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9:00 a.m. Christian Education

**10:00 a.m. Worship**

Children's Sunday School during Worship



**"It's What We Do:  
Proclamation of the Gospel for the Salvation of Humankind"**

**Romans 10:8-15**

**Rev. Ron Holmes**

**April 18, 2010**



We begin a new series today the topic for which is "The Great Ends of the Church," which are found in our *Book of Order*. Now, "The Great Ends of the Church" may not exactly grab your attention, so we are calling this series "It's What We Do." The Great Ends of the Church are our purpose in being the church. It's what we do in order to fulfill our calling as Christ's church in the world. There are six "Great Ends" cited in the *Book of Order* and they are, in order: *Proclamation of the Gospel for the Salvation of Humankind* (our topic for today); *Shelter, Nurture, and Spiritual Fellowship of the Children of God*; *Maintenance of Divine Worship*; *Preservation of the Truth*; *Promotion of Social Righteousness*; *Exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the World*. The Presbyterian Church recently published a series of books on the Great Ends of the Church and Barbara and I will be guided by them without necessarily reciting them directly back to you.

The Scripture reading for today's topic, *Proclamation of the Gospel for the Salvation of Humankind* (some of the titles are rather long!), is Romans 10:8-15. (Read)

Several years ago in one of our Inquirers' classes, we were looking at the *Nine Marks of Membership*, another list in the *Book of Order* which is a kind of expansion on the *Great Ends of the Church*, describing in a bit more detail what active membership in the church looks like. The first "mark" of membership listed is "proclaiming the good news." When I mentioned that, one of the elders assisting with the class looked at me and said, "That's your job." Therein followed a discussion about "proclaiming the good news" being everyone's job. That elder was not unique in such thinking. We in the church tend to think of proclaiming the good news as being the pastor's job. That's what preaching is, isn't it? Well, yes, but preaching is only one aspect of proclaiming the good news. We "proclaim" the good news in a variety of ways every day...by what we say and do. In fact, the most powerful and effective way of proclaiming the gospel is not in preaching, but rather, in what followers of Jesus Christ do and say in their everyday lives.

One of the things I miss most about my pre-seminary and pastoral ministry days is the impact, as a

"layperson," my proclamation of the gospel could have. As a pastor, when I connect with someone, say in my neighborhood, and the appropriate opportunity comes along to share something about the importance of Jesus Christ and the good news of the gospel to my life, without fail the immediate response is, "Well, you're a pastor. It's your job." When you have the opportunity to share with someone the importance of faith to your life it has much more impact than I do. I miss that. The task of proclaiming the good news is the task of everyone in the church...and you have a greater impact on others than I do. When I sit in my purple chair in the driveway and have a conversation with a neighbor who, at some point in the conversation or later in the relationship might say, "I notice you leaving the house every Sunday morning about the same time," and I begin to talk about going to church every Sunday...and then it comes out that I'm a pastor, the response always is, "Oh, you're a pastor! It's your job!" You have a much more effective role in proclaiming the gospel and it is essential to the church fulfilling its role as a church that you are aware of and actively engaging in the proclamation of the gospel.

One more word about proclaiming the gospel. We "proclaim" through our words and deeds. It's not just through words and it's not just through deeds. "Actions speak louder than words" is true—and our actions must support what we say we believe. But, actions without words can often leave unclear what motivates and drives us. "Oh, you volunteer at the hospital? Great! Good for you! You obviously care about your community." There's no understanding of Christian faith and responding to the good news of the gospel as a source of motivation for our volunteering. And Paul reminds us, "*...how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?*" We must be prepared to answer the question, "Why?" for our actions with words about our faith in Jesus Christ and responding to his call to be a servant to all. All of us have the task of proclamation. Your proclamation of the good news is more effective and impacting than mine. And our proclamation consists of both actions and words.

I know I've shared this story with you before, but I think it is relevant to this topic and worth repeating...a perfect example of what I'm talking about. As most of you know, I have a brother, Mick, who lives in Greeley. His story is much like mine in that we grew up in an every-Sunday-morning-at-church-two-years-of-confirmation-class-and-no-excuses-for-missing-one-class home. But, he, like me, never took ownership of what we were learning. He, like me, had head knowledge of faith, but not heart knowledge. And he, like me, left home for college and didn't darken any church door while in college...except when we came home on the occasional weekend for laundry and some good home-cooked meals. He, like me, was following an athletic god...only his sport was football, not baseball. And he, like me, was eventually confronted with his lack of truly following Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord and re-committed his life to Christ—now with heart knowledge as well as head knowledge. Before his commitment, however, yet after his football playing career was over he refereed high school basketball. And, often he was paired with a friend named Bob. They would travel together to games out on the northeastern Colorado plains to places like Sterling, Yuma and Julesburg. Now, the other piece to the story is that my brother during that time had a bit of a temper and refereeing basketball is fast paced and often emotional. There would be the usual arguments with coaches and my brother could get in the face of a coach with the best of them. Then, on the way home, he and Bob would discuss the game—often in colorful and emotional language. Then, Mick re-committed his life to Christ. The next season of basketball refereeing saw a very different Mick. Less volatile, calmer and definitely no longer discussing with Bob the games in colorful and emotional language. At mid-season one night, Mick and Bob refereed a classically tight, tense game between two rivals—the kind of game that always brings out controversy and high emotions. Only Mick was no longer the referee who relished the in-your-face confrontations, but dealt with them much more calmly. During the drive home, in the customary discussion about the game—only, remember, Mick now in less colorful mode—Bob, who was driving, pulled the car over to the side of the road, put the car in "park" and looked at Mick and said, "Okay! What is it? What's different about you?" Mick's actions throughout the season had spoken loudly to Bob, but Bob didn't yet have enough information to determine the cause and motive to Mick's actions.

And there, on that lonely country road, Mick had the open invitation to say something about what motivated his actions...the change brought by following Jesus as Savior and Lord. Not too long after that, Bob committed his life to Christ and he and his wife, along with Mick and his wife, were important witnesses to Kim and me in our faith journeys. As people are wont to say these days: "That's what I'm talking 'bout!" That's proclaiming the gospel by deed and word—and the impact it can have on people's lives.

And what is it we are proclaiming? Good news. Good news! Don't you think the world could use some good news? And we have good news to share. Literally, that's what the word "gospel" means—"good news." We have good news to proclaim to the world. Recall a sermon series from a few years ago whose title basically was this...*Hey! It's Good News!* Sometimes I think we need to be reminded that the gospel we proclaim is good news. Jesus is Savior and Lord. "*Declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead...and you will be saved,*" (Romans 10:9). Do you find that good news? For you? For others? Then it's worth proclaiming...in word and deed. It's good news for "the salvation of humankind." It's good news for everybody. Not a select few. Not just those who look and act like us. It's good news for everybody...and we ought to be alert for ways we can proclaim it, by word and deed, to all whom God brings across our path.

I conclude with a rather lengthy quote from Catherine Gonzalez, the author of the *Proclamation of the Gospel for the Salvation of Humankind* book in the "Great Ends" series. It's longer than I normally might quote, but I think they are great words on this topic.

*"Presbyterians are often tempted to limit their proclamation to those who already lead basically "good" lives. We assume that those who are clearly and publicly sinful, or have made such terrible choices that their lives are seriously disordered, are not interested in what we have to say. We may help them, but our mission may well be limited to such help, without any real proclamation.*

*For instance, a church that has a soup kitchen or a night shelter may well assume its mission is to meet the physical or even social needs of the people who come. But the thought that they might become members of our congregation is not part of our agenda. Why? Were we to see the gospel radically transform their lives, what effect would it have on our own faith? Often our rationale is that they would not be comfortable in our worship. But it is probably equally true that we are the ones who would not be comfortable. Why? Would we be uncomfortable with those for whom the gospel has been a matter of life and death, for whom it has caused an enormous transformation? Might we wonder why the gospel has not had such a great effect in our own lives? Do we really expect that the gospel can transform lives? Do our own lives need transformation by the gospel? What would it look like? These are all questions that a congregation needs to struggle with when it asks who the people are to whom it is to proclaim the gospel.*

*To witness, to proclaim, is to risk being changed ourselves. If faith has no power in the lives of others, there is no point in proclaiming it. If it does have great power, we must be ready to have that power unleashed in our own lives." (p. 89, 90)*

Let's take a moment of silent reflection to consider our calling to proclaim the gospel for the salvation of humankind.