



THE WHOLE WORLD MOBILIZING GO FORWARD!

SERMON

TITLE

Go Forward!

TEXT

Mark 16:15, 19-20

THEME

The Great Commission still compels us as soldier-disciples to go forward for God's Kingdom, bringing every person in this world into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

INTRODUCTION

2017 marks the centenary of the United States' entry into the First World War. At the beginning of the war America tried to remain neutral, but when Axis forces began attacking American ships in the Atlantic it was no longer possible to stay out of the conflict. In December of 1917, then President Woodrow Wilson asked the US Congress for, in his words, "a war to end all wars" that would "make the world safe for democracy". When American forces entered the conflict zone of Europe they found that the war was being fought by means of trench warfare - where soldiers would live and fight in open trenches on frontlines sometimes hundreds of miles long.

In this method of warfare, soldiers of opposing sides would fire at each other from within their trenches and outposts. The ability to find cover in these dugout positions was certainly helpful, though it resulted in battles lasting weeks, sometimes even months. Soldiers would take up defensive positions, secure their trenches, and wait. In the mud, in the blood, they would wait. The war in which Americans now found themselves was fast becoming a war of attrition. Senior commanders realized that if the war was to be won in Europe then a new



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method of warfare was needed - a method of warfare where soldiers, who were formerly on the defensive, would go on the offensive. Leaving their trenches behind, they would go up 'over the top' and charge the trench of their opponent and thus engage with the enemy. Charging an enemy position was fraught with danger. To run towards what everybody else ran away from required a great amount of bravery to say the least. But these brave young Americans, so far from home, went on the offensive. Heeding the call from their commanding officer to go forward, they went forward, closed with the enemy, and won the day. On November 11, 1918, just 11 months after Americans joined the war to end all wars, an armistice was signed and the war was over. The war didn't end because America decided to continue the established policy of trench warfare - it ended because they discontinued it. The war ended because the soldiers were willing to go forward.

TRANSITION

We know sadly that World War One was not the "war to end all wars" as President Wilson hoped it would be. We also know as followers of Jesus Christ that the true "war to end all wars" is the Salvation War - because only when every person's heart is won for the Lord will lasting peace reign over the earth. And yet spiritually speaking, many of the Lord's soldiers are sitting out this war, hiding in trenches: trenches of fear, trenches of silence, trenches of apathy. All the while, our enemy the devil is leading humanity towards hell in a never ending battle of destruction. My friends, we must get out of our trenches. We must go forward! We must 'go to', 'go preach', and 'go do!'

GO TO!

V.15 "Go inTO all the world."

In the sixteenth chapter of Mark's gospel, the resurrected Jesus appeared to his disciples as they were eating. Verse 14 says, "He spoke firmly to them because they had no faith. They would not believe those who had seen him after he rose from the dead." Think about this for a moment. Jesus made numerous promises



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to the disciples that after his death he would rise again¹. Yet during the crucifixion the disciples scattered in fear, Peter going so far as to say that he did not know Jesus.

Now the disciples were in hiding, or to put it another way, they were deep down in their trench of fear. Their fear caused them to lose faith. Their loss of faith caused them to doubt. Their doubt caused them to disbelieve the reports that Jesus was alive. What a sad turn of events. Even though verse 12 reports that two of them had seen and talked with Jesus while they were walking, the rest of the group did not believe them. A few days earlier they had one final meal with their master before his crucifixion, an event we call the Last Supper. This meal together in Mark 16 may well have been their last supper with each other as the former disciples of Jesus. After all, the leader of their movement was dead. Wasn't it time to move on with their lives? We can imagine them saying, "Let's have one final meal together and then we'll go our separate ways." "No, no, we don't want to hear that story again how you think you saw Jesus walking with you on the road. It wasn't him, it couldn't be him, he's dead."

Then, Jesus appeared to them. In the trench of their doubt and disbelief; in the dugout of their sadness and fear, Jesus showed up. He spoke firmly to them, Mark tells us in his gospel. Jesus knows exactly when his followers need soft, encouraging words, and when his followers need something stronger. This was a time for firm words. This was a time for motivating words. Like the commanding officers that would walk through the trenches, rousing men to their feet, preparing them for the big push over the top, this was a time to inspire the disciples to shake off their lethargy, to shake off their fear, and to prepare to go forward!

You see, the "Jesus movement", which until now was a very localized, limited movement was about to expand in a big way. It was time to mobilize. "Go into

¹ Mark 8:31-32; 9:30-32; 10:32-34



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all the world,” said Jesus. Now to a group of people who lived in an age where they lived and died in the same village in which they were born, the concept of global expansion, a global faith, was very hard to imagine. But Jesus left no room for ambiguity.

“What do you mean, *go to* all the world?” we can imagine them asking. “Do you mean, all the Jewish world?”

“All the world!” Jesus said.

“Do you mean, *go to* all the Roman world?”

“All the world!” was Jesus’ reply.

“Do you mean, *go to* all the people who share our same cultural and societal norms?”

“All the world!” Jesus answered.

“Go to all the world” is still Christ’s command today. We can try to put provisions on it, we can try to put limitations on it, yet it remains Christ’s commission to the Church and to The Salvation Army. It does not mean that the local context is unimportant. After all, we enter the world through our local neighborhood. The world, in this day and age is quite literally, upon our doorstep.

William Booth understood this. He said, “Go to anybody...get a barracks [corps] at the corner of every street. Hoist the colors in every port, city, and village. March, sing, play, testify, make a noise. Fill the world with the sound of salvation.”² Go forward! Go to - all the world.

² William Booth, “Go! All the World”, 1884.



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GO PREACH!

V.15 "Preach the good news to everyone."

The next command of Jesus found within that great commission: Go preach! "Preach the good news to everyone." Preaching is sometimes viewed negatively by people today. "Don't preach at me!" the expression goes. Even within the church there is a movement to reduce the sermon to a mere devotional thought, something tacked on to the end of an enjoyable service. But preaching done properly, is life-changing. Preaching done properly is life-saving. When Jonathan Edwards in 1741 preached the sermon he titled, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," he was interrupted numerous times by people - getting offended and walking out? No. He was interrupted by the listeners of his sermon crying out, "What must I do to be saved!?"

Charles Finney, one of the fathers of our Salvation Army theology, preached a sermon that was so offensive to a group of reserved Presbyterians that the following night they formed a mob with the intent of injuring him. Fearlessly, Finney proclaimed the word of God and the mob, the church, and the entire district were won over for Christ in a massive revival.

Even Rudolf Bultmann, the famed Lutheran theologian, in a moment of gospel clarity wrote that it is through hearing the *kerygma*, the sermon, that the person makes the decision to be crucified with Christ.³ What an important task is preaching!

But preaching is not just the role of a few select individuals who stand behind a pulpit. For those of us who are deeply embedded in our trench of silence, know that we all have a responsibility to "preach the good news" or as some translations say, to "preach the gospel". What does the word, *gospel*, mean? It means *good news*. We share and communicate many things with people in the

³ Myles M. Bourke, 1958, *Rudolf Bultmann's demythologizing of the New Testament*, 120.



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course of a day. We share commentary on the weather. We communicate those banal, cultural greetings: "How are you doing?" "I'm fine, how are you doing?" "Good, thank you." We share our opinions on how our favorite sports teams will do in the play-offs, our political opinions, and yes, even our religious ones. We can fill hours of conversation talking about The Salvation Army, can we not? We'll talk about this officer and that officer, we'll debate policy initiatives, the merits of the uniform, traditional music versus contemporary music, and the list goes on. At the same time while we are talking about all these things we are being strangely silent on the gospel, we are being silent about the good news that so transformed our lives, and as a result of our silence there are countless millions going into eternity without a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

George Scott Railton had some hard words for the soldiers of his day, at a time when The Army had an amazing focus on evangelism. How much more do his words impact us today. In the lyrics of a rather up-beat song, he asks The Army of his day and of ours, "Dare ye still lie fondly dreaming, wrapped in ease and worldly scheming, while the multitudes are streaming, downwards into hell?"⁴

"I'm not a preacher!" you might say. Is it not better to be like St. Francis who said "Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary, use words." It may surprise you to learn that St. Francis loved preaching the gospel so much, that he would often preach his sermons with only the birds of the forest to hear him. He couldn't stop preaching! Yes, we live the gospel through our actions but we share it through our words. Use your words! The world needs to hear your words, my friends. The world needs to hear the good news of salvation.

The world needs to hear that "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

⁴ SASB 978.



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For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”⁵

Go into all the world - go to - and preach the good news to everyone. Go preach!

GO DO!

V.17-20 “..those who believe will do.”

Lastly, Jesus tells his disciples to “Go do!” Starting at verse 17 Jesus says this:

Here are the miraculous signs that those who believe will do. In my name they will drive out demons. They will speak in languages they had not known before. They will pick up snakes with their hands. And when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all. They will place their hands on sick people. And the people will get well.⁶

This was a pivotal moment in the life of every disciple gathered around Jesus. Until now they were stuck behind a trench of fear, silence, and now, apathy. But Jesus had returned to them, not only to give them words of comfort, but words of challenge. Death had been conquered! Hell had been defeated! It was time to go up and over the trench of fear, silence, and apathy and win the world for the kingdom of God. The war to end all wars had been fought and won on the cross of Calvary. The empty tomb stood as proof that Christ’s kingdom had come and that the old order of things was passing away.

As God’s soldiers we must get out of the trench of apathy, and go do! The third part of Jesus’ Great Commission was to go and do things for the kingdom of God. Go drive out demons. In other words, go and dislodge the evil that is

⁵ John 3:16-17 NIV

⁶ Mark 16: 17-18 NIRV



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entrenched in this world, personally and socially. Go and drive out the demon of poverty and inequality. Go and speak in unknown languages. Meaning, go and speak to people regardless of language, culture, class, and the hundred other distinctions we like to place on one another. Go and communicate the Gospel. Go do these things without fear or regard for what will happen to you. Jesus uses the examples that if you pick up a snake, it will not harm you. Or, if you drink poison, it will not hurt you. In other words, go and do these things with complete faith that Jesus will protect you. Why? Because he's telling you to go.

His final command to go, do, is to go, heal. "They will place their hands on sick people," verse 18 says, "and the people will get well." Isn't that a wonderful promise? The people will get well. The world needs the healing touch of Jesus Christ more than ever. What an amazing assurance that people can receive Christ's healing through our hands and through our lives.

The final verse in Mark's Gospel records that moment of action, when the disciples, inspired by Jesus' words, leapt up over that trench of fear, silence, and apathy. Verse 20: "Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere. The Lord worked with them. And he backed up his word by the signs that went with it."

Jesus' message to his disciples, to his church, and to his Salvation Army is clear. You must go forward. You must go 'to'. You must go 'preach'. You must go 'do'.

APPEAL

In these closing moments, God is calling us as members of The Salvation Army to go forward, to go into the world, to go preach the good news to everyone, and to go do mighty works in his name. God is calling us to mobilize. God is calling us to wage war against sin and to bring those held in bondage by Satan into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. How will you go forward? How will you be mobilized? We're going to sing the chorus, "God of Justice" and after we sing that beautiful refrain, *We must go*, I'd invite you as individuals in God's Army to



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stand up, and in one sentence say how you will go forward and be mobilized in mission.

For example, you may say, "I will go forward by sharing the Gospel with my co-worker, at least once a week." Or, "I will be mobilized in mission by volunteering for a program at my local ARC." Let us covenant together to do something big for God, amen? Prayerfully consider what God may be calling you to do as we sing.

Chorus: God of Justice (We Must Go)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1TCh31xg4vA>

[After a few individuals share in one or two sentences how God is calling them to 'Go Forward', the service leader may want to invite people to gather in small prayer groups to consider how corporately, they can go forward in mission. While this is happening, play the chorus, "God's Got An Army" prayerfully and reverently. As the prayer time concludes increase the tempo to a joyful finale - God's affirmation that His Army is mobilizing around the world and that everybody has a part to play in going forward.]

Chorus: God's Got An Army

*God's got an army marching through the land
Deliverance is their song, there's healing in their hand
There's everlasting joy and gladness in their heart
And in this army I've got a part.*