

**Series: Witness of the Windows**  
**Today: Bless the Whole World, No Exceptions**  
**Text: Matthew 28:16-20**

**A Communion Meditation delivered by the Rev. Randolph T. Riggs, D.Min.**  
**Sunday, October 2, 2011**  
**First Presbyterian Church of Lancaster, PA**

### **Background on the Window**

As we continue our series on scriptures which inspired these marvelous stained glass windows which were created by Louis Comfort Tiffany and Nicola D'Ascenzo, we come to the first of the windows which you will have to take a field trip in order to see. It is located on the first floor of the building in the rear hallway of Education Building where our younger children have their classes on Sundays and where our Day Care Center operates Monday through Friday. If you want to see it, you have to go down the hallway outside the Sanctuary to the elevator and then look to your left. It is there to greet the children Open Arms Day Care every morning and bless them as they leave the building every night.

As you can see by the picture on the front of your bulletin, it is a picture of the risen Christ with his left hand over his heart and his right hand is raised in a sign of blessing. He has two angels sitting at his feet dressed in brilliant red which may give you a clue about which of the two artists created this window. It is the same artist who created the window over the Chancel door which we focused on a few weeks ago entitled *The Pilgrim*. It is by Nicola D'Acenzo who we said used deep reds in his design of the windows.

The window entitled *Jesus Blessing the World* is the last of the windows to be installed. It was once in the sanctuary in a place where it could not be seen, and it was moved to the children's wing of the building during the renovation of 1996. It was given by William Slaymaker Kinzer in memory of his mother, Edith Iola Slaymaker, his uncle, Peter Slaymaker, and his aunts, Laura, Caroline, and Margaret. The Slaymakers were a prominent family in Lancaster and in the history of First Presbyterian Church,

and at one time or another most of us have probably owned a combination lock made by the family business. With this background, let us turn to the scripture which inspired the window in Matthew 28:16-20:

*<sup>16</sup> Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. <sup>17</sup> When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

### **The Communion Meditation**

Sometimes when I pull up behind cars stopped at a red light, I like to check out their bumper stickers and imagine the kind of conversations that would be going on if they were in the same car. Let me give you a few examples. One day I pulled up behind a car with a bumper sticker which read: *Pro-God, Pro-Life, pro-Gun, Pro-Country, Anti-Obama*. Right next to him was a car with bumper sticker which read, *Like Jesus would own a gun, and vote Republican*. Can you imagine the conversation these two would have?

Another time I was behind one car with a sticker which read, *Annoy a Liberal: work hard, Succeed, and Be Happy!* And right next to this car was another car with a sticker which read: *Annoy a conservative: Live like Jesus*.

However, my favorite in the dueling bumper stickers is when one car will have the sticker which reads, *God Bless America!* And right next to that car will be a car with a bumper sticker which reads: *God Bless the Whole World, No Exceptions*.

Jesus didn't drive cars, and there was no bumper sticker on his donkey. However, in his words and in his deeds he was definitely a *Bless the whole world, no exceptions* kind of guy. We see it most clearly in his final words to his disciples: *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them*

*in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,<sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

As we come to the table of our Lord on this World Communion Sunday, I would like to lift up seven words from this text: 1) Go; 2) All Nations; 2) Make Disciples.

### **GO!**

The commission of Jesus was to *GO*. He did not say, *“Huddle here and make each other feel comfortable.”* He did not say, *“Bring people to church when you come.”* His commission was to get outside ourselves; to get outside of the walls of the church; to go and meet people where they are and share with them the good news of what God has done for them in Jesus Christ.

The story is told about an old Native American who attended a church service one Sunday morning where the focus was on this great commission of Jesus. By the end of the preacher’s message it was clear that it lacked any real challenge. He did a lot of shouting and pulpit pounding, but he failed to ask people to actually go out and do something with the grace of God which they had received.

After the service, one of the regular members turned to the visitor and said, *“The preacher preached up quite a storm today, didn’t he?”* The Native American thought for a moment, he summed up his opinion in six words: *“High wind. Big thunder. No rain.”*

Friends, when we have received the grace of God this morning in the sacrament that is spread before us, I want us to think about what we will do with it. I want you to go from here and be ministers of that grace right where you are; right where you live, right where you work, right where you spend most of your time. Don’t lock the gospel in this church and expect people to come and find it. Take it to them. Speak to them in a language they will understand the amazing gift of God’s love. Go!!

### **All Nations**

Jesus did not only say to get out of here. He said to go to all nations. Start with your neighborhood, but push out beyond your neighborhood. Think about the places in your frame of reference where the good news of God's love needs to be shared, and keep pushing the boundaries.

This summer I was privileged to make my final visit to our mission partners in Kenya as the pastor of this church. I remember sitting with the elders of the church in Kiambaa where we were talking about what had been accomplished in our 16 years of partnership together, and I told them I would miss them. I said, *"I will probably never see you again,"* and the Andrew, the chair of the local church committee said to me, *"We do not know what God has planned. You never planned to see us in the first place. It was the will of God that brought you here."*

Andrew doesn't know how right he was. Africa was not on my top five places to visit before I die, and now I have been there six times. Each time I have gone to Africa, I have been reminded that I live in a country that is rich in things but poor in spirit, and I have experienced people who are rich in spirit and poor in things. I have been challenged to the deepest part of who I am to examine my feelings about generosity, and I have become a more generous person willing to share what I have with others because I know it is a gift from God.

That's what can happen when we are willing to take the Gospel to places where we never thought we would go. It may change the lives of those we encounter, but it will surely change the way we see the world. And if you can't go, you can send others in to minister in the name of Christ. That's what we are doing with the Blue Challenge Offering this morning. We are sending funds to Honduras to buy medicines which will save people's lives, and the good news of God's love will be shared in the process.

### **Make Disciples**

Finally, the command of Jesus is to go to *all nations* and MAKE DISCIPLES. We are so afraid of the “E” word: Evangelism when all that word really means is sharing good news. Our task is to help people understand that the God whom they think is indifferent really cares about us and this planet earth God has given us to be good stewards; that the God whom they think is going to punish them really, really loves them and wants them to love themselves; the God whom they think is boring is really quite exciting; and if they will commit their lives to follow him (to be his disciple) life will become a great adventure. We have good news to share.

In his best-selling book [The Reason for God](#), Tim Keller, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian in Manhattan, shares the story of a woman in his congregation who was learning how the grace extended to us through Christ's work on the cross can actually be more challenging than religion. He writes: *Some years ago I met with a woman who began coming to church at Redeemer and had never before heard a distinction drawn between the gospel and religion [i.e. the distinction between grace and what is often a works-based righteousness]. She had always heard that God accepts us only if we are good enough.*

*She said that the new message was scary. I asked why it was scary and she replied: If I was saved by my good works then there would be a limit to what God could ask of me or put me through. I would be like a taxpayer with "rights"—I would have done my duty and now I would deserve a certain quality of life. But if I am a sinner saved by grace—then there's nothing he cannot ask of me."*

Keller concludes: *This woman understood the dynamic of grace and gratitude. If when you have lost all fear of punishment you also lose all incentive to live a good, unselfish life, then the only incentive you ever had to live a decent life was fear. This woman could see immediately that the wonderful-beyond-belief teaching of salvation by sheer grace had an edge to it. She knew that if she was a sinner saved by grace, she was (if anything) more subject to the sovereign Lordship of God. She knew that if Jesus really had done all this for her, she would not be her own. She would joyfully, gratefully belong to*

*Jesus, who provided all this for her at infinite cost to himself. (Source: Timothy Keller, The Reason for God (Riverhead Books, 2008), pp. 189-190)*

**Invitation**

Go! To All Nations. Make Disciples. This is the commission of Jesus for us to ponder as we come to the table of our Lord on this World Communion Sunday.