

June 15, 2008
Hope Church
“Our Call to Teach, Preach, Heal”
Rowland VanEs, Jr.

Last week we heard about God’s call to Abraham to **go!** and Jesus’ invitation to Matthew the tax collector: **come and follow me**. This week we read about Jesus’ ministry in Galilee and how he then sent out the 12 disciples on their own mission to all the lost sheep of Israel there.

As Jesus goes about on this his third tour of Galilee we read in Mt. 9:35 that he went through all the towns and villages, *teaching* in their synagogues, *preaching* the good news of the kingdom, and *healing* every disease and sickness... He talks to his disciples about the harvest and the need for workers and then in Matt 10 he sends them out with authority to do just as he had been doing. When they returned they rejoiced in their successful ministry in Jesus’ name.

The 12 disciples were not qualified or well prepared, (4 were fishermen after all) but they were still sent out as apostles to go and do what they had just seen Jesus doing: teaching, preaching, and healing. Jesus gave them their authority, it was not their own. At the end of Matt, in the great commission the same authority is given to them again when he tells them,

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

We have all been *called* by God and given *authority* by Jesus and *equipped* by the Holy Spirit to make disciples, to teach, to preach, and even to heal. Let’s look first at our call to teach. Jesus was a teacher, *a rabbi* and Jesus taught in their cities and their villages, he taught in their synagogues and in the temple. He taught beside the sea, up on a mountain, and down on a plain. He taught sitting at table, and as he walked and talked along the way. He was always teaching his disciples and anyone else who was listening to him first in Galilee and later in Jerusalem.

His teaching was astounding, it was spellbinding, it had authority but it was not always easy or accepted. It stirred up the people and angered the authorities and offended his home town. The same was true of the disciples after Jesus left. They also taught everyone everywhere. In Acts 2 we read that the 3,000 people who joined the church at Pentecost devoted themselves to the apostle’s *teaching* (and also to fellowship, the breaking of bread, and to prayer) and everyone was filled with awe and many signs and wonders were done by God through them.

Later Paul tells Timothy, if you teach you are a good minister. Hope Church does a good job of teaching but most churches don’t. Most stop teaching once kids are confirmed or too old for Sunday School and that is too bad for there is much to learn, much we have to be taught. We are all called to teach: to teach our children, to teach our neighbors, to teach our colleagues, to teach everyone everywhere what we know and what we believe about Jesus. The words teach and teaching occur over 200 times in the Bible so we are all *called to teach*.

We have also all been called to preach for we are all *ambassadors*, we are all *witnesses* to what the Lord has done for us and for the lost and broken world so loved by God. The word for preaching here means being a *herald*, a town crier, someone who **shouts** out the good news because they can’t hold it in. Think of the day someone’s first child was born, how they had to tell everyone, “it’s a girl!” or “it’s a boy!” Could they have kept that good news inside? As the song says, how can I keep from singing? Think of preaching as singing

It was like that for those who knew Jesus. Think of Philip who runs to tell Nathaniel, we have found the Messiah! We too are to preach the word and Jesus is the word made flesh for us and for our salvation, he is our Messiah. How can we not preach about our Savior and Lord? We are to preach the word of God that 2 Tim tells us is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. Just as some of your kids trained for hiking the Appalachian trail, so all disciples have to be trained in righteousness before they can be effective servants of God. We are trained by hearing God words, not our own human words.

We also preach good news: that the kingdom of God is near, it is not far, it is already here, it is among us, between us, within us, all around us if we can just open our eyes of faith and see what God is already doing on earth as it is in heaven. God is alive and active, this is the good news we are all called preach.

Now I know not many people like to preach from up here in the pulpit but this is not the best way or the best place to preach from anyway since our actions speak louder than our words. We can and do preach always, using words only when necessary. We preach to everyone all the time as they watch us and learn from us. What are you preaching with your lifestyle?

If all anyone knew about the gospel was what they saw from your life, what would they know? Just as our Kenyan neighbors learn what Americans are like from watching us there, so your neighbors are learning what Christians are like from watching you here. What gospel is your life and lifestyle preaching? That is the question I ask all my students (and myself).

Finally, we are also all called to heal. The Greek word here actually sounds like therapy and it means to wait on menially, like a servant, to relieve and so to cure or to heal. We can all wait on others, we can all hold the hand of someone who is sick, can't we? When I worked for Hospice of Holland, some of my patients could hardly talk or hear but I could hold their hand and they could squeeze mine back. That was all I could do and that was enough to relieve their suffering just a little. A lot of healing is just being with people, letting them know you are there and that you care.

We had a missionary friend in Kenya who asked people to come and work with her. When people said, but what would I come and do she would always say, can you hold someone's hand? Then you can be a missionary. It's not that easy of course but she was right, we can all hold someone's hand and provide that kind of human *therapy*. Think of all the older people in nursing homes and all the younger people in orphanages who just need a hand to hold on to. Can you hold their hand? There are lots of hands that need to be held in the world today...

We read in Matt 9:36 that Jesus had compassion on the people and again the Greek word helps us for it really means he was moved with pity, he felt it in his gut. He was sick to his stomach seeing their pain and so he did all he could to relieve their suffering. This special Greek word is used 12X in the NT to show how moved Jesus was. How often have you been moved by the suffering of others whether here or in Darfur, in Somalia, Iraq or Afghanistan?

In Jan of this year I know many of you were moved to pray for us and for Kenya during the post-election violence that killed at least 1,500 and displaced at least 400,000 people into camps where they were living as refugees in their own country. We thank you for your prayers for us and for St Paul's and we ask you to continue to pray for Kenya. I'm glad you were moved and I pray that we continue to be moved by the suffering of so many people in the world today. May we be moved enough to pray, to write letters, and to vote differently...

Today's scripture reminds us all that we have a common calling to teach, to preach, and to heal and I hope you have all thought about new ways you can do that here in Holland MI. As

your missionaries in Kenya we would also like to share with you some of the ways we do that on your behalf in Kenya as well. We also look forward to sharing more stories and some pictures of our work after the service in the commons area when we can answer your Qs too.

Jane and I both teach at St Paul's University, the oldest ecumenical school in Kenya. It was started over 100 years ago by the Church Missionary Society out of England and is still 51% Anglican but also owned and operated by the Methodist Church of Kenya, the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, the Reformed Church of East Africa, and the National Council of Churches of Kenya. Because we have students from so many denominations speaking so many different languages, we teach all our classes in English.

Jane teaches sociology and psychology and works with those getting an MA in community care for HIV and Aids. I teach Bible and Business Ethics and CSR to Business Students and mostly OT and OT interpretation to the Theology students at St Paul's. St Paul's University has over 500 students and our classes have 30-90 students in them so we are tired from grading all those exams since 70% of their grade depends on one 3 hour final exam... Like most teachers, we enjoy teaching but we don't really enjoy all that marking and grading...

We also preach always by our actions as we are the only missionaries on campus and so everyone watches our every move. That's one of the hazards of being a stranger in a foreign land. I do also have the opportunity to preach from the pulpit during morning chapel. We have chapel every day and the teaching staff get to preach every Wed with communion once a month. As the former acting chaplain I often help the current chaplain with special services like opening and closing the semester and dedications and seasonal services like Ash Wed.

Our family also attends a small Sunday fellowship and we are all involved with those Sunday services in one way or another. It's a bit like early worship at Hope church and we have good music and good preaching and great fellowship that includes coffee and tea after the service and meals at each other's houses, much like the fellowship groups here at Hope Church. Our kids were glad to see you still have pizza Sun although we will have to miss it this month as we travel to Iowa and MN and then come back to MI for July and a few weeks in Aug.

Finally, we have a chance to heal, to be therapeutic when we spend time with students and other faculty and staff in small groups that meet Tues and Thurs. Jane is also involved with an active women's bible study on Thurs and I meet with the 12 reformed students every Wed. This gives us time to get to know them as individuals and to be a shoulder for them to cry and/or lean on and we can help them more personally and more directly than we can in class. We live right on campus and our house is open to all students and staff to come and share a cup of tea or coffee, especially the foreign students studying at St Paul's (2 from Malawi).

So, that is how we try to follow the example of Christ in Kenya by teaching, by preaching, and by healing those we come in contact with. We thank you for your support of us, both spiritually and financially. We enjoy reading news from hope and we covet your prayers for us and for our children Jenna and Michelle and for our work on behalf of the RCA in Kenya.

God bless you in your work here in Holland and for the kingdom that reaches all the way to Kenya and to Asia and back again. The whole earth belongs to King Jesus, praise God. Amen

We would just ask you to continue praying for the staff and students of St Paul's as the University continues to expand and offers more programs (like Masters in Theology, Masters in Development, Masters in Business Administration). Pray to that we remain focused on producing servants of God and humanity, humble Christian leaders for global service.

You can also continue praying for the coalition government in Kenya that it will hold until the next election that there would be enough time for healing the wounds and solving the underlying causes of the recent conflict which are as much economic and social as political.

Specifically you can pray for the commission that is investigating the election results and the reaction to those results. There is also a group looking into the land issue in Kenya which still does not have its own constitution. The Kenyan Anti-Corruption Commission also needs to do more work and do it faster to change the culture of impunity among Kenyan politicians.

You can also pray for the church and for its leaders, especially the new leader of the NCKK. They have admitted their failures in the past, their sins of omission and commission, and now they are trying to be a positive force for change and for unity, reconciliation, and justice. I went through the Belhar Confession with the Reformed students precisely for that reason...

Of course the thousands of internally displaced people need food, water, shelter, and support. Even some of our own students were affected and continue to be affected by the violence and the trauma of recent events. It is expensive to study and many businesses were lost and with it the ability to pay for school fees.

Students and Faculty in our 8 diploma schools were also affected and one friend was injured and has had to relocate because he's from the wrong tribe... Kenya is still working on being a united country where all people are treated equally. Christians need to teach and preach that the water of their baptism is thicker than the blood of their tribal identity. Only with this new mindset will Kenya be healed and find true peace.

God bless all of you as you seek to be faithful here and thanks again for your support. Amen.