

November 16, 2014

Embracing Christ's Mission

Luke 24:45-49

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Imagine if Cam Newton, the quarterback of the Carolina Panthers, came up to you this morning and said, "Hey, we're playing the Atlanta Falcons today at 1:00. I need you to take my place today. You have to play quarterback against the Falcons." What would you say? What would you think? Would you feel psyched, excited? Or scared out of your mind?

What if a surgeon handed you the scalpel and said, "I need you to fill in for me today. You have to take out this guy's appendix, and do a knee replacement for this guy." How would you feel?

In a way, that's exactly what's going on in our Bible story today, from Luke 24. Again, it's Easter evening. Jesus already gave his life on the cross, and the sacrifice for sins has been paid in full. It is finished. Now he's been raised from the dead. Suddenly he appears in the middle of the room where his disciples are hanging out. The Lord greets them, calms them down, convinces them that he's really alive ... and, then, he says to them, "You need to take my place! I need you to keep going with my mission. You're on! You have to proclaim repentance and forgiveness, like I've been doing, to all the nations."

How do you think those disciples felt in that moment? Excited and psyched? Or scared and hesitant?

Jesus made it clear to them that night that his mission wasn't over. He was looking for followers who would be not just observers and bystanders. Christ wanted his disciples to do

his work, to take on his job, to carry on his mission. Jesus knew, on that night, that there was a world full of sinners out there with a desperate need.

And there still is today, isn't there? Christ is calling us today to embrace his mission. He's urging you and me to get off the sidelines, and to get in the game. "You're not here to watch," he's saying. "I don't want my followers to be bystanders, or pew potatoes," he's telling us. OK, that's not a direct quote – but that's the gist of this story, isn't it?

"You are witnesses of these things," he told the disciples on that night long ago. And they were witnesses. They had seen him do miracles. They had heard his preaching. They had watched his arrest. Some of them were present at his crucifixion, and now they were witness to his resurrection. They were eyewitnesses, and they had an incredible story to tell.

But what about us? What have we witnessed? As followers of Christ, we may not have seen what Peter, James, and Matthew saw. But haven't you witnessed some amazing things, as a Christian believer?

Haven't you noticed the difference Christ makes in your life? Aren't you a different person, a better person, with Christ in your life? None of us are perfect; but hasn't Christ made an impact on our lives in certain ways?

Maybe you've witnessed the changes that Jesus has made in the lives of others. I've seen people hit rock bottom, and then rebuild their lives, with Christ's power. I've seen others who were leading sinful, wicked lives, and then found a new path to walk, led by the Savior Jesus.

Haven't you seen sinners forgiven by God? Haven't we all watched how people like us can learn how to forgive others, learn how to be compassionate to the needy, learn how to grow in their understanding of the Word?

You and I are "witnesses of these things" – and there is a world of hurting, lost people out there. They need to hear these stories. They desperately need to find hope. They desperately need forgiveness. They desperately need a Savior.

Friends, Christ's mission isn't over! It's ongoing. It's continuous. Christ's mission is MISSION 2014, and it will be MISSION 2015 soon. Christ's mission is the church's mission now; but it's my mission, and it's yours, too. In every day and age, followers of Jesus Christ need to embrace wholeheartedly and passionately, his mission.

After the service ends today, we're going to stay in here and talk about what we can do, as a church, to carry on Christ's mission. And I want to tell you today how thankful I am to be part of this congregation. It's a growing church, it's a friendly church, it's a mission-focused church, it's a positive and joyful church. It's not perfect, and let's not pat ourselves on the back too much. But we're all part of something very special, and I hope you treasure this church as much as I do.

And, yet, none of us are here to just watch, are we? None of us are on the sidelines. God has brought us here, together, for his purposes, for his game plan. And he's giving you and me the opportunity to shape the future of this church.

We've been doing great here at Hope; but we can do even more, can't we? We've been richly blessed here at Hope; but God wants to bless us and bless this church even more. We've been growing, and lots of visitors have been coming

in these doors, but God has more families and people he wants us to connect with in his name. And many of our church members have been volunteering their time and talents, and giving of their treasures, very generously. But there are many others who need encouragement to do the same. Not out of a sense of guilt. And not because the pastor is waving his arms around and shouting about it. But because we all are challenged by Christ himself today to embrace his mission.

So every time we ask for volunteers here at Hope, it's an opportunity to embrace Christ's mission. Every time we pray for the ministry here, it's an opportunity to embrace Christ's mission. Whenever we pass the offering plate, or make an appeal for our next campaign, or collect food for the hungry in our community, or plan out another Vacation Bible School, it's an opportunity for you and me to embrace Christ's mission.

Because Christ's mission isn't over. And Christ's mission includes you. This is your opportunity to embrace it! Amen.