

## **Psalm 87** >> On Purpose: Making Christ Known

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What is something you are excited about? [*The congregation was invited to answer.*] Is it pretty easy or really hard to share something you're excited about? When you're excited about something, you tell people about it.

Are you excited about Jesus?

Does a smile come to your face, does your blood start to really pump the more you think about Him – who He is and His place in your life? Do you pop worship music into your CD player or iPod and find yourself not just singing along but actually belting out the songs? Do you sometimes stop and, with tears of joy, ponder the mystery of His love for broken sinners like you and me?

Are you excited about Jesus? Can people around you tell?

### *Commission*

In His Great Commission to His 1st century and 21st century disciples, Jesus calls us to live an infectious faith: "...Go and make disciples of all nations..." (Mt 28:19). This is not a specialized ministry for only Peter or John or the apostle Paul; this commission is given to all the disciples 2000 years ago and today. We "are sent on a mission. Jesus commissions His disciples to be His representatives to the world."<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps you don't think you are gifted enough to speak about Jesus out loud to anyone, let alone someone who doesn't already know Him. You're afraid that you'll say something wrong that will make the person you're talking to *less* interested in Jesus than they were *before* you started the conversation. Maybe you're thinking that you're having a hard enough time being Jesus' representative in your own home in how you interact with your spouse or children or roommate, let alone trying to represent Him to people who don't know Him. Or, you don't know what you'll do if a non-Christian asks you a question you don't know the answer to if you're having a conversation about faith.

It's helpful to remember that we do not represent Jesus only with our words. St. Francis of Assisi is famous for saying: "Preach the Gospel always. If necessary, use words." No, this is not an excuse to never open our mouths, but St. Francis' words remind us that representing Christ can also take the form of extending kindness to someone who hasn't been all that kind to you; helping a neighbour down the road fix a problem in her house or in the barn; treating people you encounter at work or at the convenience store with respect as fellow imagebearers of God.

Or what about when you volunteer at the soup kitchen at St. James Anglican Church? Or

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<sup>1</sup> David E. Holwerda, "The Bible's Teaching on Discipleship" ([www.growdisciples.org/leadersandparticipants/links.asp](http://www.growdisciples.org/leadersandparticipants/links.asp)), 16.

when you head over to the Bulkley Lodge when it's our turn to sing some favourite hymns with our friends there? Or even when you show up right here at our church facilities when Fedo & Ana plan a work bee? We can proclaim the Gospel not only in words, but in the things we do.

For the times we *do* need to use words as we represent Jesus, I think of another word we often use when it comes to sharing our faith: *Witness*. For us *Law & Order* fans, this word reminds us of a courtroom where a witness is called to give testimony in a trial. A witness is not asked to first of all complete hours and hours of research into the topic of criminal justice. No, the witness is asked to give a testimony about what he had seen or heard. Prosecuting attorney Michael Cutter on *Law & Order* asks things like: "Can you tell the court where you were on the night of the shooting? And who did you see there? How many gunshots did you hear?" The witness is asked to recall for the court what he or she experienced.

The same is true for us. We can give testimony to what we have seen and heard, to what Jesus has done in our lives and the lives of family and friends. We can give testimony to how God is restoring health and strength to Bryan so quickly after his concussion, or to Pat, more slowly, but now able to join us in worship unlike a couple months ago. We can give testimony to how God has brought joy into our lives through the births of Mason and Jonas, and the births of other children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. We can give testimony to how God surrounded us with friends when a parent or brother or sister or uncle or aunt recently passed away. We can give testimony to how God is working in our lives through Sunday school, Cadets, GEMS, (E)TM, Sacred Marriage, the various Bible study groups, and other Telkwa CRC ministries. We can give testimony to how God brings peace and purpose to our lives, how He forgives our sins and equips us to live for Him.

You don't have to go to seminary for years to do this – not that going to seminary is a bad thing! You don't have to become an "expert" before you can give a testimony. You can testify to what you have seen and heard yourself.

And we don't do this alone because the Holy Spirit is equipping us. He is always at our side, within us, even. In the courtroom of the world or perhaps our own homes where we're sometimes ashamed of how we don't look anything like Christ's representative, the Holy Spirit stays with us, helping us live right and He giving us the words to say.

Reaching out is *not optional*. With the help of the Holy Spirit, being a representative of Christ, a witness not only becomes possible, but also desirable, something that more and more becomes just a part of our lives.

### *Fulfillment*

When we devote ourselves as individuals and as a church family to making Christ known, we are part of the fulfillment of the vision of Psalm 87:<sup>2</sup>

"I will record Rahab [a poetic name for Egypt] and Babylon  
among those who acknowledge me –  
Philistia, too, and Tyre, along with Cush [a reference to the upper Nile region] –  
and will say, 'This one was born in Zion'" (87:4).

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<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to Curt Gesch for connecting this psalm to the third part of Telkwa CRC's purpose statement.

Those names don't mean much to us, but upon hearing the names of those places, people in the Old Testament would have gasped. These countries are the sworn enemies of Israel. And yet, "the God of Zion claims them as God's own people."<sup>3</sup>

It would be like us hearing the governments of Iraq and Chechnya, Ethiopia and China – places where Christians are facing restrictions, harassment and persecution for their faith<sup>4</sup> – calling on their citizens to embrace Jesus of Nazareth, claiming Him as Saviour and King. We would gasp and say, *That's... that's impossible!*

Yet the Gospel is for all – for those who are near and for those who are far off (*cf.* Ac 2:39). The Gospel is for those whom we would consider likely candidates as well as for people we might have written off... the family member we think will never commit to Jesus, our crass and crude co-worker, the very kind but very uninterested next door neighbours. The Gospel is even for our enemies. Psalm 87 is a precursor to Jesus' teaching in His Sermon on the Mount where He says, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you..." (Mt 5:44).

Wayne Watson sings:

"...And we wake up in that city [referring to the new heaven and new earth] and behold the family – who is there and who is missing – well, we might just be surprised."<sup>5</sup>

Egypt, Babylon, Philistia, Iraq, China, the lunchroom at work, the playground at school – all these places and the people they represent for us are candidates for God's roll call of the peoples.

One psalm earlier, in Psalm 96:9, we hear David affirm: "*All the nations* You have made will come and worship before You, O LORD; they will bring glory to Your name" (emphasis mine). God says through the prophet Isaiah: "Turn to me and be saved, *all you ends of the earth*; for I am God, and there is no other" (Is 45:22, emphasis mine).

All this is to say: As we reach out, we are part of a much larger process being orchestrated and directed by God in which people from all over the globe, from different countries or different cultures or different convictions represented even in our own neighbourhoods turn to Jesus as their Saviour and King.

And we get to be part of that process! As the Holy Spirit inspires our actions and words, we can play a part in a person coming to say of him- or herself, "This one was born in Zion" (87:6). The word *born* repeats itself three times in Psalm 87; it's a "theological metaphor that means that those who acknowledge the LORD have birthright status in Zion, no matter where they live."<sup>6</sup> No matter how far away, no matter how much they seem like enemies now, the people to whom God calls and equips us to reach out may indeed be on a road that eventually finds them spiritually at home in Jesus. Echoing the ending of Psalm 87, these (perhaps) unlikely people may actually end up among us, making music and singing praises (*cf.* 87:7), perhaps even here in this very building.

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<sup>3</sup> J. Clifton McCann, Jr., "The Book of Psalms" in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (vol. 4; L.E. Keck, ed.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 1024.

<sup>4</sup> According to Voice of the Martyrs ([www.persecution.net](http://www.persecution.net)).

<sup>5</sup> From the song "The Blood of Jesus," in his self-titled CD released in 2000.

<sup>6</sup> James L. Mays, *Psalms* (Interpretation; Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1994), 281.

### *Conclusion*

I can't help but think that it's exciting that God chooses to use us as representatives, as witnesses in the whole process. Our excitement about Jesus can in turn spark excitement in others. Even though we are broken sinners, in Christ, we belong to God. Jesus died on the cross so that He could be the ultimate representative – representing our sins in our place – and the ultimate witness – witness to both God's judgement and grace. And when He rose from the dead and commissioned His followers, He gave them – and that includes us – the promise that as we represent Him, as we bear witness of Him, He will be with us always, even to the very end of time (*cf.* Mt 28:20).

That excites me. With the help of the Holy Spirit, let's together be excited about this, allowing our excitement to be infectious and obvious to all. And I, and the Lord as revealed in Psalm 87, do mean *all*.