

*“The Church: Place of delivering the Gospel” Acts 2:36 / 1 Tim 4:6-16 / Matt 28:18-20 (2/9/25)*

Every time when I go to Sooho’s school to pick up Sooho, Sooho always asks me if he could play more with his friends. And I always tell him we should go home quickly because it is too cold to wait for you. Sooho always feels sad to go back home and to say goodbye to his friends after school.

One day, it was probably about a few weeks ago, when the weather was so nice and warm, like spring, he asked me again to play more with his friends. He knew the weather was so warm and nice, so he ran to the big playground with his friends before I said ok. So, his friend’s parents and I followed the kids. We could not find any reason to make them go back home soon.

It was also a good chance for me to have a conversation with other parents. Although we saw each other every morning and afternoon, we did not have enough time to talk because all the family went back home very soon after school. So, that warm day was great for children and good for parents to talk to each other.

Unfortunately, I could not join their conversation well. The topic was about houses in the Viroqua area. They were interested in the prices of houses in our community. I am a person who really does not have any interest in money. When

I did the psychological test to be a pastor at UMC, I got 2 points in the financial interest area. The max score was 100. I listened to the parents' conversation really carefully, but I could not find any point that I could jump into the conversation.

However, the conversation topic changed from houses to political issues in our country. And then, one parent suddenly brought up a topic about Christianity. Probably, that parent did not know I was a pastor. The other parents who knew I was a pastor kept looking at me and smiled when that parent was talking about Christianity.

Anyway, the main point of conversation about Christianity was that they all grew up in Christian families. But they do not believe in one God, and they do not go to the church now. However, they know they are spiritual and want to raise their children spiritually. They had a clear story about not believing in a Christian God. They know they are spiritual, but Christian God is not their God. They found spiritual things in many ways.

Their story was very interesting to me. When I was a Buddhist, I also felt that I needed a spiritual one. I felt some emptiness in me. And I was sure Buddha was not the one who could fill my emptiness. So, I defined myself as "I am a

spiritual person, but I do not believe in the gods of the religions in the world. I believe in my own transcendent one.” It was my thought just right before I went to the church in New Zealand. After I went to the church, I realized that our God is the one who can satisfy me spiritually. I experienced the same thing with those parents, but they found the other ones, and I found our God.

Last Wednesday, I attended the Wisconsin conference clergy Bible study in Onalaska. At that conference, the Bishop told me that ministry these days is not easy for young pastors. I answered him that it is true that ministry is not easy for this age, but every generation has different challenges. So, this is a young pastors' challenge that we should pass through.

Many people say that the church faces big challenges these days because people are not religious and do not go to church anymore. However, I am confident that humans were created as spiritual creatures. So, humans need some spiritual things. I surely believe our God is the only one who can truly satisfy humans spiritually. And I believe the church is the only place that lets people know God is the only one who gives spiritual life to human beings. The problem is that we should think about if the church functions well to introduce our God to the people in the world.

Then, how can the church let people know our God satisfies us spiritually? We should deliver the Gospel. If you remember my very first preaching in our church, I believe that the Gospel is, “God is with us.” Delivering the Gospel does not mean saying, “If you don’t believe Jesus, you will go to hell!” Actually, this phrase is right in terms of our church doctrine. But this phrase of the church does not explain the Gospel well. I would say in more detail about the Gospel, “My life was worse than hell when I did not know Jesus. I experienced God’s presence in my life through Jesus Christ.” Delivering the Gospel means letting people know “God is with us.” This is why the church should be a place for delivering the Gospel.

Then, how can we let people know the Gospel in this challenging generation? How can we let people know the Gospel while people do not believe in God and do not go to church? My simple answer to those questions is, “I have no idea. I don’t know.” It is true that it is really hard to deliver the Gospel to people in the community. Although I do not have a clear answer to those questions, I hope to share several insights that I had while I prepare today’s sermon.

Firstly, we should know that delivering the Gospel is God’s order, and God is with us when we deliver the Gospel. When I read Matthew chapter 28, I focused

on verse 19. “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,” I thought this verse was what I should do for God and for the church. So, when I failed to make disciples, I was discouraged. However, this time, when I read this chapter again, God showed me verse 20 rather than verse 19. “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” The very first chapter of Matthew starts with Immanuel, God is with us, and this Gospel ends with the promise of Jesus that Jesus is with us always, to the very end of the age.” No matter what result comes, we can experience the presence of God when we deliver the Gospel.

Secondly, we should talk about the Gospel and who Jesus is. Today’s Acts Scripture is the last sentence of Peter’s preaching. The first work that the apostles did after receiving the Holy Spirit was preaching about who Jesus was. Peter proclaimed to the people that Jesus was the Messiah. Before the apostles received the Holy Spirit, they were afraid of being killed by Jews. After they received the Holy Spirit, they confidently delivered the Gospel before the people. The early church was the place of delivering the Gospel with the Holy Spirit. So, as the church, we should rely on the Holy Spirit and proclaim the Gospel to the people.

Thirdly, we should be an example of the Gospel. I thought being an

example of the Gospel was being a good person. But I saw and met so many good people, although they were not Christians. Without Jesus, we are able to be socially good and nice people. But without Jesus, we cannot be the people who live in God's presence. We cannot be an example of the Gospel without Jesus. I believe being an example of the Gospel is a life that reveals the presence of God. In the church, I met many people who were really happy because of God. I saw people who confessed their sins and returned to God. They were not perfect people. But they were people who brought their weaknesses before God and experienced God who worked on their weaknesses. Through their lives, I could see God. I could believe God is real.

In the last 3 weeks and today, we shared about the church. The church is the place of God's presence, the place of worship our God, the place of nurturing people in faith, and the place of delivering the Gospel. I am so happy because I saw the news that the A.I cannot do clergy's work in the future. It shows that even though people say, "I am not religious. I do not go to the church. I do not like Christianity." People still need something spiritual. The church and Christians are passing a very challenging time. It is difficult and challenging if we think the church is a building, system, and number of people. If we think about the

functions of the church that we shared, the church has opportunities and hope. I hope God bless our church to be a good church. I hope someone can feel God's presence in our church when they visit our church. I hope we can be the church that pleases our God. Amen.