**Christians are witnesses to Jesus
Acts 5.27-32**

Quick quiz question:
How many times do we find the command to ‘go’ in the bible?...

Well, to be honest, I haven’t counted, but a Google search says its 1542.

Now, why did I begin my sermon with this question?

Well, just last week we celebrated Jesus’ resurrection.

And what was it that the angel at the tomb said to the women?...
“*Go* quickly and tell his disciples (Matthew 28.7)

And what was it that Jesus told Mary to do after she met him in the garden?...
“*Go* to my brothers and tell them, “I am ascending to your Father and my

Father, to your God and my God” (John 20.17).

And what was it that Jesus then told his disciples just before he went up to heaven?...
“*Go* and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28.19-20).

Christians are those who Jesus calls to ‘*go*’, whether that’s to the person next door, over the road, round the corner, or beyond.

Why are we to “go”?

So that we might share the good news of Jesus with others.

So, over the next few weeks, during the church season of Easter, as a mission community we plan to give some time to thinking about what it means for us to be people and churches, who ‘go’:

who *go* to make disciples of Jeus, bring them into the church family, and teach them how to follow him, that they in turn might ‘go’ out to others as well.

We’ll be using the early church in the book of Acts as our guide.

Then on Pentecost weekend, we’re encouraging each of our churches, as much as they are able to join in an initiative called “Love South West”, expressed locally as “Love North Devon”.
There will be a 24/7 week of prayer between Friday 30th May and Friday 6th June leading up to the weekend.
On Friday 6th June there’s an evening of prayer and worship in Grosvenor church.

On Saturday 7th churches are encouraged to do something to bless their communities in a practical way… maybe by picking up litter, or cleaning road signs or putting on a free coffee morning.
And as we do this, to invite people to join us for church on Pentecost Sunday, Sunday 7th June.

So… something really exciting for us to get involved in…

So, we begin this Easter series focusing on ‘going’ in Acts 5.27-32

And being “witnesses”.

Our reading takes place just a few short weeks after Jesus’ resurrection and ascension.
God has poured out his Holy Spirit on the church and the church is growing (Acts 2).
But the religious leader, those who had put Jesus to death, are not happy.
Peter and John have been put in jail and warned off sharing the good news of Jesus (Acts 4).

They carry on anyway.
The apostles are jailed again, but an angel rocks up in the middle of the night and releases them with the words, “*Go*, stand in the temple courts and tell people all about this new life.” (Acts 5)

So, our reading for today from Acts 5 records Peter and the Apostles’ words to the Sanhedrin after they have been arrested yet again:

“The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead – whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Saviour that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. We are *witnesses* of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to all who obey him.” (Acts 5.31-32).

What had the Apostles *heard*?

Jesus explaining his heart and the purpose of his death.

What had the apostles *seen*?

Jesus raised from the dead.

What had they *experienced*?

The Holy Spirit filling and empowering them.

And what were they doing?

Sharing this with others.

… being witnesses…

… because isn’t this exactly what a witness is, isn’t it?

someone who tells what they have heard, seen and experienced?

There is a time and a place to explain the Gospel to people – to help people understand who Jesus is, why he died and rose again, what it means to become a follower of Jesus, and how to take the first steps.

There is a time and a place to engage in ‘apologetics’ – to answer peoples’ questions about, how the world began, why a loving God allows people to suffer…

There is definitely a time and a place to show God’s love in practical ways – to demonstrate what God is like in practice.

But there is also great value in just telling people what God has done for you, what Jesus means to you…

What you have heard,

What you have seen,

What you have experienced.

… especially if people ask…

You know, apart from people growing up in Christian homes, the most significant thing in someone becoming a Christian is so often having a Christian friend…

Someone who appears to have something they want…

Someone who can share their experiences of Jesus..
Yes, someone who can have a stab at answering their questions, albeit imperfectly, and who can point them to other places where they can find out more…

Someone who cares enough to take the risk and say… something.

You know, the great thing about being a witness, is that all you have to do is share what you have heard, seen and experienced… not what you haven’t.
And most of us like talking about things that are special to us… a TV programme we’ve watched, a place we’ve visited, our grandchildren.
We don’t need much prompting to talk about things that bring us joy, or give us meaning, or help us when we are struggling.
Surely we can do the same about Jesus.

So, if someone said to you,

“You’re a Christian aren’t you. Why do you go to church?”

Or, “Do you pray?”

Or, “Isn’t the church just full of hypocrites?”
Or, “I’m a scientist, so I can’t believe in anything I can’t see and touch…”

What might you say?

It might be worth thinking through how we would answer some of these questions we might be asked by those interested in faith, so we have got something to say.

But we don’t need to have all the answers. We don’t need to be word perfect.

We just need to be honest, real, kind…

And share what we’ve experienced… what we’ve heard, seen and experienced of God.

I need to be honest with you… not everyone will respond well to our sharing Jesus.
If we’d read on from our reading in Acts 5 we’d have found that the Sanhedrin were furious at what the apostles said. They were ready to kill them. It was only the intervention of a wise man named Gamaliel that meant they got of lightly… with a flogging!

But some people will… and it will result in their salvation and enjoying eternal life with Jesus.

The other night on the BBC World Service news, there was a short piece about a growing interest in Christianity amongst young people; those aged 16-24.
It was picking up on a recent survey that suggests that churchgoing amongst this aged group has increased from 4% to 16% since the start of covid.
Anecdotal evidence suggests younger people are rejecting the materialist world view of their parents and looking for something more.
Jesus is it.
And those of us who know Jesus can show them where to look.

So church, hear the voice of Jesus… Mark 16.15-16:

*“Go* into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved and whoever does not believe is condemned…”

**Prayer**

Father God, we give you thanks for all that we have heard, seen and experienced of Jesus.

Please help us to be faithful witnesses to him,

That others might find what you have graciously given us.

In Jesus name,

Amen.