

## Caring for People Through Proclaiming Christ to Them

We are here to love God and care for people. We love God through worship, observing His Ordinances, and obeying His word. We care for people by praying for them, practicing hospitality toward them, and proclaiming the Christ to them. I want to tell you this morning that I am satisfied that what I have just reminded you of, is our mission. **We are here to love God and to care for people.** These two things, based on Jesus' assessment of "the greatest commandment," make up our mission. If you remember the little church I built and has been moving around in the gathering room, it is built with a joint made up of two parts the mortise and tenon. In a similar fashion loving God and caring for people are the key components upon which our church is built. Our mandate as a church of God is to love God and care for people.

Now, the third way we care for people is to proclaim Christ to them. As I said last Sunday, this is our ultimate goal. Although the larger part of our work, and the more time consuming part of our work, is laying a good foundation through prayer and acts of hospitality and service, the work is not finished until we tell people the story of Jesus, how He laid down His life as a sacrifice for all men's sins and how anyone can have the gift of everlasting life by putting their trust in Him as Savior and Lord. Our mission is not done until we tell people about Jesus, the King. In the end, it is all about Him and what He can mean in people's lives. People do need the Lord and we are here to help them find Him.

But, just how do we go about doing this? Although I'm clear about our mission, I'm still wrestling with the vision of how we fulfill that mission effectively. I know what the end game is, but I'm still trying to describe the process by which we get there. In other words, what are the specific steps we need to take as a church to reach many others and help them find a vital connection to Jesus Christ? How do we proclaim Christ to the multitudes of lost people who surround us in this world?

Certainly, we need to pray for them and look for opportunities to extend hospitality to them and to serve them, but we also need at some point to speak into their lives the Good News of Jesus Christ. I found some interesting verses about this in Romans 10. Reading from the New Century Version of the New Testament, Romans 10:13 says, "Anyone who calls on the Lord will be saved." But Romans 10:14-15 list some important prerequisites: "But before people can ask the Lord for help, they must believe in him; and before they can believe in him, they must hear about him; and for them to hear about the Lord, someone must tell them; and before someone can go and tell them, that person must be sent. It is written, 'How beautiful is the person who comes to bring good news.'"

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I said that I'm still trying to describe the process by which we can reach many others and help them find a vital connection to Jesus Christ. Well, Paul, in these verses from Romans 10, is describing a process isn't he? Giving it in the reverse order from how Paul presents it, (1) someone is sent to tell good news, (2) the one who is sent tells the good news to someone else, (3) that someone else hears the message about the Lord, (4) that person believes in the Lord because of what he or she has heard, (5) that person calls on the Lord and asks Him for help, and (6) that person is saved. Do you see the process? Someone is sent, someone tells, another hears, He believes, She asks for help, He or She is saved. It's a simple process.

But, taking it back to step one, we need to ask who does the sending? If there is a "sendee," who is the sender? Would you want to hazard a guess who the sender is? That's right: The sender is the Lord. It is Jesus who says, "Go and make disciples or 'followers' (CEV), of all nations or of 'all people in the world' (CEV), baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." So the first step in the process of proclaiming Christ to people is for those of us who already know Christ to hear from Christ. This means that we need to be close enough to Him in worship, observing His Ordinances, and attending to His Word, that we are able to feel His pinch, His leading, His compassion for those who do not yet know Him. Again, our caring for people grows out of our loving the Lord. The urgency we feel that others should know Him as we do, also grows out of our loving Him. The closer and more intimate we are with Him, the more we will care for the souls of others. It fits together like the mortise and the tenon.

Some of you may be wondering why I am making such a big deal out of what should be obvious, but I want to make it clear that the process for proclaiming Christ to others, has to begin in and flow from the our deep and abiding connection to Jesus Christ. This is the Vine and branches spoken of in John 15. Unless the branch abides in the Vine and draws its nourishment and strength from the Vine it cannot bear fruit. Unless we abide in Christ and draw our nourishment and strength from Jesus Christ, we cannot effectively proclaim Christ to others. We cannot do it by a sheer act of will. We cannot do it because we feel guilty if we don't. We cannot do it because we have learned a technique at a workshop. If it is going to be effective, it has to come from His Spirit, His love, His heart beating inside of our hearts. We have to genuinely care for the people to whom we are sent.

Some of us saw something really "cool" when we went to Fairview Hills last Sunday. The little carnival we held for the children there was

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quite successful I think. We certainly spread good will. Many children came and enjoyed the activities, little gifts, and snacks we brought them. We think with a little more encouragement they may come to connect us with this church and know that they can be blessed and cared for here in our midst. But what some of us saw that we thought was really neat was the way Zack Scholl related to, and voluntarily reached out to the children at Fairview. You see, Zack's assigned task was to be a part of the pirate skit, and we expected him to do well with that. He likes to act, and he certainly enjoyed playing the part of a rowdy pirate, as most teenaged boys would. But what got our attention was the way he related to the children afterwards. Many of the children needed help with their scavenger hunt treasure maps, and Zack jumped right in to help them. It was soon obvious that Jesus' love for the children abides in Zack and that he has the ability to lead, teach, coach; and, yes, to proclaim the love of Christ to the children. That's what I'm talking about, sharing Christ with others because He has given you His love and His compassion for them. **Caring for people by proclaiming Christ to them begins with a heart of love for them.**

Step one then in the process of proclaiming Christ to others, is being sent by Him because we have His heart for others within us. We get that when we draw closer and closer to Him and when we abide in Him. Step two actually occurs somewhere between being sent and actually telling the good news. Step two is becoming magnetic. Louann shared a little experiment with the children this morning in which she was able to turn an ordinary nail into a magnet by rubbing it against a magnet. When we rub up against Jesus, not only do we get His heart of caring for people, we also get His drawing power. Jesus said, "If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto me." But, even before the cross, and even before His ascension into heaven, Jesus was a people magnet. People were attracted to Him and came to Him from all over. Some times there were so many people crowding around Him that there was hardly room to eat or breathe.

If we invite and allow Jesus to live within us, and if we welcome and nurture His presence within us, then we also will become magnetic. People will be drawn to us; or, more accurately, people will be drawn to Jesus living in us. Jesus put it this way in Matthew 5:13: "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men."

Salt has a number of interesting properties. It is a preservative, an antiseptic, a flavoring, an ice-melter, and too much of it can raise your blood pressure. It has another property too. I gave everybody a salt

pellet as you came into church this morning. What do you suppose would happen if you were to put that whole pellet into your mouth and suck on it for a while? What would be the next thing you would probably want to do? It's the same reason McDonalds puts all that salt on their French fries! That's right. Salt makes us thirsty. We are meant to become like salt, making the people around us thirsty for the living water found in Jesus Christ.

Jesus also says we are to be like a lighted city set on a hilltop, or like a lamp on a lampstand. In Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus says, "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

The first image seems most compelling to me. In Jesus' day, there were no electric or even gas street lamps. If you were traveling from the country to a city at night, you would be surrounded by darkness and, with the darkness, danger. But, then you come around a bend in the road or to the crest of a little hill and there before you is the city you are looking for. The home and shop windows glow with oil lamps or candles, and suddenly you are not in the dark any more.

Some politicians like to talk about hope, but Jesus is the hope that is real hope. And that hope that we have in Him is meant to shine from our faces and from our deeds like lamp and candle light from a city set on a hill. Our church is set on a hill and our steeple is above it's crest, and sometimes the lights are on. But are we walking close enough to Jesus to be aglow with His Spirit? Can anyone see Jesus in you and in me? Do our deeds reflect His love and His glory. Step two in proclaiming Christ to others is for us to be aglow with the Spirit, making others thirsty, attracting others to Christ by the magnetism of His love within us. **By drawing closer to Christ we will become, more "salty."**

Step one in proclaiming Christ to others is to know we've been sent by His love for people that wells up and overflows within us. Step two is becoming magnetic, salty, and luminous by His Spirit that ministers through us. Step three is being ready and able to explain to others in simple terms what He is all about. I Peter 3:15 says, "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."

Please notice the assumption that Peter makes. He assumes that those who set apart Christ as Lord in their hearts will be asked about the hope they have in them. These are salty Christians, luminous Christians, magnetic Christians, and people will have to ask them why. "What makes you tick?" "How can you be so sweet in such a sour world?" "How can you be so positive in such negative circumstances?" Our brother Gary Irvin has been growing in the Lord since coming to be with us at Fourth Street. He was talking to his brother on the phone last week and his brother commented, "Gary, Altoona has been good for you spiritually." You see, Gary's hope in Christ has grown to the point that it's beginning to leak out and other people are getting wet in its flow.

What's neat about the privilege we have in proclaiming Christ to others is that we get to be salt to make them thirsty and then we have the greater privilege of sharing the living water that can quench the dryness of their souls. And, this is not hard. Proclaiming Christ to others is not hard—not when you follow the steps. The first step is to get close enough to Jesus to absorb His love for people and sense His call to reach them for His kingdom. Step two is to abide in Jesus until we become magnetic, salty, and luminous with His love. Step three is to explain it: "I believe that Jesus died on the cross to forgive my sins. I've asked Him to be my Savior and to guide me as the Lord of my life. He's given me a new understanding of who I am and what life is all about. I'm different now; I have a joy now that I didn't have before. And when I die I have the assurance that I will be with Him in heaven. Do you want in on this? Would you like to have this?"

At this point the person hearing such a testimony is going to say one of three things. 1) "no," 2) "maybe later," or 3) "yes!" Answers 1 and 2 are sad, but our response is not hard, "If it's alright with you, I'll continue to remember you in my prayers." Our response to answer 3 is easy and full of joy. Remember that when someone says, "yes" to Christ, there is applause in heaven. "Jesus died for your sins too; do you believe that? Are you ready to ask Him to be your Savior and Lord of your heart? That's all you need to do to begin the journey. Ask and you will receive. I'll be your witness. You ask Him to come into your life as Savior and Lord right now, and your new life in Him will begin right now."

## The Fourth Street Church of God

2001 Fourth Street  
Altoona, PA 16601  
942-1007/946-4110  
4thstcog@pennswoods.net

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## Caring for People By Proclaiming Christ to Them

**Matthew 5:13-16; 28:16-20;  
Romans 10:13-15**

Jon R. Neely, Pastor