



Week 1 Preaching Resources: Be a Witness (#toinfinityandbeyond)

Scripture Passage: Matthew 28:16-20

Focus Statement: To be a witness is to be empowered by experiencing the risen Christ to point others to an encounter with the infinite risen Christ. Our encounter (mountain experiences) with the risen Christ empower us to be witnesses going out to make other witnesses beyond our church buildings.

Note: Consider playing with the phrase or hashtag #toinfinityandbeyond from Buzz Lightyear in the movie Toy Story. We are called to be a witness to the infinite God and beyond the place of doubt.

ME: Reflect on the beginning of your relationship with God. Maybe you grew up in church, in a Christian home, learned about God in college, from a friend, or just by reading and seeking. A relationship with God happens and grows in a unique way for each of us. Share a story about when you formed a special relationship with someone in your life and how that relationship has affected your life. Then share how you remember coming into a relationship with God, how you were introduced to God, and when you felt like the relationship began.

WE: We can all think of a connection with someone in our lives that is/was special to us, whether a relative, partner, friend, teacher, pastor, mentor, or someone else. This person's light has shined in our lives in a way that inspired us, brightened our own light, and caused in us a desire to reflect light onto someone else.

GOD: In the Jewish tradition, "the mountain" is often where people go to meet God, or where God reveals Godself in unique ways. The disciples have walked with Jesus throughout his ministry, witnessed the crucifixion, and have gone to the mountain, as Jesus instructed. There, they meet God once again, in the resurrected Christ. Many begin to worship in praise and belief of this divine and miraculous encounter. But some doubt.

Mountain Moments: The mountain here represents things or ways that connect us with God, and how we find ourselves developing a relationship with God. Our own call to "go to the mountain" is an invitation to encounter God through spiritual disciplines (e.g., praying, meditating, silence, worshiping,



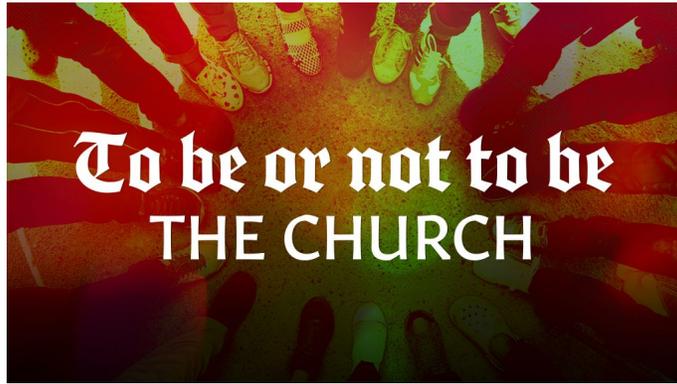
servicing, connecting with others and leading them to connect with God). In mountain moments, we meet God in unique ways and create spaces and moments for others to meet God as well. Being a witness isn't just about telling people you go to church, or what church you go to (trying to get people to "come to the mountain"). It is about bringing the mountain to them. It is about being witnesses of the divine infinite one, sharing what you have seen, heard, felt, experienced, and known of Jesus, and guiding others to be witnesses as well. Witnesses who make witnesses, disciples who make disciples, together share the gospel to infinity and beyond.

Attitude/Beyond Doubt: Notice that while some worshiped, others doubted. We all encounter and grow in relationship with God at different paces, in different moments, and in different ways. However, an attitude of worship and listening for the voice of God is necessary even in the presence of doubt. Doubt is not the enemy of faith, but the perfect scenario for God to activate our faith. This is why some will often pray, "Lord, help my unbelief," (Mark 9:24). Moments of doubt and confusion can prompt us to ask God, "What are you saying to me in this? Help me to meet you and get closer to you in this." Doubts are opportunities to be transformed by faith.

Assurance: We are to open our senses, to perceive the mystery of the risen Christ and praise God's magnificence with the assurance that Jesus' presence was among the disciples. That he promised his presence to all his disciples "until the end of the age." Look for ways that others can connect and build a relationship with God through us.

Empowered through our connection with God. We are sent, called, and instructed to share this great Gospel because of our connection with Christ. Christ declares all power in heaven and earth has been given to God. Through our connection to God, we share in that power to spread the gospel, spread the love of Christ to every nation, race, tongue, people... and lead them into relationship with Christ.

YOU: God is yearning to meet us on the mountain, through daily encounters. Spiritual disciplines can lead and guide us to meet God and bring the mountaintop experience to others. Encourage people to think of how they came to know God – it probably involves the story, testimony, or loving service of others. Likewise, remind that that is how others will come to know God too -- through *their* story, testimony, service. Speak to the different situations in which people may find themselves – perhaps exercising the spiritual practices of giving, prayer, or study, but not their faith through serving or witnessing; perhaps they're actively serving but they don't feel like they've had an encounter with God recently. Encourage people to think about how they are setting themselves up to meet God regularly?



What spiritual disciplines might they practice to help them meet God? And in what new ways is Jesus calling them to witness to him and share his light with others in their lives?

WE: How do we defeat and overcome doubts? How are we going to go to the mountain together, cultivating mountain experiences, and bringing others to meet Christ? Offer real life opportunities and possibilities for people to experience God together and share their witness in the world.



Week 2 Preaching Resources: Be a Disciple (#notjustachurchgoer)

Scripture Passage: Luke 9:23-25

Focus Statement: You were meant to “get lost,” so that the true you can be found. When we lose ourselves in following Jesus, our true identity is revealed as a beloved child of God, created to love and serve alongside God’s beloved children.

ME: Get lost! Getting lost can be a frightening and painful experience, and can ruin our plans. Have you ever gotten lost? Share a story about getting lost and how it was scary, difficult, or ruined your plans. While getting lost can be scary it can at other times be amazingly freeing, by giving us the opportunity to see and notice what is really important in our lives. Getting “lost” can sometimes lead to a greater blessing than remaining on the known path.

WE: Encourage listeners to think of a time when they have gotten lost in something – a song, sport, experience of nature, or in the act of creating something. Have they ever had that experience in or with a church community (e.g., getting lost in worship, in connection, in mission/service). What feelings did that experience evoke? What was the effect personally or corporately (as a congregation)? Make the connection of how getting lost in the moment can connect us to something greater than ourselves.

GOD: In Luke 9: 23-25, Jesus gives us a paradox: we will find true life only when we let go and lose our life in order to save it. There are four movements in this passage: 1) deny yourself, 2) take up your cross, 3) follow Jesus, 4) and find true life. You can focus on one or more of these points to flesh out what getting lost and being found looks like in the life of the individual and the church.

Deny yourself: Jesus’ call to deny ourselves strikes at the struggle between pursuing our own human desires and those of God. Self-denial is about moving away from self-centeredness, selfishness, and the need to maintain control, as much as it is to die to sinful nature. Self-denial can manifest as a choice to think, act, and react in the way Christ calls us, instead of following a knee-jerk response that is primarily self-serving. (You may give an example of a time you chose Jesus’ way instead of your instincts of resentment, retaliation, control, etc. and what the consequences were, or examples of situations where people can make these types of choices).

Take up your cross: The cross was a symbol of guilt and death, yet Jesus chose death on the cross rather than retaliation. He went against the prevailing values and realities of the day to embrace what would have been perceived as failure and defeat. Jesus calls his disciples to defy culturally defined values and



aspirations by choosing the pattern of living God has set before them (embodied and proclaimed in him). Consider what crosses your congregation is called to bear today, either in relation to the world or to each other. What examples of hope or victory can you celebrate?

Follow Jesus: A disciple's goal is to learn from and emulate their teacher. Following Jesus is to be remade into his image so that we can live as our true selves, freed from self-centered pursuits. Jesus becomes the guide when the disciples let go of their own agenda.

Find true life. The paradox in losing and finding our lives confronts us with the question: "how do we define life?" For Jesus, true life is the life God made and saved us for--life as a child of God that thrives in perfect communion with God, one another, and all creation. It may sound like an impossible ideal but that is the path Jesus invites his followers to take up -- his way, values, and the greater mission to serve others. How do we lose our life for Christ? For the disciples it meant that they were no longer their own, but they now belonged to a new family with a new purpose that not only changed their lives for the better but helped countless others find true life through Jesus Christ. Their identity as Jesus-followers affected every area of their lives. It made their lives what they were. That transformation would have been impossible had they tried to save parts of their old lives. The same is true for disciples today.

YOU: What might it look like for individuals in your congregation not to resist loss but to purposely lose themselves (their own pursuits, desires for control, achievement, etc.) in a journey of discipleship? When they lose themselves in discipleship, remind them of what will be found: true selves, purpose, joy in serving and walking with others, what God is already doing in and around you, Jesus as guide and companion. Provide ways of practicing "getting lost"/discipleship (e.g., the works of piety – prayer, fasting, worship, holy conferencing (small groups), searching scriptures, sacraments; works of mercy – clothing the naked, visiting sick, imprisoned, working for justice and peace, feeding the hungry and caring for the afflicted).

WE: What ways can we as a church help one another to get lost, deny ourselves, and live more into actually following Christ? What are we afraid to lose? What are we called to lose? What we seek to find - love, joy, peace, freedom – can only be found in letting go and denying the usual patterns of responding, judging and controlling.



Week 3 Preaching Resources: Be Transformational

Scripture Passage: Romans 12:1-5

Focus Statement: Transformation is communal and requires intentionality.

ME: Share about a time when participating in a communal event created an experience of connection and excitement (e.g., at a sporting event when a team/athlete scored/performed well and the crowd cheered, a concert where everyone is singing along).

WE: We've all had different experiences being part of different groups or communities (e.g., extended families, school classes, sports teams or band, coworkers, social clubs, etc.) Have people think about how they've engaged in different communities. Did it lead to a sense of belonging? Have they ever felt that they were missing out even while you were in the community?

GOD: The church is a community that is centered on and in Christ. Our passage reminds us that we are called to be in the world, but not live according to the patterns of this world. Jesus calls us to be a people of rest and service, yet the world calls us to be on the go and all about ourselves. When we pick up our cross, who will we follow?

The church is an intentional community. This means the church is devoted to the process. Life has ups and downs (ebbs and flows or fluidity), but when we get off track we have to ask ourselves if we are willing to get back on track. Being intentional and devoted takes time, it's not just something that happens overnight.

Being God's people or the body of Christ in the world is not something that happens accidentally or by default. So, in Romans 12:1, we have Paul urging the church in Rome to "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." Notice that devoting our entire selves – body, spirit, life – to God is something we do, but it is not something we do by our own power, something that we can simply achieve if we set our minds to it. The church, and the life of each Christian within it, is made possible "by the mercies of God" (v. 1), by giving of ourselves *over* to God as sacrifice



(letting go of our desires to live apart from God and community). Note that this language is used in the liturgy of Holy Communion (“present yourselves as a holy and living sacrifice *in union with Christ’s offering for us*”). We are able to give ourselves fully over to God because Jesus first gave himself on our behalf, grafting us into the family of God (this language is used in Romans 11:13-24). By allowing ourselves to be *transformed* by God in the context of the church community and not conformed to the world (v. 2) by going along with the “default” way of life, we grow in our discernment of God’s will for us.

Verses 3-5 describe the diversity, interconnectedness, and unity of the church. The church is a garden where we are called to bloom and blossom where we are planted. Some are soil, stems, leaves, petals, and seeds. Just as a garden is a place of rest and healing in the busy city or farms in rural areas, so the church should be for all. The beauty of a garden or farm is in its diversity and the same is true of the church. All of one flower or plant would be boring, but when different types of vegetation come together there is beauty. When the church works together and embraces its diversity there is transformation and growth.

YOU: Is it time to allow your whole self to be transformed by God, devoted to God as a “living sacrifice,” so that you can, in turn transform others in and beyond your church community? Have people think about the ways they are conforming to the patterns of the world, whether on purpose or by default. Challenge them to think of ways they can, instead, invite God’s transformation by making a different choice (e.g., by spiritual disciplines, or plugging into the church community via a small group or participating in mission, exercising spiritual gifts in the community).

WE: Creating beauty takes work, hard work. In order for beauty to take place we need to start the hard work within us. The “us” starts with a transformation by Christ in our lives, which transforms our church, and then transforms our community. It’s time to have our personal, church, and community gardens grow. Let’s get to work.



Week 4 Preaching Resources: The Church of the Pentecost

Scripture Passage: Acts 2:1-21 (focus verses:17-21)

Focus Statement: With the gift of God's Spirit, we are learning to live into God's divine purpose, just like the Church of Pentecost.

ME: Name a time when you had to share something that wasn't popular to hear but needed to be said or when you stuck up for someone. Name a time when you really had to listen to God's voice. Name a time when you dreamed something impossible, but God made it possible.

WE: Pastors sometimes use the phrase "divine purpose." That can mean different things for different people at different times. Maybe sometimes you sense a message that you just must share. Maybe sometimes it is about listening and discerning God's plans for our lives. Maybe sometimes we have a passion that just cannot be ignored even if we face obstacles in following that passion.

GOD: When the rushing wind of the Holy Spirit comes to those gathered at Pentecost and the disciples are waiting for what will come next, Peter presents Joel's **prophecy** (Joel 2: 28-32) or message to explain what is happening in this moment. What is taking place seems impossible, like a **dream**. Yet, together, those gathered **vision** and discern, or listen, for what was next – the next steps of that early, just being born, church. Through the Holy Spirit's gifts in this time of prophecy, dreaming and visioning, the impossible becomes possible.

Prophecy (communicating the message of God): In Acts 2:17, Peter, quoting Joel, talks about how God's Spirit empowers people to prophesy, or share the divinely inspired message of God. Prophecy is about seeing with the eyes of faith and speaking with the voice of faith in and to the present moment. Through scripture, prophets are consistently shown calling people back to God and to a higher standard of justice and faithfulness. These messages are hard to hear and often resisted by the communities to which they are proclaimed. In our world, there are many voices claiming to speak on behalf of God and the church that are not plugged into the Spirit-filled community that is the church. It is easy to hear only what we want to hear or only what confirms the status quo or our current beliefs. But, as the church, we have the



opportunity to listen to and discern carefully the message that the Holy Spirit has for us and for the world in the present moment. And, we are empowered to speak that message to the world with the prophetic voice of God's Spirit.

Vision (hearing the voice of God and discerning or listening): Visioning is not just about adopting a new strategy to move ahead. To vision or envision is to opening ourselves to seeing and hearing God's words and implementing them into our future or following God's direction to fulfil internal or external needs for the future. When the church is not implementing a vision, it is like a boat without a rudder. Everyone is pulling in different directions and there is no movement forward. However, when the Holy Spirit is your rudder, you can row your boat ahead into the future God has planned.

Dreaming (a goal that seemed impossible or passion that can't be ignored): Much like a child when dreaming, the possibilities are limitless when we align ourselves with the God who is also limitless. Dreaming is larger than visioning, as it is about realizing that God lives and moves outside the box that we have a tendency to put God in. Pentecost shows that God refuses to be put in a box and does not let us stay in our own box either. Consider the type of community that can come to life (e.g., Acts 2:43-47) when we are not constrained by the status quo but when we let God inspire our dreams and when we get on board with making the dream come true.

YOU: Much like the early church, God has given us the gift of the Holy Spirit to participate in God's divine purpose to bring about a future beyond our human imaginations. Encourage people to reflect on the ways God is calling them beyond the status quo or the "nudgings" of the Holy Spirit. What might be getting in the way of living into God's future (e.g., other voices, focus on self, need help/to work with others to move a project or idea forward)? How can they take a step towards God's divine purpose this week?

WE: For a long time now, we have lived constrained by circumstances (e.g., around the pandemic) and focused purely on survival. Paint a picture of what it might look like for your church to live into the seemingly impossible by opening itself to the Spirit's movement and power.