

*Go therefore...* A sermon preached on April 24, 2016 at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George on the occasion of Mission Awareness Sunday. Preached by Rev. Herb Hilder

Lessons: HEBREWS 11:1-3, 39-12:3  
MATTHEW 28:16-20

Some months ago, while trolling on eBay – that gigantic buy and sell online site, I came across a book entitled Our Jubilee Story, 1864-1924 the Women's Missionary Society, the Presbyterian Church in Canada (W.D) Quebec and West.

Printed in 1924, the book is now en route to the church archives in Toronto.

But not before I read it with care and interest. Care owing to the fact that the binding is fragile Interest because it is history that is largely underestimated, uncelebrated and untold and untold in the life of the PCC

And the story itself was actually quite engaging.

The WMS (WD) had its origins in Montreal in 1864 and began as a Ladies Auxiliary Association in connection with the French Mission work of the Church of Scotland.

When the various branches of the PCC came together in 1875,

The Auxiliary was reorganized and renamed the Ladies' French Evangelization Society whose sole object was to "...extend the Gospel to the French speaking people of the Dominion."

Mrs. John Redpath – Redpath Sugar – was the Society's first president and the Society met the first Tuesday of each month at St. Paul's Church, Montreal.

Within a year, the society had established a Mission House where religious instruction, a soup kitchen, classrooms for basic reading, and a sewing class for girls was taking place.

The book traces in detail the growth of Auxiliaries in congregations of Central Canada – Quebec and Ontario.

What is clear through all the detail is that the growth was exponential as the interest in mission work beyond the provinces increased.

A mission station was established and funded by the WMS in Honan Chin in 1872,

A lady missionary was sent that at that time.

With the Klondike gold rush in 1897-98, trained Christian nurses were sent to Atlin BC and Miss E. H. Mitchell and Miss Helen Bone arrived in Atlin on July 22, 1899. A new hospital was funded by the WMS and completed by the end of the calendar year.

A mission station was established in Peace River country in 1901 – again funded by the WMS.

By 1914, \$86,787.75 (which translates today into \$1,838, 453.84) was raised by Auxiliaries across Canada – for the sole purpose of supporting Home and Foreign Mission work by education and personnel

A special appeal from the WMS for famine relief in China in 1921, netted from Auxiliaries -- \$33,794.44 (translated into 2016 dollars at \$397,710.49)

In 1924 – the year before Church Union and the year of the Jubilee, there were approximately 92,000 members from Quebec to BC with assets for mission work standing at \$414,000.

Not an insignificant amount in 1924  
Today, it translates into \$5,719,500.00 in 2016 dollars.

All raised by members of the WMS through mite boxes, Thank offerings (begun in 1885) mission band (children's' groups) and special appeals to its members.

All in a time and age when it was not common for women to work outside the home – money received was money received from husbands!

That teaching of generous giving remained a source of strength and security that the wider church has never been able to quite replicate  
And WMS appointed missionaries were always it is said treated better than Church appointed missionaries – a woman's touch – I wonder.

At the 1913 annual meeting of the Women's Foreign Missionary Society, soon to be shortened to the Women's Missionary Society – part of the opening address contained these words,

*The name of the Society may change, but the work of the Women's Foreign Missionary Society will not cease. The interest and devotion of its members to the cause of foreign missions will go on and increase, and the enlargement of the work to include missionary effort in our own land will most surely lead to give us a more glorious vision of service, will make us realize anew the Master's great call to every woman of the Presbyterian Church in Canada to pray, to work, to give, so as to win 'The World for Christ'*

Exciting stuff to read – I was affirmed in some of the information presented, but I also learned a lot I did not know about the WMS (WD)

The prose of the book is at times a bit too purple and embellished for ears today,

But the historic roots WMS (WD) are pure scripture

This was a group who has always taken serious what we know as Jesus' Great Commission – Jesus' final earthly words to his disciples before his ascension

<sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore 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> and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’ [Matthew 28:18-20]

I wonder whether one reason that the church and its congregations and faith communities – this denomination and others – is struggling just to survive is that somewhere along the way – through busyness, noise, trying to be too trendy and too current, --being all things to all people We have forgotten some really important basics of the Christian faith – that are non-negotiable – among which is the Great Commission.

If not forgotten then, we have allowed the voices of the world to cloud the truth of Jesus’ teaching and expectations.

What are some of the untruths about mission and its importance in the life of every person who decides to follow Jesus?

#### UNTRUTH #1

*Mission is to be done only by people who have specialized training in missiology or evangelism.*

Read – mission is for professionals only!

Over the years I have heard individuals and groups say quite seriously, to do mission work you need a degree, or you need to hear God’s

clear call, or mission is something other churches are supposed to do.

Really? I mean, really?

Hear the Great Commission again

**<sup>19</sup> Go therefore 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> and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’ [Matthew 28:18-20]**

The disciples were not degree holders.

They were very ordinary people

So from where does this mission=specialized training come?

Sometimes specialized training alienates or intimidates the very people that one is trying to tell about Jesus

You are supposed to say that.

You get paid to say that

Or, specialists sometimes convey a I’ll talk//you listen I know//you don’t – mindset.

UNTRUTH #2

*Mission is a programme.*

Read – mission is akin to a curriculum of study.

Stick to the playbook and you are “doing mission”

There are in truth many, many books on mission – its history, its impact, studies on

demographics and community profiles to “target” an audience

These are well and good, but to do mission as Jesus understood it in the Great Commission is more about living a life, than studying a book.

Mission is about approaching each day with expectancy and hope.

Mission is about how we handle each day given to us – with Jesus as the centre.

For people are drawn to lives lived much faster than books read.

Disciples continue to be added to the followers of Jesus by the example of other followers of Jesus.

Think back on your own lives – what made you choose to be a follower of Jesus?

What has made you stay as a follower of the Risen Christ? –Reading a book or observing how believers meet the ups and downs of life in the real world.

Never under-estimate how our behaviours, actions, words affect others.

Both our girls have seen behaviours of individuals who profess to be Christians that are anything but Christian when it comes to dealing in some retail and hospitality situations.

And often such people are the same ones who would say “well, that just could not be me – I am a regular church goer. Yeah!

The eyes of the world are watching God's people – many of those pairs of eyes want to believe in something beyond them.

But if our words and behavior are not different from the worlds, they will not be drawn toward the One we profess to serve.

### UNTRUTH #3

*To practice the Great Commission means that one must go to Africa or up the Yangtze. – go somewhere far, far away.*

The PowerPoint on PCC mission work clearly shows mission is NOT exclusively somewhere far away.

Yes, there is international missions work, but there are specialized ministries and missions in this country – what I grew up knowing as Home Missions.

Yet, even these may tend to make us believe or assume that mission==somewhere far away or as PEI Islanders say, “a long way from da road”

To take seriously the Great Commission in Matthew's Gospel is to be reminded that Jesus set no geographical parameters in bringing people to join the disciples in His work.

At the Clerks' Consultation I attended in Ontario a week or so ago, a book that was highly recommended was this one The Art of Neighboring. Building Genuine Relationships Right outside Your Door.

Picture of 9 houses – center house is the only one filled in – your house.

Among other things, the book contends that our work as missionaries – sharing the good news of Jesus – often overlooks people immediately around us – our neighbours.

Coupled with the Great Commandment  
**'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.'**

The Great Commission – this morning's lesson Joan read from Matthew – leaves us no option about our neighbours.

As Pathak and Bunyan state in their introductory chapter,

The problem is that we have turned this simple idea— love God with everything you have and love your neighbor as yourself' into a nice saying. We put it on bumper stickers and T-Shirts and go on with our lives without actually putting it into practice. But the fact is,

Jesus has given us as a practical plan that we CAN actually put into practice a plan that has the potential to change the world. The reality is, though, that the majority of Christians don't even know the names of most of their neighbours.

Question: How many of us are guilty of that very thing – don't even know the names of most of our neighbours.

I look forward to reading what the authors suggest to turn this situation around.

#### UNTRUTH #4

*To do what Jesus calls us his disciples then and us to do today is easy.*

It is not!

It is at least intimidating and for some, terrifying. Further, if Jesus expected the disciples then or his followers today to fulfill the Great Commission or the Great Commandment all by themselves – without any help from Him – he would not have added that final verse in the Great Commission  
**And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'**

That is a definite promise. No expiry or valid only until date.

Nowhere in the scriptures does Jesus call us to do something without first providing the rationale,

The way to do it,

And then his eternal help and presence as we do it

Never are we left abandoned as it were – to do by self!

Mission in the church involves the whole church.

It has been said that a church not involved in and not interested in mission beyond its 4 walls is a church that has begun to die!

Jesus' Great Commission is very clear isn't it?

Our responsibility as followers of Jesus is not just about singing "O how I love Jesus" – which is certainly important to affirm

Following Jesus is also about sharing His love that we have experienced in our lives with another.

And none of us can start this any sooner!!