

“Go Ye Into the World”

Date: July 19, 2015

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: Matthew 28:19-20

Theme: Missions

Occasion: Paraguay Mission Team, VBS

A certain pastor was remembering the first Sunday in his new parish. He tells how the children’s sermon went. The sanctuary in his new church had some magnificent stained glass windows. So his message centered on how each one of us is called by God to help make up the whole community of faith.

He went on to tell the children, like the pictures in the windows, it takes many panels of glass to make up the whole picture. Wanting to teach them that each of us it to let God’s light shine through us, he said, “Each of you in a little pane.” (spelled p-a-n-e). Then, pointing to each child he said, “You’re a little pane, and you’re a little pane, and..

It took the pastor a few moments to realize why everyone was laughing so hard. Hello? You’re calling the children of your new congregation a little pain? That pastor’s sense of tactfulness may have been a little off, but his point was right on.

God needs each of us to allow God’s light to shine in us, and through us, so that others may see God’s love in action. Today we are celebrating the ministries of Vacation Bible School and the Paraguay Mission Team. We have among us friends who are a little pane, allowing God’s light and love to shine through them.

When Jesus was preparing to ascend to Heaven, he did not say, “Go forth to build monuments in my name.” Instead he said, “Go and make disciples.” That is the purpose of the Church, to make

disciples in Jesus' name. We are to share the good news of God's love in word and deed, so that others may believe.

I am so proud of the two ministries that are about to be launched this week by our fellow Lakewoodians: our Vacation Bible School and the team going to Paraguay. What a leap of faith to be doing both of them this summer. God is at work here among us.

I love this week's theme for VBS: "In God, we live and move and have our being." The emphasis is on the word MOVE. Kids naturally love to move. Adults tend to become a bit sedentary, but not the people of Lakewood. We are on the move in God's name, and I rejoice in those ministries. We are a mission-minded church.

People who have been touched by the life-changing message of Jesus Christ want to be in mission. They are called by God to tell the good news and to invite others to experience this amazing love and grace.

To be in mission is to spread the news of God's love in Jesus Christ. To be in mission means to love people because we have first been loved by God. We love people so they may experience the reality of God's love for them.

When Jesus gave the great commission, he told his disciples to go out to all the nations of the world. Over in the book of Acts, where it also records Jesus' ascension into Heaven, he tells the disciples to be his witnesses, "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Missions start at home. You begin by loving those who are closest to you. But then the circle of love widens to include the people

who live in your neighborhood, and then your city, and then our country, and then to countries all over the world.

This month we are glad to be able to serve those near to home. Next Sunday we have a group going to the City Mission to serve lunch. It's an awesome experience to share the love of God with some of Erie's poorest folks. Most of them are extremely grateful for the love and the helping hand when they're down and out.

We have a wonderful group of people who are prepared to share the love of God with the children who will begin gathering here tonight for VBS. We have the chance to tell them about God's love and invite them into a personal relationship with the God who made them, through the Lord Jesus Christ. What a privilege to share in this ministry. I'm really looking forward to it.

Later this week, we have the first wave of missionaries who are traveling to Paraguay, to be followed by another wave of missionaries going the following week. Talk about your risk-taking mission and service! These friends of ours are going to a country where most of the team don't even speak the language.

But they're allowing God to use them. Stepping out in faith, some of them are making both financial and time sacrifices to go. They are an awesome group of God's servants, some of God's little panes.

They've gathered up resources that New Horizons has identified as being needed to help that small mission school in a very poor section of Paraguay. Many of you have helped by purchasing and donating those items. I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Our Paraguay team has written and learned an adorable puppet skit that they're going to share wherever they are invited, sometimes even being able to go into the public schools over there. They've learned a few songs in Spanish to share. And they take the love of Christ in their hearts.

You see, you don't have to speak the same language to share God's love. You can do it with smiles, with songs, with laughter, and with presence.

Missions is changing this church. It has been happening for a long time, even before I ever arrived on the scene here at Lakewood. Our focus is not just on ourselves and our church and our building. Our reason for existing as Lakewood UMC is not merely to survive, but to share the love of Christ in word and deed.

This is a vibrant church, not simply because we're busy, but because we've been listening to the voice of God, and I believe we're busy doing the right things. We have a very generous church, which shares the love of God with financial resources.

But missions is more than simply writing a check, it's getting your hands dirty by helping on a Habitat for Humanity Build, or serving dinner at the Mission. It's also about forming relationships with the poor.

You see, we are called not only to be in mission *to*, but also to be in mission *with*. And that's about relationship. That takes time and persistence, and it involves a learning curve. I would love to see Lakewood become a mentoring church to one of the families at the Refuge, walking alongside them as they build their lives up again.

Mission is allowing God to use us to touch other people's lives in the name of Jesus. The church is not simply another social service agency. We have plenty of those. We are not simply do-gooders.

But we also carry the message of a loving God, and a sacrificial Savior who died to save us from our sin. We not only do good, we do good in the name of Jesus Christ. It is Christ who calls us and Christ who sends us.

Go ye into the world, and know that Christ goes with us. Amen!
Let us pray:

“O Lord our God, thank you for loving us. Thank you for calling us to be your children; and thank you for calling us to share in your mission – to love the world in Jesus' name.

Grant to each of us your Holy Spirit, that we might discover our part in mission. Some of us are called to go and to do ministry with people in need. Some are called to be prayer partners. Some are called to provide financial help. And some are asked to donate supplies.

Gracious God, guide each of us to know and to do our part to support your mission in the world. We ask this in the precious name of Christ our Savior. Amen.”