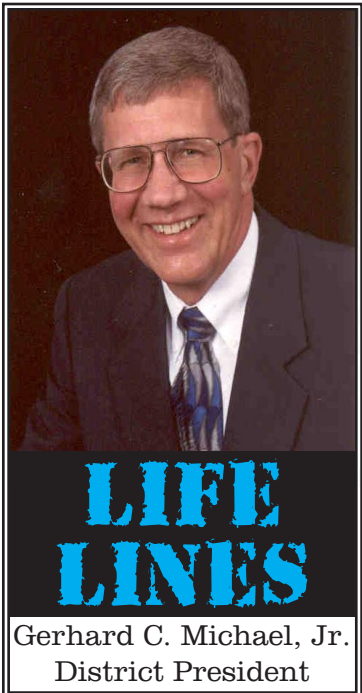


The Easter Imperative: "Go quickly and tell!"



Gerhard C. Michael, Jr.
District President

In the Easter story we have, I believe, an emphasis which is often overlooked. The title of this column will undoubtedly suggest that Jesus' resurrection implies witnessing, which it most assuredly does. But have you checked the Easter record to see to whom we are first sent to witness?

The Easter account in the Gospel according to St. Matthew is highly instructive in this regard. In chapter 28, we read how Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the tomb early Easter morning. A great quake shook the earth; an angel rolled back the stone from the grave, and then sat on it. The guards became like dead men, for fear of the angel's holiness.

The angel then addressed the women with words which suggested that they too, godly as they were, were overcome with fright, "Do not be afraid." If I had been there, I think

that I would have needed similar words. I have lived through earthquakes — they are nothing to laugh about. A quaking earth is enough to shake the spirit of the most confident of souls. To top it off, the angel's appearance was like lightning and his clothing pure white like newly fallen snow. Wouldn't you tremble with bewilderment, wondering, "What in the world is happening? This is terrifying! I'm scared. Help!"?

To that fear, which undoubtedly was compounded by the events of the previous days when the Lord on whom they had relied for inspiration had been falsely accused and then executed, the angel announced news which can only be termed excellent, surprising, good in the truest sense of the word, "I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay." In these events is the end of fear!



Jesus is the One who can be trusted. He predicted his passion, death and resurrection. He did what he said. His suffering and death were for one purpose: "to give his life a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:28) People are fearful because they are sinful, acting like they are in control when they are not. As the Passover lamb, Jesus shed his blood to free us from the futility of our self-centered ways, the cause of our fear. His

resurrection is the good news that announces his death has accomplished that tremendous feat for all of us.

The women had to hear that good news, even though they had been in the Lord's company and undoubtedly had heard and

Lord and fled in the time of trial. They had failed him. They were not worthy of being called his disciples, but what does Jesus instruct the women to do? To go to these fallen disciples, to those who had abandoned him, to go to them as his brothers. What he had done

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knew his word that predicted his suffering, death and resurrection, for they had gone to the tomb, surely not expecting a risen Lord. They demonstrate how easy it is to trust our experience and senses more than the promises of God; dead people just don't come back to life. The women illustrate that Christians too need to hear the good news of Jesus' liberating work. In love the Lord dispatched his angel to them to deliver the message of Jesus' resurrection.

After telling the good news of Jesus' resurrection, the angel immediately instructed them, "Go quickly and tell his disciples. 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.'" The disciples are no different than the women. Even though they have spent three years in the presence of their Lord, have been instructed by him also in the matter of his suffering, death, and resurrection, they need to know that events have unfolded "as he said." (Matthew 28:6) If the good news does not reach their heads and hearts, how will they be able to be people who can live without fear? How can they be people of hope, purpose, and joy? They have got to hear too! Rather than an angel going to them, however, the women are to be the messengers.



That those inside the circle of Christ's followers need to be the recipients of our witnessing is re-enforced for us by the Lord himself. After the women left the tomb quickly to carry out their assignment, Jesus met and instructed them again, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." (28:10)

Indeed, Jesus' words get to the heart of our witnessing. It is to convey his forgiveness to others. The disciples had forsaken their

in dying and rising was to provide the forgiveness needed to restore them. The women are to witness to them, that they may know and rejoice in his pardoning love.

The record of the first Easter is instructive for us as well. Daily each of us fails to live by the Word of our Lord. Instead of trusting his wonderful promises to provide for us, we become anxious about our finances. Instead of reaching out in love, we withdraw. Instead of serving without thought of reward, we look for recognition for our efforts. We

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who are Christians still sin daily — and therefore need to hear the good news too. We need to be the recipients of others' witnessing!

Recently one of our commissioned ministers shared a story of an individual who had left one of our congregations. This individual had been very active and involved, but then due to health issues had been absent for a period of time. No one checked up on him to inquire about his well-being. After six months of neglect, he decided to leave because no one had communicated care and concern for him. The point the commissioned minister was making was that those in the church also need to hear the good news. Just because we know the content of the story does not mean that we do not need to hear it addressed to our heart's need again and again. Witnessing begins within the body of Christ!



While the imperative to "go quickly and tell" is normally understood to apply to witnessing to those who

do not know the Lord Jesus, the story of the first Easter in Matthew's Gospel suggests that we begin our witnessing to those in the church.

In the Gospel of Luke, we read the delightful story of the Emmaus disciples. What did they do when Jesus was revealed to them in the breaking of the bread? Even though the hour was late, they immediately got up and quickly journeyed the seven miles back to Jerusalem. They had good news to share — within the company of Jesus' disciples!

The Gospel of John records a similar phenomenon. The disciples who saw Jesus Easter evening told Thomas, their brother who was absent, "We have seen the Lord." He needed to know too.

Think of the people in your family and in the congregation to which you belong. Which of them has not faced challenges in their personal lives for which a word of encouragement would not have been welcome? Is someone tired from dealing with responsibilities at home and work? What word of support might you express? Is someone

cast down because a loved one has let them down? What good word might you share? Is someone experiencing loss? How might you comfort them?

If the church is not going to witness to itself, pointing one another to the Lord Jesus as the One who has defeated sin, death, and the devil, how can we have a healthy church? And if the church is not healthy because it is not solidly anchored on the work which Jesus has accomplished in his life, death, and resurrection, how can it hope to "go quickly and tell" the world what Jesus has done?

Through the church's internal witnessing, including clearly Gospel centered preaching, teaching and conversation, we Christians are equipped and empowered to tell the world what happened on the first Good Friday and Easter. By witnessing effectively and lovingly to one another, we can begin to carry out our mission to the world!

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Every congregation is a church in mission, and every member is a missionary; with all of us working together under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, empowered by His Gospel to share His love.

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