

## Sharing the Good News – Acts 1:8

A thousand young adults gathered in Urbana, Illinois, for a conference that included speakers, seminars, music and more. Among those who shared their faith stories was a college student from New Jersey named Keith Greenberg. He had grown up in a non-Christian religion, following the traditions and practices of his family for generations. One day a school friend named Daniel talked to him about Jesus Christ and asked him to consider becoming a Christian. Keith said he didn't need or want Jesus and that he was offended by Daniel's approach. As a result, he didn't speak to his friend Daniel for an entire year.

One night after a high school basketball game, Keith instigated a fight in the parking lot that resulted in another student being seriously injured. As a result, he was expelled from school in his senior year. He felt like his life, future college, family relationships and everything else were crumbling around him. He didn't know where to turn or what to do – so he called Daniel. Somehow he knew that his classmate cared and had something special to offer. That night they went to a church service together and Keith Greenberg became a Christian.

When he introduced his parents, who had also become disciples of Jesus Christ, to the 19,000 students gathered in Urbana there was shouting, whistling and applause.

Talking about Jesus and recruiting other people to believe has always been basic to what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. One of the first disciples of Jesus was Andrew, and one of the first things Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him. John 1:41-42 tells us:

The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus.

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Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter.)

Andrew recruited Peter who became one of the most famous early leaders of Christianity. Both St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican in Rome and St. Peter, Minnesota, are named for him.

Because Christian faith can't be inherited, Christianity is always one generation away from extinction. There are Christians today because previous generations shared their faith. There will be Christians in the future because we share our

faith. That's the way Jesus planned to win the world – one at a time with Christians telling non-Christians about Jesus. Here's what Jesus said to Christians of every generation in Matthew 28:19-20:

Go and make disciples of all nations, 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. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Disciples make disciples. That's how it's supposed to work. The purpose statement of Wooddale Church comes straight out of this teaching of Jesus: "The purpose of Wooddale Church is to honor God by making more disciples for Jesus Christ."

Here's how we do it. First of all, we need to understand that every Christian is a witness. The very last words Jesus spoke on earth before he zoomed back up to heaven are recorded in Acts 1:8: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

These final words of Jesus need a little explanation. Jesus promised that when he returned

to heaven the Holy Spirit would come from heaven to earth to live in and empower every Christian. The Holy Spirit is fully God—as much God as God the Father and God the Son.

Jesus had his own body, but the Holy Spirit lives in our bodies. If you have accepted Jesus as your Savior and Lord, the Holy Spirit lives inside you. God lives in you. He gives you all the power you need to live the Christian life the way Jesus wants you to live.

Jesus declared that every Christian would be a witness for him. We become his agents to get out his message and help others become Christians. He expects us to do this everywhere, starting at home and moving in concentric circles around the world. For the first Christians, home was Jerusalem. The area around Jerusalem was called Judea. The next province over was named Samaria, and from there it was on to the rest of the world. This was not to be done one stage at a time but simultaneously. Christians were to witness wherever they went and they were to send out other Christians to people and places where they would not have otherwise gone.

Jesus' plan was amazingly successful. Christians are almost everywhere in the world. The desire of Jesus to have believers in every nation, ethnic group and language is near fulfillment—probably in this generation. The church of Jesus Christ has never been larger, stronger or faster growing than it is today.

Let's move from the first century to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and from them to us as individual disciples of Jesus. To be a disciple is to be a witness. Every Christian is a witness for Jesus. But perhaps some of us think, *“Not me! I'm really not into this witness business. I don't feel comfortable talking to people about religion and certainly not trying to persuade someone to convert. So, don't count me on the witness list.”*

Jesus didn't say, *“You may be my witnesses—if you want to be.”* Jesus said, *“You will be my witnesses.”* Everyone who is a Christian is a witness. That's who we are. That's what a Christian does. We may be good witnesses or bad witnesses.

We may be effective witnesses or ineffective witnesses, but we are witnesses.

In order to travel to a foreign country we need passports and sometimes a visa. From the moment we enter that country it is obvious that we are Americans. It's not about whether we want to be Americans in a foreign country. That's who we are. We can embarrass our country or we can enhance our country's reputation, but we are Americans either way.

Everywhere we go we are Christians; we are disciples of Jesus Christ. At home, at work, driving down the highway, in America or overseas, we are representatives of Jesus Christ. We witness to what a Christian believes and what a Christian does. Those who are not Christians listen to our language, observe our morals and check out what we believe and how we behave. We are witnesses.

Remember what a witness does. In a courtroom, a boardroom, a classroom or a living room—a witness tells what she or he has experienced. We give the powerful testimony of transformed lives through Jesus Christ.

As witnesses we show and tell others about ourselves. We tell about how we decided to believe in Jesus. We tell about the difference he has made in our lives. We tell about our struggles and doubts. We tell about our miracles and victories and answered prayers. We don't have to be evangelists or theologians—just witnesses who tell about our personal experience with Jesus Christ. You may not know all the Bible verses or have answers to the toughest questions, but you are an authority on your own experiences. Just tell what has happened to you—you will be amazed at the transforming impact of your personal faith story.

Every Christian is a witness. As a disciple of Jesus you are a witness for him. Every day in every way that is appropriate tell others about Christ and the difference he makes in your life.

In our witness, it is important to keep the message clear. Watch out that people don't realize there is something special in your life but never know that what is special is Jesus.

I have a friend who was greatly overweight. Her health and her appearance were both increasingly impacted by all the extra pounds. I hadn't seen her for a year or two and then we ran into each other one day. She wasn't overweight at all. She looked very different. I said, "It's great to see you. You look wonderful." We talked for a while. Then she said, "Do you remember how big I was?" You know, that's a very difficult question to tactfully answer. I'm honestly not sure I said anything at all.

But she went ahead to tell the story which she obviously wanted to tell. After many failed attempts at losing weight she had undergone major surgery. Her employer's insurance carrier wouldn't pay for it so she and her husband had paid the money themselves at significant sacrifice. Her life was changed and she wanted me to know what had happened.

The same goes for the changes brought by faith in Jesus Christ. Others can see them but they don't always ask about it. Unless we speak up, they'll never know what happened to us. As Christians who have been transformed by Jesus, we want them to hear. It's important for us to make the message clear.

Here is the clear simple message: God loves us and wants to make us into the very best we can be. God sent his Son Jesus to earth. Jesus showed us how to live. He died on the cross to pay for our sins and rose from the dead to guarantee a place for us in heaven. God offers us the gift of eternal life. He invites us to accept this gift by believing what the Bible says about Jesus, accepting Jesus as our Savior from sin and committing to follow Jesus as our Leader for the rest of our lives.

As disciples, we tell others that we did this and it worked for us. We encourage them to do the same, but the rest is up to them and God. God persuades, not us. God allows each of us to decide for ourselves. Our privilege is to tell, to en-

courage and to give support. But, the final transaction is between each individual and God. Some become Christians right away; others may take years or even a lifetime. But one of the greatest joys of a disciple's life is helping someone else become a disciple of Jesus Christ. So keep the message clear.

And use a team approach. The good news is that as Christians we are in this together. As Christians we worship together, we celebrate together, we pray together, we give together, we learn together, we serve together, we suffer together and we evangelize together.

Some people are natural salespersons. I'm not. When I was growing up there were school projects that required selling items to neighbors, family and friends. There were times when my mother was my only successful sale. I was scared to walk up to a stranger's door. My opening line was probably, "You don't want to buy this, do you?" It wasn't that I didn't believe in the product or that I didn't want to make a sale, it was just that I didn't do well alone. I needed the support, encouragement and help of others.

It's the same way with recruiting more disciples for Jesus. Most of us do much better as part of a team. Here's how it works. One Christian makes friends with a neighbor who is not a believer. Another Christian meets that neighbor at a summer pool party. Another Christian prays for this neighbor and recruits her small group at church to pray as well. Another Christian meets the neighbor at work and invites him and his wife to a Bible study. Another Christian at the Bible study invites the couple to join a co-ed softball team. Another Christian on the team invites them to church. Another Christian at church takes them out for dinner and talks about becoming a Christian. Another Christian from the same church helps them out in a family crisis. After two years of

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friendship, prayers, conversations, crises and victories the neighbors come to personal faith in Christ and join the team of disciples. It was a team approach. Every Christian doing his or her part to share the gospel, live the witness and win the unbelievers to Jesus Christ.

Recently a woman told me she put up a poster in her apartment building inviting people to a special program at Wooddale Church. A man told me about three people he had led to faith in Christ; he's praying for seven more. A mother told me about bringing her neighbor friends to church. Someone else shared with me a letter she wrote to a family member explaining the gospel. I saw an e-mail from a mom who explained to her son's friend how to be sure of going to heaven when he dies. In the last three days another friend found out that a family member has terminal cancer and he requested prayer, not so much for a cure but for that person to come to personal saving faith in Jesus Christ before they die. All of these are Christians on the team, sharing the transforming Good News of eternal life through Jesus Christ.

If you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, you are part of the team. Don't drop the ball. Share your faith. Do it in ways that fit who you are. But do it. Be a witness for Jesus Christ.

Here's the challenge. Affirm your personal faith in Christ as your Savior and Lord. Read the Bible regularly. Pray daily. Worship weekly with other Christians. Serve others. Give faithfully and generously. Share the good news of Jesus Christ.

Is it your heart's desire to become a disciple of Jesus? Will you strive to live out these seven commitments? I invite you to commit to God and remember today's date.

Congratulations! You are a disciple of Jesus Christ!

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