

**The Walk: 5. Sharing**  
**Matthew 4:18-20; 5:14-16**  
**October 24, 2021**  
**Pastor Steve Richards**

I am someone who falls asleep within seconds of my head hitting pillow, but not last Monday night. I tossed and turned, got up for a while, came back to bed again, but my back hurt and my arms and legs hurt. I just could not sleep. And here was the cause. [photo of me lifting my grandson above my head] I spent Monday with my grandson, Basil. "Poppa, up!" he said. "Poppa up!" And so I picked him up over my head, tossed him in the air and caught him. Not once, but repeatedly. How could I refuse his pleas and his giggles every time I caught him. And then we got down on the ground. He climbed on my back, and I crawled around until he would fall off and start all over again. When I finally reached a point where I was too tired to do it anymore, he still wanted more, so I suggested we take his stuffed dragon for a long walk. I was hoping it would wear him out. Instead, it wore me out. Let me say, I love spending Mondays with my grandson, but I really love it when his mother arrives to pick him up. And Tuesday morning, I said to Amanda, I've got to get in better shape. These past two years, a lot of things have slipped and I'm in the worst shape I can remember. I haven't been exercising like I should. I've been eating all of the wrong things, and I'm afraid if I don't resume the right physical practices, I'll end up being a poppa who watches from the sidelines and not the poppa I want to be or the poppa he wants me to be.

What's true for our physical bodies is also true for our souls. And many of us are not exercising well when it comes to our spiritual lives. We know what to do, but we get busy, or it doesn't seem as important, and there's this gradual slipping away of our spiritual health. And when we get to a point where we need this inner strength to face what's happening, it isn't there. For the past five weeks, Tami and I have focused on five exercises or practices – five spiritual disciplines, and if you do these you become stronger and healthier. You will be able to *run and not be weary, walk and not faint*.

Let's review. As Tami reminded us last week, there are two dimensions to these practices (both represented by our hands) – one together and one alone. First, we looked at the practice of worship and the importance of gathering one day out of every seven. We sing, pray, and listen and God moves through songs and scripture and a sermon- and by the end of the service, we have a clearer sense of what God is doing in our lives. And there's an individual practice: praying five times each day – "Thank you, God. Thank you for everything." It's pausing throughout the day to acknowledge God is with us. Then we looked at the study of scripture as the primary way we understand God's will for us. We do that in groups, and we do that each day – 5 verses a day, listening for one word or phrase and carrying that with us throughout the day. The third practice is serving. We were created to serve God. Next week, we will work together and we will be able to accomplish what we could not do along. But we also serve individually – 5 acts of kindness. Our neighbor hired someone to install a fence in their backyard. It's a beautiful cedar fence and a few days I walked by the house and noticed the carpenter was loading his tools in the truck. 5 acts of kindness – I turned around and complimented the carpenter on his work and asked for his name and number because next year, we may want to replace our fence. And last week, Tami talked about giving and what can happen when together we share our resources and on our own, five acts of generosity every month. It might be a big tip because you see someone who needs it or our monthly second mile offering or disaster response. Five acts of generosity a month. And today, we come to the practice or discipline of sharing our faith and letting our light shine.

This is the one practice that makes many of us uncomfortable. And I think it's because we've seen or heard people do this poorly, and we don't want to be associated with those kinds of people. Furthermore, we've learned that there's two topics it's best not to talk about: religion and politics. But Christians believe Jesus is God's response to the human condition. God saw the pain and brokenness of this world, and God said, "I will become flesh and show them the answer to the deepest longing of the human heart." Jesus came and lived, died, and rose from the grave and said, "Go tell somebody."

Imagine you discovered the cure for some form of cancer, and you decided to keep it to yourself just in case you ever contracted that form of cancer. Never shared it with anyone else. You have something other people need, and for many, the only way that will hear it is from you. When Jesus began his ministry, he brought together 12 disciples and said: "Come, follow me, and I'll show you how to fish for people." In other words, how to draw people to God. He's talking to us.

To do this, we need to know what to share. I might be willing to share the message, if I knew what it was. How would you summarize the Christian faith? Could you do it in one sentence? Karl Barth was one of best-known theologians of the twentieth century. He wrote a series of books on systemic theology called Church Dogmatics. In total, he wrote 2500 pages to summarize the Christian faith. But he was once asked if he could summarize the Christian faith in one sentence, and he said: "**Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so.**" How would you describe the Christian faith? What if you had the amount of time you might have if you were speaking to someone in an elevator? What's your elevator speech to summarize why you are a Christian? In one of his letters, Peter tells us we need to be ready whenever someone asks about the hope that is within us.

Here's my elevator speech. *I grew up going to church and Sunday School, and I learned about all about Jesus, but it wasn't until I experienced a difficult time in my life that I called out to God. "If you are out there, God, help me." And in that moment, I felt an inner peace and assurance that God was with me and would never let go. In that moment, I realized God is real – and throughout my life, I've tried to lean into that faith, and I've never been disappointed. What I saw in Jesus – his life, death and resurrection was no matter how hard life gets; the worst thing is never the last thing. There is always hope. I've tried to live as Jesus taught – to come alongside others to live with compassion, kindness, and love and as a result, I'm a better husband, a better father and grandfather, a better boss, a better person because I follow Jesus. That's why I'm a Christian. What's your story, and what difference does faith make in your life? There are people who don't care what I would say, but they care what you would say because they know you and respect you.*

The best form of sharing your faith begins before saying any words. It was St. Francis of Assisi who said "Preach the gospel all the time and if necessary use words." You are sharing your faith in the way you live. Jesus said: **You are the light of the world. A city on top of a hill can't be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they put it on top of a lampstand, and it shines on all who are in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven.**

If you've been to our candlelight Christmas Eve, you've seen what this looks like. At the end of the service, there's one candle representing the light of Jesus that came into the world. And then I light my candle from the light of Christ and pass it to Pastor Tami and then to the ushers who pass it down each aisle until the enter room is filled with light. And I say, look around – this is what a lighted world looks like. Together, we work to push back the darkness in this world.

Last Tuesday, Tami and I brought coffee and bagels to the teachers at Oakwood Elementary. It turned out that we didn't need to introduce ourselves, because the teachers already knew about Messiah Church. They were thanking us for the notes that you send. One teacher said she has kept every one of your notes and periodically reads through them because it makes a difference to know you are supporting her. We were there to thank the teachers and we ended up being the ones who were thanked – because you are letting your light shine.

When I'm in the community and people realize who I am, I often hear – you're the church that cares about kids. It's wonderful what you are doing about child care. A few months ago, Heather Felt and I had breakfast with the mayor of Plymouth, and though at that point he had never been in our building (since that time, he has), he'd heard about this church and the things you are doing in this community. With my retirement announced, there is a long line of pastors who would like to be your next Lead Pastor, because they've heard about your witness and how you've launched new ministries and support causes locally and internationally. Pete Thorp sent me a chart that indicates 30% of what you give to this church doesn't stay here, but goes out into the community or around the world to help others. That's over \$300,000. Next week, we all have an opportunity to make a difference in one of the service projects. We do this together.

There are also ways to make a difference right here inside the walls. I was talking with Sami Tierney, our director of youth and family ministry, and how she needs more adults who will spend time with our youth. Most people who came to faith do so before the age of 18. Sami put together this promo. [video – adults and youth describing the impact of youth ministry] I like that – you find a spiritual lottery ticket that you can redeem the rest of your life. I remember moving our older daughter into her dorm room her freshman year and on her desk, she put a framed photo – not of me or our family, but a photo of her youth director – and her shelf was her third grade Bible. Because you care about kids and want to help them grow in their faith. A few weeks after I began my ministry at Messiah, I received a letter from my high school Sunday School teacher. I hadn't seen her in 20 years, but she wanted me to know that she had never stopped praying for me.

In his letter to the Corinthian Christians, Paul said, "we are Christ's ambassadors." Every one of us is an ambassador. We represent Jesus to people around us, and God makes his appeal through us. If you have a card or a piece of paper, I'd like you to write down the names of two or three people who are most responsible for you being a Christian today – people who shared faith with you or helped you come to faith or encouraged you to come to church. (15 seconds) Most of the names on my card are deceased. My prayer is "God, please tell my grandma and Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Gilman and Bob Havens and Hiram Johnson and Gordon Minehart how grateful I am for their impact on my life." Because if not for them, I don't think I'd be standing here today. And that's true for everyone of you. Somebody shared their faith with you. Maybe you know someone who is going through a crisis, and you say, "This morning, I prayed for you, and if I can help in any way, I'm here for you." Or you post a note on Facebook and say, "I heard this in church, and you might find this helpful" – and you provide the link to today's service. We have persons online today located across this country. And many of them found us, because you invited them. You could do that – invite someone and then talk about what you heard in a simple non-threatening way. Do the people who know you have any idea that you are a person of faith?

Let me give you a homework assignment: 5 times a month let someone know you are a Christian. Maybe it's next week on a service project, you take a selfie and post it on Facebook and say, I'm serving with my church. Or someone catches you reading your Bible or saying a

silent prayer before a meal or you mention something you heard in worship that inspired you. 5 times a month something that witnesses to your faith and then 5 times over the next year, invite someone to worship in-person or online.

I look at this card. And I've decided to devote the rest of my life to the next generation – first to my grandson, but whole lot of others so that one day my hope is if they are asked to list the people who brought them to faith, my name would be there. My hope for you is that one day your name would appear on someone's card. Let's share our faith so they will come to the light.

### **Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of October 24, 2021**

**Weekly Prayer:** O Lord, you sent the disciples and apostles to the very ends of the earth to teach and proclaim your message, to heal all illnesses and to reveal the mysteries of the faith. Send us your blessing and enlighten our understanding that we, too, may be your disciples sent into the world. Empower us to reach others and heal a broken world. We pray in the precious and powerful name of Jesus. Amen.

### **Monday, October 25**

#### **Scripture: John 4:4-15**

Jesus had to go through Samaria. He came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, which was near the land Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there. Jesus was tired from his journey, so he sat down at the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me some water to drink." His disciples had gone into the city to buy him some food. The Samaritan woman asked, "Why do you, a Jewish man, ask for something to drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" (Jews and Samaritans didn't associate with each other.) Jesus responded, "If you recognized God's gift and who is saying to you, 'Give me some water to drink,' you would be asking him and he would give you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you don't have a bucket and the well is deep. Where would you get this living water? You aren't greater than our father Jacob, are you? He gave this well to us, and he drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks from the water that I will give will never be thirsty again. The water that I give will become in those who drink it a spring of water that bubbles up into eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will never be thirsty and will never need to come here to draw water!"

**Observation:** In the first century, Jews looked down on Samaritans, even hated them. Though the shortest route from Jerusalem to Galilee was through Samaria, most Jews going north or south would travel through Perea, east of the Jordan River, to avoid the Samaritans. Jesus did not physically have to go through Samaria. However, he purposely made a spiritual choice to go through Samaria. In going through Samaria, stopping and drinking from Jacob's well, he was directly defying the enmity between Jews and Samaritans. Jesus was challenging an injustice of his day.

**Application:** Jesus offered the Samaritan woman water that quenches thirst forever. The woman likely confused the living water Jesus offered with a natural spring of flowing water that would keep her from coming to the well so often. She wanted to escape the labor; Jesus wanted her to embrace the water within. Do you just want Jesus' living water to make your life easier or simpler? Or do you want living water to make you whole so that the world might see Jesus in you?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, keep me from chasing convenience and an easier life. Guide me to your work, no matter how hard, that I may bear witness to your love for humanity. Make me willing to go out of my way for the sake of the world. Amen.

## **Tuesday, October 26**

### **Scripture: Luke 24:44-48**

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.” Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. He said to them, “This is what is written: the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and a change of heart and life for the forgiveness of sins must be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

**Observation:** After the crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus taught his disciples to reflect on Israel’s history to find their ongoing mission. They were to preach to all nations the life found in his resurrection. Jesus charged the disciples to preach the story of repentance and forgiveness of sins. He opened the disciples’ minds to see the big picture: that their history as a people, from Moses to the Psalms, said that in the Christ there is salvation and justice.

**Application:** Your personal story of a changed heart and life is powerful to people who haven’t experienced what you have. You, like the disciples, are a witness to God’s redemptive work through Jesus Christ. In what ways can you share your personal story of a changed heart and life with those around you? Someone at some point invited you to learn more about Christ; you have an opportunity to do the same.

**Prayer:** God, keep me alert for chances to faithfully share the story of your son’s life, death, burial, and resurrection. Give me courage when afraid, confidence when unsure, passion when indifferent. May I make you proud as I share my personal story of a changed heart and life. Amen.

## **Wednesday, October 27**

### **Scripture: Acts 1:3-8**

After his suffering, he showed them that he was alive with many convincing proofs. He appeared to them over a period of forty days, speaking to them about God’s kingdom. While they were eating together, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for what the Father had promised. He said, “This is what you heard from me: John baptized with water, but in only a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” As a result, those who had gathered together asked Jesus, “Lord, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel now?” Jesus replied, “It isn’t for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has set by his own authority. Rather, 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.”

**Observation:** Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would give his followers power to bear witness to God’s work in the world. The Spirit still gives us guidance, courage, strength, alertness, and passion to share the person and work of Jesus. The mighty wind that is the Holy Spirit empowers Christians to be storytellers of God’s great love for the world. God calls us to radiate hope, to live with a confident expectation that God’s work is real and present in the world today.

**Application:** God did not leave us on our own to radiate hope. Through the Holy Spirit, God grants us power to be living extensions of Jesus' ministry in today's world. It's often said that we have as much power from the Holy Spirit as we ask for. Are you asking for the Holy Spirit's power? In what ways, as a God-powered messenger, can you share Jesus' story with others? Sometimes, the best way to share that story does not involve words.

**Prayer:** God, give me chances to share my faith story with others. Show me where you are already at work around me so I can join you in your work. Help me remember that my power comes from the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## Thursday, October 28

### Scripture: 1 Peter 3:13-16

Who will harm you if you are zealous for good? But happy are you, even if you suffer because of righteousness! Don't be terrified or upset by them. Instead, regard Christ the Lord as holy in your hearts. Whenever anyone asks you to speak of your hope, be ready to defend it. Yet do this with respectful humility, maintaining a good conscience. Act in this way so that those who malign your good lifestyle in Christ may be ashamed when they slander you.

**Observation:** Apologetics: the art of defending and giving evidence for the Christian faith. The writer of 1 Peter saw it as important to be ready to provide evidence for our faith, and the hope we live in, to anyone who asks. We best defend our faith and radiate hope, not in arguments or disputes, but by being able to reasonably and realistically support our faith candidly, confidently, compassionately and comprehensively.

**Application:** Think about how faith in Christ has changed your life. In essence, why do you believe? Create an "elevator speech" for your faith – something you could share in 30 seconds or less while on an elevator with someone. Here are some questions to consider as you think about this:

1. Were you ever reluctant to believe? Did you have doubts?
2. What happened that changed your mind? Was it an experience, a person?
3. How is your life different now?
4. How do you live out your faith – think of how you worship, grow, serve, give, and share.

**Prayer:** O Lord, in my passion to defend my Christian faith, help me to be humble to all I meet. Let your loving kindness flow through me as I represent you to the world around me. Amen.

## Friday, October 29

### Scripture: Acts 8:27-38

So he did. Meanwhile, an Ethiopian man was on his way home from Jerusalem, where he had come to worship. He was a eunuch and an official responsible for the entire treasury of Candace. (Candace is the title given to the Ethiopian queen.) He was reading the prophet Isaiah while sitting in his carriage. The Spirit told Philip, "Approach this carriage and stay with it." Running up to the carriage, Philip heard the man reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you really understand what you are reading?" The man replied, "Without someone to guide me, how could I?" Then he invited Philip to climb up and sit with him. This was the passage of scripture he was reading: *Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent so he didn't open his mouth. In his humiliation justice was taken away from him. Who can tell the story of his descendants because his life was taken from the earth?* The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, about whom does the prophet say this? Is he talking about himself or someone

else?” Starting with that passage, Philip proclaimed the good news about Jesus to him. As they went down the road, they came to some water. The eunuch said, “Look! Water! What would keep me from being baptized?” He ordered that the carriage halt. Both Philip and the eunuch went down to the water, where Philip baptized him.

**Observation:** An Ethiopian in Jerusalem was a long way from home. Acts said he’d come to Jerusalem to worship, but how did he get his hands on a scroll to be reading on his journey home? Perhaps in Jerusalem he’d heard some of the spreading stories about Jesus. Whatever led to it, he was curious about the sacred Hebrew readings in Isaiah. His curiosity produced initial confusion. He admitted he needed help to understand what he was reading. Philip’s immediate task was simple—help this curious man find the meaning of the gospel message.

**Application:** The Holy Spirit sent Philip on a mission to help guide the influential Ethiopian to understand the gospel from the prophetic words of Isaiah 53. Philip ran to the chariot eager to help the man. That example of eager obedience is inspiring. When the Holy Spirit whispers to you, how willing are you to listen? Are you eager to help others understand your faith?

**Prayer:** God, teach me how to listen closely for the Holy Spirit’s whispering guidance. Help me have the courage to eagerly obey. Stir within me, Lord, a desire to better equip myself to help curious people make sense of the gospel story. Amen.

**Saturday, October 30**

**Scripture: Matthew 28:16-20**

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. Jesus came near and spoke to them, “I’ve received all authority in heaven and on earth. 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, 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.”

**Observation:** The disciples made their way to the rendezvous point in Galilee. Understanding more fully who Jesus was after his resurrection, the eleven disciples probably worshiped him with more depth than ever before. “Some doubted” likely means some were still stunned, even dumbfounded that they found themselves with Jesus – a once-dead, now alive, risen Savior. He told his disciples to “go,” which is probably better translated as you are going. As you go about the daily rhythms in your ordinary life, the Savior said, prioritize the mission of disciple making. And as you do, realize the comforting presence of Jesus is with you every day.

**Application:** People become disciples by coming into the community of believers and submitting to Christ as the Lord of their life. Teaching disciples means leading them toward a life of obedience to Jesus, not just intellectually teaching doctrine. Jesus said “go.” As you go about your life today, how are you showing and sharing what a disciple looks like?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, I want to glorify you with my faithful commitment to make disciples. Help me remember that you are always present with me as I live out your commission. Amen.