

WHY GHANA?

Have you ever asked a person what time it is, and he answered by giving a lengthy explanation on how a watch is put together? Sometimes a question cannot be answered in just one or two words. So it is with our sermon today. The question of the day is, "Pastor, you are going on a missionary trip. "Why Ghana?"

Some 2,750 years ago the great Jewish prophet Isaiah foretold that the Messiah would bring the Gospel light to the non-Jewish world. (Read Isaiah 49:5-6) This included the Americas, Europe, Asia, Australia, the Pacific Rim, and Africa. Quickly, what does this tell us about God's love for the sinner, the Gentiles, people of all races and nations? God loves us all, God wants us all to be saved, God wants us all to hear and believe the Good News that Jesus is the Savior and all who believe in Him have eternal life. Now, how is Jesus going to pull this off? The world is a big place and there are billions of people living throughout it. Over 200,000 babies are born every day. How will Jesus do this? Through people like you and me!

Listen to the words of our Savior in Luke 24:46-48. Or again listen to Matthew 28:16-19. What does Jesus command us to do? To preach the Good News of "**repentance and the forgiveness of sins.**" Whether we want to admit it or not, as St. Paul tells us, "**we all have sinned...**" We need to admit our sins, express our sorrow for our sins and their consequences, and begin to change from our sinful ways. We need to hear the message of "**repentance!**" And we need to hear the message of the "**forgiveness of sins.**" Jesus wants you and me to hear and believe that through His sacrificial death on the cross all our sins are forgiven! All of our sins; every one of our sins! No sin is too great not to be forgiven by the blood of Jesus. This announcement of God's forgiveness means in Jesus we are forgiven and God is no longer mad at us, we are no longer His enemy, and we are no longer separated from Him.

This new, forgiven relationship with God brings a ton of blessing into our lives. Not only are we forgiven and have eternal life, there is more for us in this new life. We are confident of God's presence no matter where we are or what we happen to face in life. God is present to provide for us, protect us, hear us, comfort us, and direct us. We are empowered to live a new life. No longer need we be driven by selfishness or self-centeredness. Now our heart looks to care for others, reach out to help, give to, build new and rebuild broken relationships. The Gospel changes us and the love of God motivates us to live this new life. Isn't it great to be a child of God and know Jesus as our Savior!

It is the Gospel that has the power to save us and to change our hearts. The Gospel can change the hearts of criminals, terrorists, an abusive spouse or parent. The Gospel can change the selfish heart, the angry heart, the hateful heart, the devilish heart. Only the Gospel can empower one to walk away from a life of destructive behavior, greed, lust, fear, worry, or self-destruction. But for these changes to happen, people must hear the Gospel. God wants people to be saved now, to be changed now, to both be assured of their justification – being declared free from the punishment of sin by the blood of Jesus – and to experience the new life of sanctification – living a new life of faith in this world. This is why Jesus said, “**Go and make disciples of all nations...**”

Notice that Jesus does not say, “Go and make members...” Rather our LORD commanded us to “**make disciples.**” A disciple is not simply one who hears the Good News or who acknowledges it to be true. A disciple is not someone who gives lip service to Jesus or belongs to a congregation. A disciple is a student of Jesus’, an imitator of Jesus, one who is growing in his or her faith and who lives the new life that Jesus summons His followers to live. Jesus wants us to “**make disciples of all nations**” including those nations of the Americas, Europe, Asia, Australia, the Pacific Rim, and Africa.

So, why don’t we do this all the time? Why don’t we share the Gospel with others, those at our work, those in our neighborhood, those on our softball team? What keeps us from living the Christian faith and from sharing the Christian faith? Is it that we have doubts, are we head nodders but not disciples? Are we out of the Word too much? Have the fears of being mocked, ridiculed, or ostracized silenced our voices? Have we, like those in our LORD’S parable of the sower become so wrapped up in the worries of life or desire of the pleasures of the world that we no longer want to follow our Savior? Or, are we so busy “playing church” and interested in preserving the institutional church, that we forgot that the church is really people in ministry and not buildings, organizations, or denominations? Sometimes the Church can be its own worst enemy tying people down with meetings instead of freeing people to be in Bible Study, reaching out to unbelievers or non-members, or engaging in service projects helping people in need or crisis.

The fact is, sharing the Gospel and making disciples is not an option or a personal preference; it is a command from our LORD and Savior Jesus Christ. That is the mission statement of the Christian church; that is the vision statement that our LORD has for His people; that is the goal we are all to strive to fulfill!

In many of our mission fields, the indigenous pastors and evangelists do not have the same level of education as do pastors in the United States, Canada, or Northern Europe. These pastors in the mission fields have a great hunger and desire to learn. They have tremendous hunger to grow in understanding God's Word. Too often their national churches lack the resources to either send their pastors abroad for further study or to bring in outside pastors and teachers. In the context of the master holding his servants accountable for fulfilling his instructions, Jesus says, **"To whom much is given, much will be demanded."** God has given to both St. Paul's congregation and me much in terms of spiritual growth, insight, resources, development, and opportunities. At the same time, our LORD demands we use our blessings, our size, our facility, our experiences, and our opportunities to His glory.

Seventeen years ago, when I earned my doctorate from the Ft. Wayne Seminary, the Rev. Dr. Paul Fynn, the President of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana received his doctorate, too. After the commencement service, he asked me if I would come over, at my expense, and help his pastors improve on their preaching skills, especially in writing a sermon. With the blessings of my congregation at that time, Trinity Lutheran Church in Utica, MI, I agreed to go. Trinity, Utica actually funded my entire trip, then and three more times. Pinnacle in Rochester did it once, and this will be St. Paul's second time in partnership. By returning, I have established credibility with the men and women of the Ghanaian Lutheran church. Many lasting friendship have resulted from these mission trips.

Together, you and I, to whom much has been given, are returning much to our LORD'S kingdom as we serve and assist the discipling of our Christian brothers and sister in Christ. Together, we are preaching **"repentance and the forgiveness of sins"** to Ghana. Together, we are tools that Jesus uses to be **"a light for the Gentiles"** and **"bring God's salvation to the ends of the earth."** This is why Ghana! The last thing I want to do on Judgment Day is to have to explain to God why I or my congregation with so much failed to help Christians of other countries.

Let us not forget that there are unbelievers, unchurched, and unrepentant people in our own neighborhoods, too. Let's remember what our personal duty is and why we are a church. Perhaps this short video can help make the point! (Video)
Let us go and share the Gospel in Word and deed to God's glory. Amen.