

WHY WE WITNESS  
[written in oral form]

The Great Commission--Matthew 28:19-20.

We Mennonites tend to prefer the Great Commandment about loving God and people. We're lovers at heart.

The Great Commission doesn't fall in our comfort zone, and the Great Commission has been an excuse for all sorts of abuse.

Yet,.....it's there. It's in the Gospel of Matthew.

What are we to do about it? And, the bigger question is: How are we to do the Great Commission?

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To begin, it's always dangerous to form a theology on just a couple of verses. Basing a belief on a snippet / on a verse or two is naive and dangerous, too. The Bible is mostly comprised of narratives. Perhaps, our theology and journey to understanding should also be a narrative.

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A delightful story that adds insight to the pursuit of "How" is found in Luke 19. It's the story of Zacchaeus.

I've liked this story since childhood. There's even a catchy song about it,.... but I won't sing it for you.

I think I related to Zacchaeus, too.

And, NO I wasn't a tax collector.

Believe it or not, I used to be short,...and so was Zac.

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We all know this narrative.

Zac was an outcast; he was disliked. Tax collectors were shunned as much as lepers were.

Somehow, he heard the buzz that Jesus was coming to town.

Note this: Jesus' reputation was spreading. People wanted to find out more about him.

Does this same thing happen to churches--Christ in the world today?

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Zac was short, so he climbed a tree just to get a view of Jesus.

Jesus. Jesus looked up and saw him,.....he really saw Zac. Jesus knew him and his name.

Jesus took the initiative, and told Zac, "I'm going to stay at your place."

No doubt, Zacchaeus felt very welcomed to be welcoming.

Time together was a way to get to know each other.

Jesus invited him to Belong/ to commune with Jesus.

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To be sure, the crowd grumbled and complained because that's not the proper way to do it.

Those who are in power invite outsiders in by demanding that they think and believe like the insiders.

The church has mostly used this approach, and it was called "making disciples."

To maintain control the steps for outsiders to come in are:  
--First Believe correctly,.....then behave correctly,.... then and only then can you belong.

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Yet,.....those steps were NOT the way of Jesus.

The better way of welcoming is:

Inviting people to belong--accepting people where they are and who they are,... no exceptions.

Belonging is First.

Then, after time,... behaviour changes.....and eventually believing becomes a shared experience,...a "shared" experience.

Belonging -- Behaving,.... then believing.

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Thanks to Jesus, Zacchaeus felt welcomed--He Belonged with Jesus.

For ease of storytelling, Zac's behaviour quickly changed.

He declared that he was going to give away half of his wealth, and pledged to do justice with prejudice.

Those he defrauded, would be paid back four times the amount.

\*His behaviour changed noticeably and radically.

And then, an amazing thing happened!

Zacchaeus didn't even get to step three--believing, and Jesus declared that Salvation had come to him.

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Maybe getting the dogma/the rules right isn't so important?

And maybe,.....salvation is more of a process. A process that begins with Belonging / belonging with God as Jesus did.

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Last week, the emphasis was on using words. Here we have a demonstration of the importance of Zac's actions revealing his transformation. Yet, do note that he used his words. He stated exactly what he was going to do. After publically stating them, he couldn't back down.

Both Actions AND words are important!

Zacchaeus **was** a greedy, selfish outcast--disliked by all.

Jesus invited him to belong, and he responded with a transformed life.

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I hope we don't have to search for reasons for being a witness to the greater community. I think people's *needs*/ the reasons to invite people to belong with God are obvious.

And, I should mention that all benefit when we welcome outsiders.

In this case, Zac's community got a windfall of cash.

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It's not about the money, but rather about the positive results of belonging. We all benefit. The welcomed, the welcomer.... the entire community is enriched in countless ways.

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We don't have to look far to see the needs / to see people on the outside,... to see the powerless and hurting.

Fear, income disparity, racism, loneliness and sadness are all pulling us down / all pulling us down.  
Suicide,.... increasing drug use,....greed, ... injustices.....and so on are the symptoms of Not belonging.....  
of people not belonging to a group of people who are belonging in God's love.

The loving church is Needed. People need to belong.

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Nevertheless, we tend to get hung up on what exactly to do.

We obsess about the How.

Too often, we are idle as we process a plan for How to do ministry.

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The HOW doesn't matter if we do NOT possess the WHY.

Or,...I should better state it: the WHY possessing us.

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Simply put, the why is for and from the Love of God....

...because we have been touched by God's Spirit...

... because we are deeply moved by Jesus.....

....because WE Belong with God and with each other in God's love.

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The How / the what we do will fall into place.... when we are possessed by the WHY.

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If the Why is Not clear,.....then we need to climb a tree and look for God's love coming to us.