

“Let’s Surprise the World!: B is for Bless”

Mark 10:13-16

3/4/2018

*(Show Title Slide)*

According to Luke’s Gospel,

On Easter Sunday,

in the evening of that day that changed the world

Jesus appeared to his disciples and said,

<sup>44</sup> *[Jesus said to them,] “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the Law from Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”* <sup>45</sup>*Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.* <sup>46</sup>*He said to them, “This is what is written: the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day,* <sup>47</sup> *and a change of heart and life for the forgiveness of sins must be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*

– Luke 24:44-47

Do you believe Jesus meant it when he said that

*a change of heart and life for the forgiveness of sins must be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem?*

According to Matthew’s Gospel,

After he was resurrected on Easter,

Jesus met his disciples on that mountain in Galilee

<sup>18</sup>*Jesus came near and spoke to them, “I’ve received all authority in heaven and on earth.* <sup>19</sup>*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,* <sup>20</sup>*teaching them to obey everything that I’ve commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age.”*

– Matthew 28:18-20

Do you believe Jesus meant it when he said

*Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations*

In the book of the Acts of the Apostles,

Just before Jesus ascends to heaven

His final command to his disciples is

*“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

– Acts 1:8

Do you believe Jesus meant it when he said

*You are to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

Jesus is pretty clear that

we are to be sharing his good news with the world

How are you...

How are each and every one of us doing with this?

*(Show Billy Graham Slide)*

Billy Graham’s funeral was Friday.

We’ve heard of Billy Graham, right?

There is much to be preached about the faithfulness,

the honest lifestyle,

and the evangelistic message of Billy Graham.

I just want to lift up one number.

Over sixty years, he *personally* preached to 215 million people.

His radio and TV evangelistic campaigns reached over 2.2 billion

Anyone here have had 2.2 billion listen to you?

*(Show Billy Sunday Slide)*

I recently learned more about the evangelist Billy Sunday.

It was suggested that he had a great affect

On the Methodist Churches across Southern Minnesota

In Austin, Albert Lea, and Fairmont

Our United Methodist churches are bigger than they should be

For the size of these towns

Billy Sunday’s preaching had an effect on the people

in our church here in Fairmont

*(Show Fairmont Methodist building Slide)*

In 1928 we built a larger church

on the site of the smaller wooden frame church

that we previously had here

Perhaps some of this growth was a result of Billy Sunday’s

tent meetings with sawdust on the floor

*(Show Billy Sunday at White House Slide)*

Billy Sunday was a professional baseball player

who converted to Christianity

Here he is at the White House in 1922

In the early 1900’s

Billy Sunday preached in the states surrounding Iowa

and preached to more than 100 million worship attenders

Anyone here preach to 100 million people?

Do you think Jesus loves you any less,

Even if we don’t share the Good News of Jesus

to millions or billions of people?

*(Show Title Slide)*

Yet, Jesus wasn’t kidding

when he commanded and commissioned us

to call people to change their hearts and lives

to make disciples of all nations

to be his witnesses to the end of earth

But not all of us are Billy Grahams or Billy Sundays

Michael Frost puts it this way in his book

*Surprise the World*

*When gifted evangelists tell the rest of us that we should behave like gifted evangelists too, it has a debilitating effect. We look at confident, articulate, theologically trained evangelists preaching in our churches and hear their stories of sharing the gospel on the back of a napkin in a restaurant or on a plane, and then we hear them tell us that we too can (and indeed, should) do what they do and we freeze! We know we can’t do what they do.*

But instead of freezing and doing nothing,

There is something each of the rest of us can do

We can live our lives

In thought, word, and deed

In such a way that we can begin,

Through our own lifestyle and practices

To point the way to Jesus for others

In my early years in college I was not an evangelist,

I was a musician – and a tuba player at that.

(If you ever were a tuba player, or ever knew one, you might know what I’m talking about)

Yet, I can still remember a day when one of my friends,

Who was not Christian, but Jewish

Came to me and said

*Why do you act the way you do. You are so nice to people.*

*What is it about your being a Christian that allows you to live that way? Tell me more about Jesus*

And we had a very pleasant conversation

about why Jesus was important to me in my life.

A group of United Methodist clergy, of whom I am a part,  
Read this book called *Surprise the World*  
As one of our monthly book studies.

*(Show Surprise the World Slide)*

In his book, Michael Frost lists five really easy ways  
To lead lives that causes those around us  
To question why we live our lives in such a special way

To make it easy the first letter of each practice spells BELLS  
*(Show BELLS Slide)*

We use the word “Bless” a whole lot in the church.  
Or even when someone sneezes

Ever wonder where it comes from?  
In the Greek and Latin precedents  
It means “to speak well of”  
Or “to praise”

In the Old English  
It comes from “to add strength to another’s arm”

So  
*to bless others is to build them up, to fill them with  
encouragement for them to increase in strength and prosperity.*  
– *Surprise the World: (p. 30)*  
*(Show highlighted Bless Slide)*

And in our busy culture,  
when so many are so busy running from one thing to the next,  
when we take time to bless someone,  
when we take time to encourage or build another person up,  
it surprises them, it intrigues them

So here are three ways of blessing others  
That we can start doing this week

First, offer words of affirmation  
*(Show words of affirmation Slide)*

Send a handwritten note  
Write an email  
Send a short text message

*(Show Mark Twain Slide)*

Mark Twain said,  
*I can live for two months on a good compliment*

Second, do an act of kindness  
*(Show act of kindness Slide)*

Helping your neighbor with the snow  
Watching the children of a young family you know  
What are some other ideas?

These things literally adds strength to another’s arm,  
Because it lightens their load

Third, give an unexpected gift.  
*(Show unexpected gift Slide)*

These don’t need to be expensive.  
Walk through the Dollar Store  
and think about the people who you know.  
When we went on our Mission Trip to Tennessee two years ago,  
someone bought stuff at the Dollar Store  
and gave us a bag a day to open up and brighten our day  
Maybe you know of someone or family  
who would appreciate a meal as a gift  
It could be the second half of a double batch of something  
you’re already making for dinner  
Again, these gifts are only limited by your imagination

I think of Arlene every time I see this box  
that she gave me years ago

And gifting others brings joy into our own life.

I love it when someone says,  
*You didn’t have to do that!*  
*That’s right. If would have had to, it wouldn’t have been a gift.*

And the cool part is that these blessings bounce around  
our congregation and our community.  
Kind of like when you smile at someone on the sidewalk,  
And that person, after wondering what’s wrong with you,  
Smiles at the next person who they meet,  
Who, in turn, smiles at another,  
Who, in turn...

So what does blessing others have to do with Jesus  
And his charge for us to share his Good News?

In a doctoral thesis entitled *Blessers Versus Converters*,  
a researcher looked at two teams of short-term missionaries  
that visited Thailand with different missional strategies.

The team referred to as the “blessers”  
went with the intention of simply blessing people.  
They saw their mission as being to bless whoever came their way  
in whatever practical ways they could.

The “converters,” on the other hand,  
went with the sole intention of converting people  
and evangelizing everyone they encountered.

Guess what?  
The “blessers” had far greater social impact.

And this next part is cool,  
They discovered that the “blessers”  
had almost 50 times as many conversions than the “converters”!  
The “blessers” were 50 times more successful  
at helping people find their way back home to God!  
*(Show Surprise the World Slide)*

For those who are reading the book,  
Michael Foster goes into some more detail  
And adds some additional guidance at the end of the chapter

Yet for all of us,  
Let’s try this out...  
*(Show highlighted Bless Slide)*

Bless three people this coming week,  
At least one of whom is not a member of our congregation.

<sup>13</sup>*People were bringing children to Jesus so that he would bless them. But the disciples scolded them. <sup>14</sup>When Jesus saw this, he grew angry and said to them, "Allow the children to come to me. Don't forbid them, because God's kingdom belongs to people like these children. <sup>15</sup>I assure you that whoever doesn't welcome God's kingdom like a child will never enter it." <sup>16</sup>Then he hugged the children and blessed them.*

– *Mark 10:13-16*

Let us bless some people this week!

(Our Time of Prayer)