

History tells us back when the West was being settled the major means of transportation was the stagecoach, and we've seen these stagecoaches in many western movies. What we might not know is that the stagecoach had three different kinds of tickets: first-class, second-class, and third-class. If you had a first-class ticket that meant you could remain seated during the entire trip no matter what happened. If the stagecoach got stuck in the mud, or had trouble making it up a steep hill, or even if a wheel fell off, you could remain seated because you had a first-class ticket.

If you had a second-class ticket you also could remain seated until there was a problem. In case of a problem, second-class ticket holders would have to get off until the problem was resolved. You could simply stand off to the side and watch as other people worked. You didn't have to *get* your hands dirty, but as a second-class ticket holder you still were not allowed to stay on board. When the stagecoach was unstuck you would get back on and take your seat.

If you had a third-class ticket, you would definitely have to get off if there was a problem. Why? Because it was your responsibility to help solve the problem. You had to get out and push or help lift to fix a broken wheel or whatever was needed because you only had a third-class ticket. Fortunately the stagecoach is no longer a major means of transportation.

Pastor and author King Duncan says that the church is much like the stagecoach. We have first-class ticket holders, second-class ticket holders, and third-class ticket holders. He states one of the characteristics of people/members who think they have a first-class ticket is they "stay-seated" (in this case it's in a pew of course) and expect to be catered to or waited on by the church.

An example of a first-class ticket member is in a conversation between a pastor and potential new member: This pastor was talking with a man who was about to join the church. The almost-new-member said to the pastor, "I want to join the church because I want to be fed." The pastor replied, "Well, that's fine, but we all would be better off if you would take off your bib and put on an apron!"

Another characteristic of first-class ticket members is they also expect everything to go their way, and when things don't, they get upset and often leave.

Dr. Harry Ironside tells of a story about a group of church members who left a church after a difficult issue within the church didn't go their way. They left to begin what they hoped would be the "perfect church." The new congregation considered themselves to be such a spiritual blessing to God that they put a sign outside their church: "JESUS ONLY!". The new church didn't do community outreach, and were limiting on their selection of members. Basically, they only ministered to themselves. Well, one day when Dr. Ironside went by the new church, he couldn't help but to notice their sign which once read "JESUS ONLY" had had the first three letters (JES) fallen off to reveal a new message: "US ONLY!". Ironically "the wind" gave a new message to the community, revealing the truth about that church's ministry.

Pastor Duncan continues to explain in the church we also have members who think they have second-class tickets. These folks ride along until there is a problem. Then they become detached spectators. They attend church, perhaps even on a regular basis, but for whatever reasons, second-class ticket members will not get involved, even when "involvement" can be something as simple as (for example, at St. Peter's) using SCRIP cards for gas, groceries, or gifts, or washing the sheets after our LIHN guests have been here for the week, giving someone a ride to church, or sending food to a saddened or struggling person or family in the community, as so many of you do.

And finally, we get to the third-class ticket holders. It is with great joy that the church has "travelers" with a third-class ticket. This is where one's membership *gives of themselves* in whatever way God gifts them to give, *and* third-class ticket holders are willing to get out and push when the going gets tough. They do this with their time, talents, and treasures.

Now, I believe, in all fairness, that each of us matches up to one of these "ticket-holders" at varying times throughout our membership. We're not always a first, second, or third-class ticket member, but move in and out of them throughout a year or years often depending on commitments to work, family, or school. And just as a reminder, remember, we *do church* outside of this building too. The church is who we are as a people, and who we are outside of this building is the most important aspect of our discipleship. Let's take a look at this.

The disciples of Jesus were third-class ticket holders, and they were charged with the responsibility of telling others the good news of Christ. And next week on Pentecost we too are charged with that responsibility. So today, like the disciples,

we prepare, we prepare by defining exactly *what is it* that we are responsible for? Exactly what IS the good news *and* what does it mean to tell others of it?

The good news is: a new reality, a new way of being. In Jesus we see a living human example of the love and compassion of God right here on earth among us. Now, in order for the good news TO BE good news we have to live it! That means we have to choose it, accept it. We have to *be* the Jesus that we read about and in being him, we WILL have opened ourselves up to God, we will have restored our Oneness with God. The good news literally IS Jesus the Christ as THE WAY of life; it's a new reality, a new way of being.

So, is “telling” of this good news something we do by simply saying it to one another and others in the community? Ah, not-so-much. Rarely are we talking about Jesus in the grocery store or any other public place or event. And I can't help but to remember all the times Jesus said in scripture (to whomever) “I have told you, and still you do not understand! (or) I have told you and still you do not listen.” Words. Words are so often empty. Even Jesus' words were not always understood. Words actually mean *nothing* if they are not lived out. One of my favorite authors, Ralph Waldo Emerson, says, “What you do speaks so loudly I cannot hear what you say.”

So, what does it mean to “tell” of this good news? It means we “tell” it with our lives; our lives are to BE a living example of the Christ. The Christ is a way of thinking, the Christ is a mindedness that Jesus chose to possess; the Christ is not Jesus' last name. It's a WAY OF LIFE, of thinking, that we choose to use or not. Jesus chose it, he chose God's mindedness, and he shows us how to choose it too. We tell the good news more with our lives than with our words. Psalm 37:5 tells us to *commit everything we do to God, trust Him, and He will help us, he will make our innocence as clear as the dawn, and the justice of our cause will shine like the noon-day sun.*

In Christ-mindedness, that is, in using the mind of God as Jesus did—as a baptized member—we understand that as the church *we are not selling a product*, we are not here to be comfortably numb, we are here to be painfully alive, we are here to unfold our discipleship, and we are here to renew our trust in love, because it's in God's love *for* us that we *give* of our discipleship. And we *need* to renew our trust in God (in love) because we forget, we forget how much He loves us. And when we forget we're loved, we forget to love others. The church is about God's love for us and our responsibility OF THAT LOVE in our discipleship to others.

When the disciples ask Jesus, “When will the Kingdom be restored?,” they were asking as if someone else or some-THING else was going to do that for them! The restored Kingdom is when every heart and mind *uses* the mind of God—Christ-mindedness. And sometimes WE do what the disciples did (looking forward to a time of complete freedom and peace) without taking productive steps of action here and now. The Kingdom of Heaven is restored when WE restore it—and that’s why anyone trying to figure out when Jesus is coming again is wasting their time. There *is* no way to measure when we’ll all get it, when every human being thinks with love and lives it as Jesus did. It’s not **to** KNOW, it’s to be created! The saying, “God only knows” is the answer here.

We don’t know when, but we know how. Jesus leaves us—literally rises above it all—and gives us the tool, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the power necessary for the Kingdom of Heaven to be restored. Let us be a people who rise above it all as Jesus taught us. Let us pray: Creating and healing God, we give you thanks for showing us how to live and love in Jesus. We give you thanks for your forever-forgiveness when we find ourselves choosing first and second-class ways of life. We pray for our hearts to be opened to your will for us, individually, and as your church. We pray for those in our church family who are dis-eased with life’s challenges. We bless them with our thankfulness for your unswerving love for them. May they feel you in their lives this day. May they know the healing that only You can bring. We also give thanks this day for the joy of our youth. Be with all those who will be worshipping You later this morning through the hearts of our little ones. We especially give you thanks for our church’s teachers who have given faithfully towards their spiritual growth. And as we continue to seek our own spiritual growth we thank you for hearing our prayer as we say together the prayer that Jesus taught us: Our Father...

(Story examples by King Duncan sermons)