Jesus telling his disciples to **'go and proclaim the gospel?'** One of Paul's exhortations to **'preach the word?'** Or that like Paul, we too have been **'sent by Christ to preach the gospel?'** NO. I found that well-known miracle of Jesus, the

Feeding of the 5000. How is that miraculous feast of a few loaves and fishes related to the proclamation of the Gospel? Is it because when you start talking to someone about Jesus, that their eyes glaze over like so many 'dead fish?!' ☺ How does Jesus' 'reaching out' with a 'supernatural' provision of food at this 1<sup>st</sup> Century revival meeting relate to our 'reaching out' to others with the Good News of Jesus Christ TODAY?

Well, there's a couple of things that stand out for me. One is the REAL way that Jesus met the needs of the people. Sure, when he first got out of the boat, and was moved by compassion for a people who were *"like sheep without a shepherd,"* He soon began **teaching**. But then, after all of these deep words of wisdom to satisfy their spiritual and mental hunger, He didn't stop there. Jesus proved that his 'compassion' was not mere 'lip service' by putting his *'manna where his mouth was.'* He FED them. He met their real, immediate, deep needs. Jesus backed up His WORDS with ACTIONS.

In his second letter to the church in Corinth, Paul said that ***"Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for ... the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. (2 Cor. 9:13, NIV {+NLT})*** Our 'obedience' to the type of 'service' that Jesus exemplifies must 'accompany' our 'confession of the gospel'.

Such 'obedience' is put a bit more succinctly in the New Living Translation: ***"This proof that your deeds are as good as your doctrine."*** It is not good enough for our WORDS to 'confess Christ' ... our ACTIONS must do so as well.

Hear what I am NOT saying, however. I'm not saying that our words aren't necessary. One of the most frequently misquoted sayings in the church is attributed to St. Francis of Assisi: *'Preach the gospel at all times. When necessary, use words.'* The fact of the matter is that St. Francis was a **prolific** preacher, sometimes going to FIVE towns in one day! The closest the good Francis got to that statement was this: *"... All the Friars (his 'brothers'... his 'cloistered colleagues')... should preach by their deeds."* That our 'deeds' must back up our 'preaching'... NOT the other way around. In the same way that Jesus followed up HIS **words** with matching **actions**...

By example, this week I had the opportunity to meet with a NON-member who had heard me preach before. And YES, he was STILL willing to meet... 😊 Anyway, in the course of the conversation, it came out that he was an atheist. And that he was willing to identify himself as such because he felt safe to do so. That despite knowing just where I stood on the 'THEISM' scale, he believed that I would be fair, and non-judgmental, in my dealings with him. And I must have done OK, because we both agreed that the conversation WILL continue.

My point is that, by the grace of God, my preaching about the love of God in Christ wasn't just **lip service**, but borne witness to by my **actions**. Thanks be to God, in Paul's words, 'my deeds were as good as my doctrine.' And in fact, it is those like this fellow, and their denial of belief in God, that we are CALLED to engage in conversation. Jesus didn't say that He came "to seek and save the FOUND"... 'that thou shalt steal members from another synagogue'... but rather, "**the Son of Man came to seek and to save the LOST.**" (Matthew 18:11) So too must we...

The second thing we should consider is just HOW Jesus followed up His words with action. When the need of the gathered people was identified, and presented to Jesus... with the 'advice' to send them away to fend for themselves ... what was the Lord's response? 'Yeah, whatever'? NO. "**YOU give them something to eat.**" (Mark 6:37)

Here Jesus sure has something to tell ME! And so many of my colleagues in ministry. Our job is not to DO everything. But rather, to empower OTHERS to DO. Jesus was the Master at both **education** AND **delegation**. AND when they immediately came back to him with 'snappy retort' ... 'what do you want us to do? Go and spend over half-a-years wages to buy some bread?!' ... he also showed good **stewardship** of resources. 'Let's use what we've got'...

We are all familiar with that saying 'Many hands make light work.' Well, that also applies to our efforts at 'reaching out.' I am one person. I have a limited sphere of influence. I have been here a grand total of FIVE years (yeah, I know... seems much LONGER, eh? 😊) YOU, however, are many. In the lifetime that most of you have been here in LC, You 'know people.' But how are you doing at actually speaking to them about what really matters? Their **struggles**. Their **doubts**. Their **faith**. Their **eternal life**. Remember those words of Paul:

***“Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.***

***<sup>6</sup>Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. (Colossians 4:5-6)***

Are you ‘making the most of every opportunity’ that you have with ‘outsiders?’ Believe it or not, just like those 1000’s of seekers out on the hillside with Jesus, there are a LOT of ‘hungry’ people out there... seeking ‘to be filled.’ And I sure haven’t done a very good job of ‘inviting them to dinner.’ Jesus is NOT just talking to his first disciples... He says to the Church, ***“YOU give them something to eat.”***

My friends, like the first part of this sermon title says, ***‘We ARE better together.’*** As we ALL, in Paul’s words, ***“do the work of an evangelist”*** ... you know, ‘REACHING OUT’...Let us continue to strive toward making our DEEDS as good as our DOCTRINE. Let us ‘make the most of every opportunity’ to give ‘answers’ that are ‘full of grace.’ And as we **engage** in that **scary word** known as **evangelism**, perhaps this **definition** will help. It’s by **D.T. Niles**, a missionary/minister to **India** ... a place where the term **‘bread of life’** would hold special meaning: ***“Evangelism is just one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.”*** Fellow beggars, let’s give them something to eat...