

Plymouth Congregational Church of Fort Wayne, UCC  
February 4, 2018

“Go On: Proclaim the Message”

**“Let us go on to the neighboring towns,  
So that I may proclaim the message there also;  
For that is what I came out to do.”**

Mark 1:38

Prelude:

The theme:

Go On - Proclaim the Message!

Did you hear Jesus speak to us from  
the Gospel of Mark in the morning lesson?

**“Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so  
that I may proclaim the message there also.”**

Let us first question:

what is the message;  
and how, why, where, with whom,  
to what end or purpose,  
dare we proclaim it?

A little over a hundred years ago,  
in a book entitled,  
*The Religion of a Mature Mind* (1902),  
George Albert Coe made this assessment  
of Christian endeavor:

**“Three great changes ... are coming over  
the practical life of Jesus’ disciples.  
First, the Christian life is being simplified;  
second, its ideals are being socialized;  
(and) third, its motives are being intensified.”**

Regrettably, mature religious thinking is a  
rare attainment, whether in this age, or

in ages past. Religious thinking has a capacity to fossilize faith, such that it fails to evolve, and falls short of the dynamic quality Coe once advanced, a hope for gospel **simplified, socialized, intensified.**

Similar sentiment has been sounded closer to our own time, as Richard Rohr has sounded, saying religion “**seldom**” gives people “**a vision, process, and practices whereby they can legitimate truth claims for themselves – (with) inner experience and actual practices**” (*The Naked Now – Learning to See as the Mystics See*, p. 37).

My point, at least in part:  
we read, study, and pray our scriptures,  
not to know the scriptures; knowledge has never been enough to fulfill a Christian quest for life pleasing and acceptable to God.

Let me repeat: knowledge of sacred teaching(s)  
has never been enough to round out a faithful life.

It was St. Paul who clearly stated:  
**If I am in possession of prophetic powers,  
and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge,  
and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains,  
but do not love, I am nothing** (I Corinthians 13:2).

This should be of grave warning to the church:  
one can possess great things conceived as desirable,  
    all mystery, all knowledge, all faith;  
one can possess immense power –  
the removal of mountains is not possible  
    without formidable clout;  
yet if love be lacking, the sum of one’s life  
is as nothing.

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The lesson from Mark simplifies, socializes, and intensifies the gospel affixed to Jesus.

**The simplification:** Jesus is healer; he comes to restore people, to break the bondage that keeps people in some state that is less than whole. Jesus breaks the powers that deny people a flourishing and abundant life.

**The socialization:** Jesus brings a personal, transformational touch that breaks the fevers that threaten to consume us when we fall ill and can't function.

When informed that Simon's mother-in-law is bed ridden with fever, Jesus pays a visit: **"He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up"** (Mark 1:31).

The fever breaks and she is able to resume her work – to take her place, which was to command, coordinate, to manage the household; she was responsible for maintaining standards for hospitality and decency. Without her, the household was in some degree of disarray.

**The intensification:** The healing of the one (Simon's mother-in-law) has a spiraling effect, it fans out, impacting all who were sick or otherwise incapacitated by powers solely concerned about maintaining their rule. Jesus becomes the centerpiece of a non-profit health care system; **"the whole city"** (a graphic description) **"was gathered at the door"** seeking cure and comfort that Jesus facilitated.

A few verses earlier, we saw Jesus as **the seeker**;  
 But now, after teaching and healing, Jesus becomes  
**the sought**. He withdraws to pray, to refuel and rest;  
 But his followers need to hunt him down, saying the need  
 is great for you and your presence and the good you  
 make possible.

And so we read, hearing Jesus say:

**“Let us go on ... so that I may proclaim the message ...”**

There is no delay, no suspension of action, in Mark’s  
 gospel. Jesus does not dawdle or pontificate.

He is always on the advance,  
 even in the face of adversity,  
 and hostile powers that can’t be avoided.

And lo, there are many. There are many **“powers”**  
 that feed on our human maladies.

The text reads Jesus cured

**“many who were sick with various diseases;”**

many in the grip of demonic forces, forces  
 that are actively engaged in keeping us half, not whole;  
 in misery with fear, rather than  
 in hope with faith.

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Healing ... hope ... for a restoration of life,  
 this is gospel as here conceived by the author of Mark;  
 and it comes about in the face of opposition.

Jesus, though, helps lead the way to liberation.

Note what is stated in the text: **“He would not let  
 the demons speak ...”** This is a first century attempt  
 to describe and interpret Jesus as charismatic, as  
 possessed with the power of Good that fosters life.

Please, a cautionary word about how we hear or might  
 use the language of **“demons.”** We want to avoid  
 demonizing any person or thought that doesn’t fit  
 the world the way we see it. R. Rohr has reminded,  
 and it seems simple enough everybody has a point of

view, which means that there is a view from a point, and we are all variously, uniquely placed. We seek not to dismiss other points, we seek to understand, and if necessary, be open to change.

As a nation, we seem to be engaged in a rather frenzied pastime of demonizing ourselves into perfect disunion; if we can't get a grip on this and see it for what it is, it will be our fall from grace. Religion, of course, is playing a role in this. And it is not good religion.

Please bear with me. I want to invoke the name of Wyatt Tee Walker, who died in late January (22) of this year, 88-years old, a life worthy to remember.

The Rev. Walker served as chief of staff to Martin Luther King for four critical years (1960-1964); when he left the SCLC, it was to serve in the administration of Nelson Rockefeller, an assistant to urban affairs in New York.

With Dr. King, he was a key strategist for the civil rights movement at a most critical stage; he was not simply a leader, he was, in the estimate of the Rev. James Forbes, a **“general, strategizing and mobilizing for the struggle”** (*Race, Justice & Culture*, Introduction, p. xv).

He was a teacher of brilliance, a stellar preacher, who gave shrewd/insightful analysis of **“powers”** that dominant the world, along with the role that religion plays, either in maintaining or in dismantling the powers (which is why I mention him).

In Walker's estimate, Western religion, which is largely white religion, is **“sterile.”** Being so impotent, it is religious expression that has been consistently silent and absent on almost every justice issue humanity has faced over the course of centuries. Western religion has been remarkably silent and non-active, inept in addressing

issues pertain to war, hunger, economic injustice, apartheid (the S. African variety or the Israeli version). This religious expression has “**neither the power nor the will to do anything about the establishment of justice and peace in the land**” (see *Race, Justice & Culture*, p. 14).

This is critical analysis. And I want to try to understand it. Western, largely white religion, Protestant and Catholic, has been born of privilege; it has been “thought out.” It has not had its birth in what Walker called “**pain/predicament.**” Jesus isn’t a convenience in this school. Jesus is a necessity. Jesus is a liberator, for a people in need dire need of liberation from the powers that oppress.

Bear with me. I have neither want nor interest in preaching a gospel of sterility. Mark these words: it is not in keeping with our history or understanding of faith and its practice, which is committed to healing and to restoring humanity to the wholeness God desires and the hope God inspires.

This is a dilemma we face: some religion is fully committed to maintaining life as we know it, in conjunction with the powers that benefit in keeping it that way.

And some religion is fully committed to working for the transformation of the world, advancing the general welfare, not good for some, but good for all. “**Tikkun olam**” would be the Jewish expression: to bring “**repair to the world.**” **Tikkun olam:** to behave constructively, beneficially, benevolently, to heal, to restore, a world in bondage to death.

The is gospel simplified, socialized, intensified. This is what Jesus, the Jew, manifested in his ministry.

As followers of Jesus,  
it is healing, restorative work that we want to advance;  
to do so we need know the diseases we face, and  
the powers that hold us in check.

They were on display this past week during the  
State of the Union Address delivered to the  
joint meeting of Congress.

- 1) War on the environment - **“We have ended the war on beautiful, clean coal.”** That, my friends, is an outlandish exaggeration and misrepresentation of fact.

The economy based upon the burning of fossil fuel,  
can, and must, come to an end. And we can end it,  
if we unleash our best and brightest to forge a sustainable  
energy future; but not if we bow to powers of a fading  
industry that celebrate short term profits at the expense  
of our planet’s long term future.

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- 2) Proposal to rebuild and update the nation’s nuclear arsenal;  
In our UCC, the teaching of “just peace” had its genesis  
at the height of the cold war,

Robert Moss in 1971, **“We now need to put as much effort into defining a just peace as we have done in the past in defining a just war.”** He made this statement, as I understand, believing there was no possible way to wage a just war with nuclear weapons; there are no winners, only losers, however you conceive of such a conflagration.

It took some time, but eventually the General Synod of the UCC defined “just peace” (1985) as the **“interrelation of friendship, justice, and common security from violence.”** Policies and practices that deny friendships, that thwart justice, that accommodate violence, are to be resisted.

**“The world is my parish,”** John Wesley said. Christians don’t huddle and hide under a flag; we worship under the cross, symbol that God so loved the world. If we can’t grasp that simple truth, all of our prayers, and all the powers we can unleash with weapons of mass destruction, will leave us as nothing.

We are not a people engaged in trivial pursuit. Let us reckon with what matters in our Christian endeavor. Consider: the day may come, and soon, when we all may need “take a knee” as a sign of our unwavering fidelity to the way set for us by Jesus.”

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- 3) The decision to move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem was a provocation in ways we are not fully comprehending. It will not bring peace, and it will not bring about healing.

When the United Nations criticized the decision, it did so with the support of 128 nations. In response to those votes, it was said **“names are being taken,”** which was a threat to withhold aid and financial support, often to the very people who need support.

## CONCLUSION

Let us go on – proclaim the message. Jesus was never content to stay put. He was always moving on, contesting with the powers, but never demonizing his opposition, rather ministering in hope of transforming each and all. The church doesn’t always recognize or honor this radical expression of God’s love and favor. But it is our call, it is our mission, it is our charge, to show and share with others we rightly see as neighbor. Amen.



*(Sermons are typically composed in haste,  
for the demands of the day are many;  
so be charitable as you read; and remember:  
the contents of this sermon have not been edited  
and may or may not have been a part of its public presentation)*