



Right Where They Are

by Rev. Jerry L. McGlone

Matthew 10:5-7

These twelve Jesus sent out, charging them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And preach as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'

Do you ever have trouble finding things around the house? I have to admit it; I do. I have something in my hand, and I put it down. When I put it down, I know I'm putting it in a great spot.

I'm putting it in a logical place.

I'm putting it in a place where I'll always be able to find it.

I know I'll remember right where I put it.

But you know what happens. You know what comes next. The next time I want it, I can't remember where I put it. I end up tearing around the house looking for that thing I put away in a logical place. I empty drawers. I look under the couch. I peek down the basement. But wherever I look, I can't find what I want.

Do you know what I'm talking about?

It's the story of my life in middle age. I can't find the bottle of aspirin. I can't find my driver's license. I can't find my house key. I can't find the duct tape. I can't find the television remote control.

When I go looking, no matter where I think I put it; it's never there.

I've seen key rings advertised for people like me. These key rings have batteries attached, and when activated, these key rings send out a beep. I think that sounds like a great invention. If I had one of those things, if I lost my keys, all I would need would be to push a button, and follow the beep.

In fact, I'd like to attach one of those key rings to all my important things! It sure would help me find them a whole lot easier. The only problem with that solution would come when I pushed the button - there'd be so many beeps going off, I wouldn't know which one to follow!

But you know, even with a beep to lead me, there's still a hidden secret to finding the things I've lost:

I always have to go
right to the place
where they are!

They never come to me. I have to go right where they are to find them.

It's true when I'm looking for that big silver roll of duct tape, and it's true when I'm looking for people to bring to Jesus Christ. I have to go find them right where they are!

The only way to get people to know Jesus Christ, the only way to get them to give their lives to Jesus Christ, the only way to get them to join our church family - is to go out there in the real world and find them right where they are.

Because, all by themselves,
without any outside influences,
without a push or a problem,
without a pain or a panic,
without a suggestion or an invitation from you:
they're not going to come to us.

If you want other people to know Jesus Christ, if you want them to experience his love and forgiveness, if you want them to embrace the Good News - you've got to go to them.

That's what Jesus did. He didn't pitch a tent on the sand in that lovely sea-side town of Capernaum and wait for the people to come to him. He didn't

sit down expecting the people to flock to him. He went out on the road, out to where the hurting, lonely, desperate, people were. He went out searching for people who were seeking and hungry, empty and lost.

It's what he Jesus told his disciples to do, too. He said it was their job to go out and find all the "lost sheep," [Matthew 10:6]. it was their job to connect with the disconnected. He sent them out to find them, right where they were.

When he sent them out, Jesus gave his disciples some good advice. You can read that advice all throughout the tenth chapter of the Gospel of

Matthew. I advise you to do that. The surprising thing about his advice was the first thing he told them was what not to do.

“Don’t go out to the Gentiles,” he said [Matthew 10:5]. He didn’t want his disciples to go to the Gentiles, because the Gentiles came from a different background; they had different gods and different traditions

“Don’t go out to the Samaritans,” he advised. He didn’t want his disciples going off to preach to foreigners. The Samaritans were kind of like the Jews, but they were still foreigners. It would be like Jesus telling us not to cross the Niagara River and preach to the Canadians - they’re foreigners!

Jesus made it plain as day where his disciples were not to go. So, where did he want them to go? “Go,” he said, “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”[Matthew 10:6]

He sent them out to preach to their fellow Jews. He wanted them to begin with the people they knew, with the people who were like them, with the people who looked like the disciples and spoke the same language, with people who had the same traditions and habits, with people who worshipped the same God and said the same prayers.

“Begin,” he said, “with the people you know.” Each disciple was sent back to his own home town [Matthew 11:1], “to teach and preach in [his own] city,” to the people he knew best.

He gave to his disciples two thousand years ago, and it’s still good advice for his disciples today. If you’re concerned about spreading the good news, if you want to lead somebody to Jesus Christ, if you want our church to grow - you’re going to start with the people you know.

Go and tell your family and friends about Jesus. Tell them what Jesus has done in your life. Share your good news. And while you’re telling them something good, tell them about your church family, too.

Do you know what the church growth experts have to say about why new people come to church the first time?

Most new members don’t come to church because of the pastor.

They don’t come to church for the great music.

They don’t come to church because of the program.

They don’t come to church because they have some great need, and they hope God will be nice to them if they’re nice to him.

They don’t come to church because of what the building looks like, or where it is located, or the denominational background, or the Sunday School class, or even because of a sporting program.

All of those things are really important. Those things keep them coming back once they come. BUT, the reason most new visitors come to church the FIRST TIME is because some relative or friend invited them.

You begin with the people you know, and you find them right where they are. You know where they are. They're over there, on the other side of the back-yard fence. They're standing beside you in the factory. They're sitting next to you at the little league game.

You know where they are. You know who they are. You might be wondering what you're going to say to them. Well, you might be surprised at the answer.

Some of you might remember George and Judy Dudley. For several years, George and Judy traveled around the United States in a motor home, going from church to church, sharing their faith through song. They came to visit us a few times about fifteen years ago. Maybe some of you old-timers remember them. Eventually they've settled down in Alabama where George pastored a Disciples of Christ Church.

They weren't always Christians. When they started out, they were a different sort of couple. They used to be nightclub performers, and by their own definition, they were a pretty rough pair.

Back then, they didn't care about the Lord. Back then, all they wanted was to get enough money to buy their next bottle and rent their next cheap motel room. They ended up in Florida where they lived a hand-to-mouth existence, playing their guitars and singing their songs in seedy beer joints to disorderly crowds.

One morning, when they were between gigs, when money was tight, they stopped at a yard sale at a little church, hoping to find a bargain. It was a little Disciples of Christ Church in the backwaters of coastal Florida with about 25 members, all of whom were over the age of 75. A little old lady approached them and invited George and Judy to come back to the church on Sunday morning. Judy told the little old lady that they weren't interested in church.

Then, Judy said, that little old lady said something that changed their lives.

Would you like to hear what that little old lady said?

Would you like to hear what changed them from a hard-drinking, hard-living couple of rough characters into a pair of dedicated, believing, witnessing Christians?

Would you like to hear those powerful words that little old lady spoke?

Here they are. That little old lady said, “Well, I understand that you’re not interested in hearing about Jesus, but come on over next Sunday at 10:30 anyway. We offer free coffee and doughnuts.”

That was all she said.

Sunday morning came around. George and Judy woke up early. They were hungry. They didn’t have any money. Judy said, “Why don’t we go over to that little church and have us some free coffee and doughnuts?”

They went for free food. Their lives were changed by a little church and a little church and a few old men and old women who gave away - along with free coffee and doughnuts - some of their loving, accepting, forgiving, freeing faith in Jesus Christ.

Those old people met George and Judy right where they were and filled an immediate need. That’s your job, too. You’ve got to meet people right where they are. They’re not going to come to you. They’re not going to be where you want them to be.

You’ve got to find them wherever they are,
accept them for who they are,
and love them as they are.

That’s what Jesus wants you to do. He wants you to meet people right where they are, and find a way to love them.

That’s your calling. That’s your task. That’s your job as a disciple of Christ. You are called to be a channel of God’s love in somebody’s life. You are called to share some of your faith and hope and love. You are called to give away some of your understanding and patience and kindness.

You can’t do it if you’re going to be critical. You can’t make demands. You can’t expect people to meet your criteria, or measure up to your expectations, or behave according to your authorized version of “Miss Manners.”

If you’re going to be the person God wants you to be, you’ve got to be willing to accept other people, willing to search out other people, willing to love other people right where they are - before they change their ways!

There used to be a lemonade commercial on television about a grandpa talking with his grandchildren. He was telling them about the day his old car broke down. He said it was really hot that day. He was out there in the street working on his old car when a beautiful young girl came out with a glass of real lemonade. He said that was the best lemonade he ever drank.

His grandchildren asked, “What happened to that beautiful young girl who brought you the cool glass of lemonade on that hot day?” Grandpa

smiled and said, “I married her.” Since it was a commercial, right then grandma walked out with a great big smile on her face and a tray of their brand of real-tasting instant lemonade.

It was just a television commercial, but it points to a truth: a simple act of kindness can change a life.

I’m sure you have all heard of the young man who had to go out of town for several months for his job. He wrote a love letter to his girlfriend every day. She ended up marrying the mailman.

That just goes to show, there is no substitute for a personal contact. Nothing can ever take the place of simple kindness. Maybe it’s a doughnut when you’re hungry, or a cool drink of lemonade when you’re hot and thirsty, or a cheerful hello when you’re lonely.

My friends, more than anything else, it is some simple act of kindness that brings others to Jesus Christ and his church. You’ve got to go out to the people you already know. You’ve got to search them out wherever they are. You’ve got to accept them the way they are. And, you’ve got to be kind.

And when you do that, then you’ll be able to share with them your lord and savior, Jesus Christ.

Jesus was honest with his disciples. He told them what they had to do, and then he told them it was going to be rough. He said it was a hard road they had to travel. He said it was a thankless task they had to perform. He said it was a tiring journey they had to make.

He told them not to give up. His words were very clear. He told his disciples, “I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.” [Matthew 10:16]

He told them it was dangerous work. He said they would be hunted down and whipped, persecuted and on the run. He said some people would end up hating them. [Matthew 10:17-23] It’s what he expected out of his first disciples, and it’s what he expects from his most recent disciples, too.

It’s amazing what you can do when you have to. A Texas millionaire wanted to have some fun with his friends. He invited all his friends out to his ranch for a barbecue, and as an added attractions, he put twenty great, big, hungry sharks in his swimming pool.

“If you’ve got the guts to jump in that pool and swim from this side to that side,” the millionaire declared, “I’ll give you three choices: you can have the hand of my daughter in marriage, you can have 1,000 acres of prime Texas land, or you can have a check for one million dollars.”

With a splash that surprised everybody, a young man immediately jumped in the pool, swam furiously to the other side, and hopped out.

“What’ll it be,” the millionaire asked, “do you want to marry my daughter, grab 1,000 acres of land, or pocket a million bucks?”

And the young swimmer coughed up some water and said, “What I really want is the name of the so-and-so who pushed me in!”

Sometimes you’ve got to feel like that. Sometimes it seems like you’re a furiously swimming Christian, surrounded by hungry sharks, and you don’t know if you can make it to the other side. And, you get that sneaking suspicion that Jesus is the one who pushed you in. Jesus admits it.

“If you’re going to be my disciples,” Jesus said, “your life won’t be easy.”

Sometimes people are going to hate you, and others are going to misunderstand you.

Sometimes you’ll be ridiculed, and occasionally your motives will be misconstrued.

Sometimes your friends will stab you in the back and spread lies about you.

Sometimes you’ll be blamed for things you didn’t do, and other times you’ll have to do all the work yourself.

There’ll be times when you’ll be so disappointed and discouraged and depressed that you’ll want to shake the dust of this nasty town off the soles of your shoes, wave good-bye to all the nasty people in it, and walk away.

[Matthew 10:14]

There’ll be days when nobody will listen to reason, and you’ll see yourself as a failure.

“But don’t give up,” Jesus said, “don’t give in. Keep on going. Keep on working. Keep on trying, because God’s spirit is in you.”

When Martin Luther was a monk, he had a good friend who was also a monk. They lived together in a monastery. One day Luther said to his friend, “I have to go outside these walls and share the love of Christ in the world.” His monk friend said, “Good for you. I’ll stay right here and pray for you.” Luther left the monastery.

A few days later, in the middle of his evening prayers, the monk had a vision in which he saw the whole earth covered with wheat, like a field ready for the harvest. But he saw only one reaper out there reaping the harvest. He looked close and saw that the reaper was Luther. The monk immediately got up from his prayers and said, “I need to go out there and help my friend.” With that, the monk left the monastery and went out to share the love of God with other people.

That's your job, too.

That's what Jesus has called you to do. Jesus wants you to go out into the world, out to the people you know, out to wherever they are. He wants you to touch their lives with simple acts of kindness and share with them your faith in God through Jesus Christ, His son..

When you are faithful,
 when you bring others to know the Lord,
 when you cause this church to swell with new members;
you will know
 that you have done your part
 to make this little section of the world
 a much better place.

You begin this, your greatest work for Jesus, when you go to the people you know, right where they are.