



"Creeping Charlie and Christian Mission"

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Acts 1: 1-11

November 11, 2018

9:15 AM Service

Creeping Charlie and the Christian Mission

How does the Kingdom of God engage more and more people?

We know "God so loved the world that he gave his only son."

God continues to so love the world, in and through His Son, that God deploys countless thousands and millions as witnesses throughout the ages and across the globe.

Jesus captured this in word pictures:

Light in the darkness

Yeast in the bread dough

Salt that seasons whatever we are cooking and eating

I'd like to add one more: Creeping Charlie

Though it doesn't rise to the level of Scriptural authority, but we are all pretty familiar with Creeping Charlie.

Creeping Charlie (*Glechoma hederacea*) is an herbaceous perennial plant that spreads by seed and by creeping stems that grow along the ground. Creeping Charlie was introduced into North America from Europe by early settlers who thought it would be a good groundcover for shade. Most often now, however, it is viewed as an invasive species that will take over our lawns.

The Christian mission moves like Creeping Charlie...and it is just as relentless. Yes, sometimes it spreads by "seeds" – through electronic means, through the distribution of Scripture, and through God's direct gift of dreams and visions. But the analogy of Creeping Charlie spreading by "creeping stems", feelers that stretch out from an existing plant to establish an extension of the plant, seems particularly apt. The Christian mission grows and expands when Christ-followers, individually, personally, supported and encouraged by one another, bring their witness, offer their servanthood, express their compassion and care, and share their experience of Jesus with others. The gospel is invasive – interrupting the way the world normally works, upending the evil, injustice, and oppression with the glorious gospel of Christ.

Let's dip into the Scriptures together.

Acts 1:1-11

¹ In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach ² until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.³ After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

⁴ On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days, you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

⁶ Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

⁷ He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

⁹ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹ "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

New Chapter, New Power, New Purpose

This portion of Scripture introduces us to the *new chapter* of God's redemptive activity in the world. It is the handoff from what Jesus has done in his life, teaching, death, resurrection, and ascension (return to heaven) to his followers who are to be representatives of Jesus. Martin Luther said that we are "little Christs", sort of a chip off the old block wherever we are. After the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), the book of The Acts of the Apostles begins the rest of the 22 books in the New Testament. They are focused on the creeping Charlie effect – the spreading and growing of the Christian movement locally, regionally, globally and eternally.

All of this, of course, is laughable from a human perspective.

You have a clown car full of the earliest followers of Jesus who spent a fair amount of their time confused and clueless; sometimes in competition with one another. They will be worthless for invading the world with God's saving gospel as long as they look only to their own interests, rely only upon their own bright ideas, and depend on their own strength and energy. Jesus promised *new power* through the gift of the Holy Spirit – the same Spirit, if you will, who empowered Jesus himself would be available to those who follow him.

When we consider the Holy Spirit we often think of the fruit of the Spirit, characteristics of those living under God's influence (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control / Galatians 5:22-23). Or we might focus on the particular gifts of the Holy Spirit that empower our various ways of serving within the community of faith: hospitality, administration, teaching, prophecy, preaching, generosity, and the like. We often overlook the impact of the Holy Spirit noted here: missionary vision and missionary power.

How come?

Because when we become followers of Jesus Christ, when we receive the Holy Spirit to change our hearts, redeem our desires, and refresh our identity as the sons and daughters of Almighty God, we are given a new purpose for our lives. Like the earliest followers of Jesus, we may have a particular line of work in which we are employed. We will have a network of relationships of which we are part. But we, like they, have a new calling: witnesses to Jesus locally, regionally, and globally.

I am particularly drawn to this account in Scripture because the earliest followers seem a bit shocked that Jesus is done with the heavy lifting of redemption and now turns it over to them. He's the Source, no doubt, but they become the distribution network. "Are you going to restore the Kingdom to Israel now Jesus?" No. That is something in God's timing. And then, as Jesus returns to heaven right before their eyes, they are standing their looking into the sky. Two angels interrupt their holy moment with the present need: Jesus will return. Right now, though, you've been given a purpose. Get to work. They were commissioned and empowered to be witnesses in word, deed, and resources.

Instead of standing on the promises they, apparently, would be content sitting on the premises. Maybe we can relate.

Our Story, Our Vision, Our Resources

So, what does this have to do with us specifically?

The first connection is that we aren't just making up our own story about this congregation and its ministry. We are connected with God's story of healing the world in Jesus' name.

The second connection is that our vision, given in the commission in Acts 1:8, is like three concentric circles: local, regional, and global. These are not mutually exclusive or multiple choice.

And the third connection has to do with resources: by what means can we participate in this local, regional, and global witness? Of course, there are the resources of our presence and our time – serving personally in a particular way within and/or beyond our congregation here. But we have additional resources that are portable and can reach to places where we are not personally present:

Prayer

Partnerships with those "on the ground"

Portable Power of Financial Support

Faith Promise

The primary way the Scripture teaches us to support the local work of our congregation is through proportionate giving.

Beyond that, however, how do we reach locally, regionally, and globally to be part of the Creeping Charlie phenomenon of God's relentless, invasive grace, mercy, and salvation?

We pray, asking God to provide extra money to us individually and specifically.

You may have been a partner in this prayer for the past three years:

Lord, how much would you give through me that you would not normally give to me for the sake of healing the world in Jesus' name?

We call it Faith Promise.

We have *faith* that God will answer our prayer.

And we *promise* to pass along the extra money exclusively for the purposes of the mission partners which our Outreach Team has identified for our personal, prayerful, and direct support.

Sounds kind of crazy, doesn't it?

Maybe, but I think this is the kind of prayer the Lord loves to answer because it means our hearts are turned toward the world God is redeeming and that we are available to pass along resources given to us.

So, how much so far?

\$230,044.00

In your bulletin this morning there is a brochure that includes the anticipated partnerships and amounts of money to be sent to these ministry partners – as God provides and as we bring it to the church for us to collectively pass it along.

To mention a few highlights:

Our relationship with **Coventry School** here in Crystal Lake continues to grow. The video earlier in worship brought us some of the perspective of the social workers there. Tyler Hughes, who produced the video for us, asked if he might have 15 minutes for it since they had so much excitement to share. What you might have missed is that we have 21 mentors now who meet weekly with a particular student to help them on the road to academic success within the context of a stable, consistent, and loving relationship.

We are adding a new partnership with Habitat for Humanity to help with the construction of a subdivision consisting of nine homes on McHenry Avenue here in Crystal Lake.

A third new partnership is with Hope for Today Ministries in Hyderabad, India. The founder and director, Dr. Peter Periera preached here two years ago. A small group of five of us is headed to India just after Christmas to deepen and strengthen the relationship between First Church and the ministries going on there.

Here's a brief video introduction to Hope for Today Ministries:

<https://vimeo.com/161494080>

Hope for Today is a homegrown mission as God called Peter and Esther Pereira into this work. Since beginning they and their team have planted 6,021 churches. Last year there were 3,447 baptisms of

adults and youth. Two thousand women were trained in vocational training centers with a marketable skill. Each week a congregation of roughly 100 ragpickers meets. Fourteen youth are having their college tuition paid. 830 homeless street children receive vitamin fortified soy milk every day. And since 2000, more than 40,000 pastors and other leaders have been trained to undertake ministries of compassion, evangelism, and church development.

How does God answer our Faith Promise prayer?

Usually in one of three ways:

- Re-aligning our spending patterns to free up money for missional partnerships
- Providing additional opportunities to earn money
- It just shows up.

Here's one story from one of our church members. This arrived in an email last November:

Figured I'd share our Faith Promise story, I'll make it short.

I was sitting there during the Envelope Time two weeks ago on Faith Promise Sunday. For some reason, the amount of \$500 popped into my head. I didn't write it down and didn't want to commit.

Concurrently, I had agreed to dig a ditch for a coworker to run water and sewer out to his garage. We didn't discuss payment, but I figured he'd compensate me well for it. So last Wednesday I finish and he pays me \$500. I explained the whole Faith Promise thing to him and said the money would go to God's work, to which he replied "is it enough?"

On the other hand, the trench collapsed and almost buried me, but that's a different story. God's funny like that.

Next Sunday we will have the opportunity to offer our Faith Promises.

Take time this week to reflect on Acts 1: 1-11. Find yourself in the account. Listen for God's voice to you: You will be my witness locally, regionally, and globally.

And pray the Faith Promise prayer:

Lord, how much would you give through me that you would not normally give to me for the sake of healing the world in Jesus' name?

New Chapter. New Power. New Purpose.

We are witnesses, too.

