

***The World Outside Our Doors***  
From the Bible: Matthew 28: 16-20

The Rev. Dr. Paul D. Alcorn  
Bedford Presbyterian Church  
Bedford, NY  
June 20, 2010

To tell the truth, I have avoided these verses from the Bible for some time now.

Verses that, in some Bibles, are titled: *The Great Commission*.

Jesus sending his disciples...

From Peter and James and John down through time to, now, you and me...

Jesus sending the disciples out into the ALL the world to teach and to preach and to baptize. And it is these verses that Christians have also used, and sometimes still use, with a heavy hand as a mandate to convert others to Christianity.

These verses were the verses of my childhood as the church I grew up in collected money and supplies to send to missionary families in those far flung places around the world who were doing the work of the Great Commission – telling those who had never heard about Jesus. But, as I grew older these verses made me more and more uncomfortable or the way they were used made me more and more uncomfortable and so I set them aside. Not forgetting them because they are too much a part of the story of my life, but with the world as it is and with my being who I am, I have not quite known what to do with them. And as I have said on past occasions, I no longer think it is my job or our job or to convert to Christianity those whose faith traditions are different than mine. And, I no longer believe those who worship God in another way are going to hell if they don't believe in Jesus. And yet, the words are there.

In the Bible and from my childhood...

Go and make disciples.

I think the struggle with these verses and how they have been used is not just my own, but something that you may struggle with as well.

How do we take our faith...

How do we take what we believe about Jesus...

How do we take something that is so important in our lives...

Out into the world?

We tell neighbors about the great new restaurant we found.

We tell other parents about the programs that our kids have enjoyed.

We recommend travel agents and real estate brokers and plumbers and handymen;

But when it comes to the church...

When it comes to our faith...

The words of information and invitation tend to stick in our throat.

Some of it...

Maybe a lot of it...

Has to do with the fact that we don't want others to think of us as heavy-handed about religion, or narrow minded or judgmental in the way we think. I know how it feels. As a

Christian and as a pastor, I don't want to be lumped in with the group of TV evangelists or fundamentalist Christians whose beliefs seems to have become the public definition of Christianity, and whose views I often find offensive.

And so I tend to keep quiet.

I do my thing here.

I come to church on Sunday.

When others ask a question about church or what I believe, I respond...but carefully.

But, something in all this leaves me feeling uneasy.

Because, darn it, I really believe this stuff.

I really believe that the values that I have learned in church and through the Bible and the values we do our best to talk about and to practice and to model in some way week in and week out are the values that give meaning to my life.

And, am I presumptuous to say in your life as well?

And, I believe, these values help us to make a positive difference in the world in which we live. I think that there is something about the way we approach what we believe and the way that we talk about and practice our faith that others, out there, are looking for.

Because the truth is there is...

- More to life than me.
- More to life than my shrink-wrapped life.
- More to life than just what I want.
- More to life than just my job.

More to life that has to do with meaning and purpose and values and community and each day making the world in which we live just a bit better.

At least, that is what I think.

And, if I am right...or even only partially right...

Do I have a responsibility to share something of that with others?

Like me, you may also remember another parable which Jesus told about the person who buried, for safe keeping, that which had been entrusted to him. In the end all was taken from him. Can the same thing happen to us?

So, this morning

As we, once again, celebrate a baptism and promise to care and to teach and to support not just Alexander and his parents and his brothers, but all the other children and all the other families who somehow find their way in the doors of this place.

And, as we ordain and install those who accept the responsibility of leadership for our congregation...

We are left, once again, challenged by the Bible.

Needing to hear its ancient words in some new way if we are to take seriously the promises that we made to Alexander and to take seriously God's claim and call on each of our lives...

Because the truth still is...

That we are to go forth into the world.