

Reach Out.

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Date: 22 September 2024

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[0 : 0 0] This is God's Word. Let us come before God in prayer to ask for his help with it. Father, we thank you and praise you for your Word. We thank you for its glories of which we have sung.

We pray now that you would speak to each and every one of us through it. Lord, that you would reveal yourself and the glory of your Son, that we might delight to make him known and make disciples of all nations.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. I wonder how you became a Christian.

I recognize I'm making an assumption in that question that won't be true of all of us in this room, but I hope it is true of most of us. How did it happen?

Maybe you don't have to think back very long at all. Maybe you have to think back decades. How did you become a Christian? One of the wonderful things about a church family like this is every one of us will have different stories to share.

[1 : 1 4] And that is great. It is always wonderful to hear different people's stories of how they came to faith in different ways, how God uses different means.

But here's a common denominator across almost all of our stories, if not every single one. At some point in your journey to putting your faith in Christ, someone reached out to you.

Someone explained the gospel. Somebody preached the Bible. Somebody helped you understand God's word. Somebody invited you to church.

Somebody took you along. God can work in exceptional ways, but almost always he works in normal ways. And the way he brings people to faith in Christ is through other Christians.

For most of us, our faith depended on someone reaching out to us with the gospel of Christ.

[2 : 2 7] That is how the church grows, isn't it? And that is how the church will continue to grow. We're continuing this morning our short series looking at not just our vision for Bon Accord, but God's vision for his church.

What is God's vision for his church? That is the big picture we want to make sure we get right. And then think off the back of that, what does that mean for us in our context here in Aberdeen?

Over the last couple of weeks, we've considered, haven't we, God's call to his church to gather in.

Last week, we were thinking about God's call to his church to build up. This week, we are turning to God's call to reach out.

God's call to his church to reach out with the gospel of Christ. As we've been doing over the last couple of Sundays, we're going to think about that just very simply by, first of all, thinking about the biblical basis for that call.

And then just thinking through a series of questions that will hopefully help us to consider what that call means for us here as a church family in Bon Accords. So we're going to begin by looking at those verses we read in Matthew's gospel, Matthew chapter 28, and hearing, first of all, God's call to reach out with the gospel.

[4 : 0 0] These are verses that are probably quite familiar to most of us, and we're really going to go for a whistle-stop tour around them this morning. They are the final words of Jesus that Matthew records as he calls his disciples to continue his mission by making more disciples.

And making disciples is the central command here in these verses. Our English translations, they kind of smooth the text out a little, and that is no bad thing.

It would make for a very clunky, unpleasant reading if they didn't do it. But in Jesus' final words to his disciples in this gospel, that there is only actually one command in these verses, one imperative, and that is make disciples.

Make disciples. Everything else in these verses is supporting that central command of Christ. A more wooden translation in verse 19 would read something like, having gone, therefore, make

disciples.

What does it mean for us to make disciples? Well, I'm sure many of us know, but put more simply, isn't it, disciples are followers of Jesus.

[5 : 28] Disciples are people who live for and learn from Jesus. That is a disciple. Disciples. So to make disciples is to make more and more people who will live for and learn from Jesus.

How do we make disciples? Well, the first word there in verse 19 does help us out with that. I said just a moment ago that the word go there is not the kind of central command, and that is true, but that doesn't mean we could park it somewhere out back, does it, and forget about its existence. We need to be going out with the gospel in order for people to hear the gospel. I suspect there's going to be a lot of points in this morning's sermon that are so very simple, but so very, very important.

We need to be going out with the gospel for people to hear the gospel. That is how God grows his kingdom. If we are not going, if we just gathered in here Sunday by Sunday and sort of sat on our hands and waited, maybe, I mean, maybe once in a blue moon someone would wander in out of curiosity and ask some questions.

But that is not what God calls his church to do. Because far more will hear the good news and far more will be made disciples if we are reaching out.

[7 : 10] So having gone, we make disciples, and we make disciples of all nations. This commission has universal scope.

That means the gospel is for everyone, everywhere. There is no one outside of its bounds. There is no one who does not need to hear the gospel.

Next week, we're going to think about what it means to be sending people out as we seek to play our part in the, not just the national, but the global mission of the church.

But making disciples of all nations does not mean our focus should be solely on sending people to the other side of the world. Because we are on the frontier of mission by being a local church here in Aberdeen in the northeast of Scotland.

Making disciples of all nations means making disciples of our nation, of our city, of our communities. God's vision for his church is not just churches sending international missionaries, but local churches carrying out God's mission where they are.

[8 : 32] We can be part of this global vision for God's church by making disciples of people in Aberdeen and the northeast of Scotland. Our communities are every part as much of this vision as the unreached tribes of the Amazon.

They are all to be reached to. So we go to all people, especially those on our doorstep. And then what?

What do we do? We baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. And we teach them all that Jesus has commanded. A couple of things I think are worth drawing out from these two points.

First, don't we? We learn something of who the vision is for here. It can be easy, I think, to hear the Great Commission as a call to individuals to go out on their own.

But baptizing and teaching is the duty not of isolated individuals, is it? But of the church, the body of Christ.

[9 : 36] The Great Commission is an instruction to us as a church family, not just us as individuals. Now, we absolutely want to advocate for personal evangelism because you, whoever you are, wherever you are, you can reach people with the gospel that no one else in this church today can.

So we want to encourage personal evangelism, but do not think that is the same as sort of isolated individual evangelism. It's great to work in partnership with our church family as we seek to make disciples and make the gospel known.

If you speak to any of the people, and it's wonderful to have these people as part of our church family who have recently come to faith, if you go and speak to them, you will find there were many people, there were many individuals all reaching out into their lives.

Reaching out with the gospel is something we do together as a church in partnership with one another. Reaching out with the gospel is the vision for the church of which you are an indispensable part.

So this is a corporate vision for a united church. We see also, don't we, in our whistle-stop tour of the Great Commission that Jesus says to make disciples by teaching them to observe all that I have

commanded you.

[11:17] Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. You may think, that sounds like a lifetime of work. And you'd be exactly right.

That, I think, is part of the point. Making disciples is an investment into a life for life.

Jesus does not call us to go and make converts and then leave them be. Jesus doesn't call people to come up for an altar call once in their teens and then never cross the door of a church again.

The aim is not to get people to publicly proclaim their faith and then move on to the next person, but to make disciples who live for and learn from Jesus all of their days.

We do not stop investing in people once they've been baptized as if that's job done. No, we teach them. We teach them to observe all that Christ has commanded.

[12:30] Building them up in their faith together with the rest of the church. And then finally, we see, don't we, in this great commission that whenever we reach out with the gospel, we never go alone.

I think one of the great fears in telling people about Jesus is how isolating it can feel, especially in contexts where perhaps we are the only Christian.

What does Jesus say to his disciples? Behold, I am with you always. Always. Brothers and sisters, you are never alone.

And never again will you be alone. Jesus is with you now and he will be with you forever. So that is a very quick run-through of God's call to his church that we reach out with the gospel in order to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to observe all that Christ has commanded, knowing that he is with us always.

We're now going to think just a little bit about how we can put this call into practice. How can this vision become our vision here in Aberdeen?

[14:06] I'm going to do this by looking at five questions. And for each of these questions, I just have one kind of big aim for us as a church family. One word or short sentence to capture where I hope we will grow in the years to come.

There will be bits of hopefully very practical application throughout as well, but to each of these five questions, just a one-word answer that we want to be growing in in order that we might reach out with the gospel. So let's just look at our first question together there.

How can we grow in our confidence in the gospel? How can we grow in our confidence in the gospel?

Your one-word answer? Know. Know. K-N-O-W. Not N-O. Know what the gospel is and what it does.

That probably seems spectacularly unspectacular. Let me explain why it's a good answer. The apostle Paul, I think we'd agree, was confident in the gospel, wasn't he?

[15:21] Here's a man who is not ashamed to tell people about Jesus. Why was he so confident? Why was he not ashamed? Helpfully, he tells us, Romans 1.16, For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

Paul is not ashamed of the gospel because he knows what the gospel is and what it does.

It is his knowledge of the gospel's power that gives him confidence in the gospel message. He knows it is the power of God for salvation and so he is not ashamed of it.

We will only lose confidence in the gospel when we forget its power for eternal salvation. When we forget, as we're thinking about it with kids, that it is good news, great news, the greatest news of all, worth sharing.

When we forget it brings life and light to this world. When we forget those things, we might well become ashamed of the gospel, but when we know and remember them, we will be confident in it.

[16:59] The gospel is not an awkward truth we are kind of called to apologetically share with people as if it's somehow going to be a burden on them.

It is wonderful news for them to hear. It is the best news there ever has been or ever will be for a broken world. Jesus Christ is the light of the world coming to darkness.

He is the good shepherd who comes to find lost sheep. Jesus Christ brings hope to a hopeless world. The gospel brings genuine joy to those who receive it.

It brings forgiveness to people who are crippled by guilt. It brings purpose to those who are wondering. It is the power of God for salvation.

It's not uncommon for the boldest evangelists to be the youngest Christians. I don't think that's just youthful zeal.

[18 : 09] I think that is in part because they are the ones most acutely aware of just how powerful, how transformative the gospel is because they have just experienced it in their own life and want others to know it too.

If you are young in the faith and wanting others to know it, I'm boldly sharing with Jesus, Jesus with anyone who will listen and that is some of you, then keep going.

That is a wonderful thing, a great thing and we rejoice to see the Lord working through people like you to make Christ known. I think that should also be a challenge and perhaps an encouragement as well to those who have been Christians for a lot longer because time goes on it can be so easy to forget just how amazing, how wonderful the gospel of Christ is to start taking for granted the blessings that come with life in Christ.

we can grow in our confidence in the gospel by remembering just what it is and what it does.

It is good news that saves sinners for eternity. It brings unparalleled joy. it transforms lives and you can remind yourself of it just by looking around and seeing we are blessed, aren't we, with a number of people who have come to faith over the last year or so.

[20 : 01] Look at them, speak to them, be encouraged by them at lives transformed by this very gospel and each of those people those we have seen up front baptized and coming into membership they have all come to the point of putting their faith in Christ because members of this church reached out with the gospel.

Speaking earlier this week this is a great and joyful sermon and vision to be preaching to this congregation because it is happening.

People are reaching out with the gospel. Lives are being changed. People are being saved. Christ is being glorified. That is what happens or at least sometimes happen when we reach out.

As we grow in our knowledge and trust of the gospel week by week we will become increasingly confident in the gospel we have been given to share. Second question, how can we be trained and equipped to share the gospel?

How can we be trained and equipped to share the gospel? One word summary, prepare. Prepare.

[21 : 31] Listen to what the apostle Peter says in his first letter. This is 1 Peter 3. He writes, Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

Always be prepared. Simple question this morning. Are you prepared? Are you prepared to give an answer for the hope that is in you when someone asks?

When I first began training for ministry I was doing a part-time course similar to the ministry training academy we have here in Aberdeen. And one of the first things they asked us to do as part of that was to write down just in a few sentences how we would explain the gospel to someone.

I was a prideful 20 year old as opposed to a prideful 28 year old now. And I confess I was kind of slightly insulted at being asked to put this on paper.

I knew the gospel and I did know the gospel but knowing the gospel and being able to clearly and succinctly explain the gospel are two different things.

[23 : 05] As I started putting pen to paper I realized just that. I knew the gospel but I was not prepared to explain the gospel clearly.

Let me encourage you maybe even this afternoon just to write out the gospel in maybe four sentences one or two hundred words. Not because I doubt you know the gospel because it is so worth being prepared to share the gospel.

And the more clearly and succinctly we can write it down the better equipped we will be to share it at a moment's notice. Think about what points you have to communicate about God about us about Jesus.

and there's lots of really helpful resources that we can help that can help us if we're struggling to put it together ourselves. One of the better known and really helpful ones is called Two Ways to Live.

Go and look it up after the service. It just explains the gospel in six steps. God's creation our sin God's justice Christ's atonement Christ's resurrection our response and it's helpful because not only does it explain the gospel it requires that people respond to the gospel.

[24 : 29] What are you going to do with it? Because there are only two ways to live. Rejecting God's rule and living our way or submitting to Christ's rule and finding forgiveness in him.

There's other variations that can be just as useful really helpful creation fall redemption consummation God made it we broke it God fixes it God will finish it whatever you use have something prepared.

There are great resources that help us explain the gospel there are also great resources that help us take people into God's words. Christianity Explorer takes you through Mark's gospel and helps you draw out the key points as you go.

The word one-to-one or uncover John will take you through John's gospel in a series of really helpful little studies. And what's great about each one of those is that they take you into God's word with people because that is what changes people.

Apologetics conversations can be great and absolutely have their place but nobody is saved by being convinced that God is real. People are saved by knowing God through his son revealed in his word.

[26 : 00] The Bible is where God reveals himself and so it is the Bible we want to take them to if we want them to meet Jesus.

us. So be prepared to share the gospel and be prepared to take people into God's words. How can we grow in confidence in the gospel, know the power of the gospel?

How can we be equipped and trained to share the gospel, be prepared? And then thirdly, how can we create gospel opportunities?

For each of these questions there was so so much we could say. I've had to leave a lot behind. But we don't have all day so I'm just going to again focus on one thing here.

Listen to what Paul says in Colossians 3. At the same time, Paul writes, pray also for us that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ on account of which I am in prison, that I may make it clear which is how I ought to speak.

[27 : 19] How can we create gospel opportunities? Through prayer. Pray for us that God may open to us a door for the word.

God will go to God to God to God to God to God to us a prayer. We cannot reach out without prayer and every Christian can play their part.

Maybe you won't find yourself on the front line engaging with someone in a gospel conversation but you can absolutely be hard at work in the engine room. without that work nothing will happen.

Pray. Pray for opportunities for yourself. Pray for opportunities for others. Make a list of people, maybe just two or three names in your life that you want to reach out with the gospel to.

Whether the family, your friends, classmates, colleagues, neighbors, whoever they might be. And then just set a time of the day when you are going to pray for them.

[28 : 31] Set an alarm on your phone and pray for opportunities to share the gospel with them and those opportunities will come more likely than not. Maybe even add one or two names to the list by asking people in your life group.

Who can I be praying for? Who are you trying to reach out to the gospel with? And then pray for them too. God answers prayers. He doesn't send us out on our own to do his work for him and wait for us to come back with the results.

He expects us to go with him. In fact, we cannot go unless it is with him. If we want opportunities to share the gospel, we need to pray for God to open those doors.

others. We can, of course, there's plenty of other ways, isn't there, to create opportunities. Living out the Christian life, speaking openly about our faith, telling people that you went to church on Sunday.

All good ways of creating opportunities for people to ask questions and invite responses. But prayer is where we must begin. And prayer is where every member of the church can be active in reaching out with the gospel.

[29 : 57] Perhaps you're housebound and don't see many people through the day. What does your part in reaching out look like? No less than carrying out the duty the apostle Paul knew he was dependent on for his reaching out with the gospel.

We want opportunities as a church to reach out with the gospel. Let's pray for them. Let's pray for them. Let's pray for God. Fourth question, how can we take opportunities to share the gospel?

Again, just in a word, invite. Simple, but so, so important. Invite people to ask questions about what you believe.

Invite people to tell you what they think about Christianity so you can start a conversation. invite people to read the Bible with you so they can know Jesus for themselves through the words. Perhaps most simply of all, invite people to church. The purpose of this question is to get us thinking about taking the initiative in reaching out with the gospel.

[31 : 14] Too often, I speak for myself here, we kind of sit around waiting for others to take the initiative as if it's the non-Christian's job to reach out to us. God does not call his church to wait, does he, but to go.

I mentioned just a moment ago that telling people you were at church on Sunday is a really good place to start. Why not add an invitation? I went to church on Sunday, would you like to come with me next week?

You'd be more than welcome and I'd love to take you along. Maybe they still yes. Maybe they still know, but they'll still know they're welcome.

Do your colleagues at work know they are welcome to come with you to church any Sunday? Do your neighbors know that you'd love to bring them along. And you can invite them knowing that they will hear the gospel each and every Sunday.

And that God speaks through his word every time it is preached. In the structure of our service and the content of our prayers and songs, Christ is proclaimed.

[32 : 29] Sometimes maybe we worry the sermon passage will be problematic. Trust God to speak through his words. One of our newest members, her first Sunday, the sermon was on Ecclesiastes 4.

Let me just remind you of that. The dead who had already died are happier than the living who are still alive, but better than both is the one who has never been born.

I'm betting that wouldn't be our first choice, would it? If we were inviting someone on a Sunday of the passage we wanted them to hear, but God speaks through his words.

And he spoke through his word that Sunday and began a work in someone's life that brought them to faith in Christ. So bring people to church, bring people under God's word, knowing Christ will be proclaimed, and trusting God to speak through his words.

Make the most of the seasons in our calendar when people will perhaps be more ready to come along like Christmas and Easter. Take piles of flyers when they arrive. Knock on your neighbor's doors and start a conversation over it.

[33 : 48] Be bold, because their eternity depends on their response to Jesus. We take opportunities by reaching out to people, inviting them to ask questions, inviting them to read God's word, inviting them to be with his people.

Just finally, and very briefly, how can we build up those we reach out to? Teach. Teach them all that Christ has commanded.

Jesus doesn't want to just want to emphasize here the point we were thinking about at the end of the Great Commission. Jesus doesn't want just to make converts, but to make disciples.

People who love him and learn from him all of their days. We need to teach people that becoming a Christian is a lifelong commitment.

It is an eternal commitment. commitment. We don't want to see one-time decisions. We want to rejoice at lifelong disciples. And we can build up those we reach out to by bringing them into the family so that they can be loved and supported and taught as part of the family.

[35 : 14] Again, I think this is something that we as a congregation do really well and be encouraged by, but keep going as we make every effort to integrate those we are reaching out to into the life of this church.

Make sure they know what is going on Sunday by Sunday and through the week. Connect them with other believers who will be able to speak the truth and love into their lives. Take them along to life group where they can be fed and taught the Bible.

Make a point of going and speaking to people you don't recognize on a Sunday. Again, so many of you do that already and it is so good, but let us strive to keep going. If you see someone bring along a friend, go and introduce yourself so that they would evermore become part of our family and so built up in their faith from the very earliest of days.

Let us reach out with the gospel! God has called us to do. Let us pray. Let us pray. By knowing the power of his gospel for salvation. By being prepared to share the gospel.

By praying for opportunities to share the gospel. By inviting people to hear the gospel. And by teaching them all that Christ has commanded.

[36 : 36] It's just one more thing I want to say. But how we can make this vision our vision.

And what we should strive to grow in as we seek to reach out to the lost. And that is our love for them.

Love Christ. Love his people. And love the lost. As we grow in our love for people.

We want nothing more than what's best for them do we? Think of those in your life that you love most dearly. You would do anything for what's best for them.

Wouldn't you? If we love the lost there is nothing more we will want. than for them to hear about Jesus.

[37 : 41] Because he is the way. The truth. And the life. If we grow in our love.

We will love to make Jesus known. It will eradicate all other fears. It will overpower all our anxieties. Because we will want to make him known for his sake.

And for theirs. Reach out with the gospel of Christ. It is a big vision. It is a glorious vision.

It is an exciting vision. And it is a vision we are already carrying out in parts. Be encouraged by that. Please do not hear the sermon as a rebuke to get moving.

Because so many of you are reaching out with the gospel. And we give thanks and praise God for that. but let's keep going and keep growing. That more and more might give their lives to Jesus.

[38 : 50] Finding hope, rest, joy, forgiveness, peace, purpose and so much more in him who is our heads. Let us come before God in prayer together before we sing our final hymn.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Father, we thank you for your love.

We thank you, Lord, that while we were still your enemies, you loved us. And you show that love in giving us your one and only son, Jesus Christ. That whoever believes in him might not perish but have everlasting life.

Father, the gospel is glorious. The gospel is powerful. So give us confidence to make it known wherever you have placed us.

May we delight to share Jesus with those who do not yet know him. Give us boldness and confidence. May you give us opportunities to speak the truth and love to those who do not yet know you.

[40 : 17] And may we take those opportunities. Give us boldness in that, Lord, that we might reach out and invite people to come and meet Christ for themselves and so find life in him.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.