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“Go... and Preach as You Go...”

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Text: Matthew 10:5–15

It was very cold, damp, and windy, and doing survey work was the last thing I wanted to be doing that afternoon. Besides, no one for the last three blocks, except the dogs, had been particularly interested in having me come to their doors and invite them to worship with our congregation. I stopped at a house where, on my last time through the neighbourhood, they had taken a brochure and had said they would call me. Of course they hadn't, but then no one else had either: 1000 homes had turned up only 1 prospective household, and they had later said they would rather remain members in Detroit.

I gathered my strength and courage, and rang the doorbell, and waited, and waited. I had turned to go, when the door opened. I halfheartedly offered our invitation, and the woman said she remembered me, but hadn't given our church much thought recently. She took another brochure, and said she would read it this time for sure. I smiled, said thank-you, but in my mind started laying odds on the outcome of her promise.

A couple of houses later I had a door slammed in my face. Shortly after that, a dog decided that I had been on his property long enough, and showed me his fine teeth persuading me to write “Dog” on my survey sheet, and then hurried across to the other side of the block. About 20 minutes later, I had six houses left to go, and was asking the Lord why I was doing this when I could be sleeping, when I spotted a woman running toward me. Now, I have had police follow me as I went door-to-door, and detectives once called me to say they had a complaint that I was suspicious looking, and that, despite

my collar, I wasn't really from our church. Thus, I wasn't too crazy at the thought of what this person might accuse me. Had I not been polite enough? Had I walked across the wrong lawn? Had I snarled back too loudly at her pet? I prepared myself for the worst.

As she came closer, however, I recognized her as being the same woman whom I had talked with earlier. As soon as she caught up with me, she said her husband and she needed to discuss something with me immediately. Reluctantly I went with her, expecting to become involved in a marital dispute. Again, I asked God why I was doing this.

When I arrived, the couple had me sit down, and gave me coffee, always the sign of a long discussion. Then they shared with me the unexpected. One of their daughter's friends had taken her to Sunday School recently. Sarah had become so excited that she wanted to go back, and pleaded with her parents to let her do so. The parents, non-church goers, had been very surprised, but supportive, and started looking for a Sunday School closer to home, and one that seemed to agree more with their beliefs. Our brochure seemed to suggest our Sunday School as being the answer to their quest. Could their two oldest daughters join our Sunday School the next week, and was it okay if their clothes weren't very good? The parents had stopped going to another congregation about six years earlier, when parishioners there had taken them aside after worship and had suggested that God, and the leaders of the parish, had an expensive dress code for those attending worship.

For two and a half years now, Ann and Sarah have faithfully been coming to our Sunday School. Their teachers and fellow students love them, and they love them back. Once in a while the parents have attended worship and have commented how friendly and accepting everyone was. They said they felt comfortable, even though they were not members, and the liturgy was somewhat unfamiliar. Even then, people beside them had helped them to discover the secret of using the Lutheran Book of Worship and when to stand and to sit.

Last Sunday the father brought the children for worship and for the Sunday School picnic. For a long time he talked with a member who, he had discovered, had like him just quit a job for a difficult employer when asked to do something unethical, even illegal. During a break in their conversation, he came to

me and asked if he could talk. I sat down, and prepared myself to listen. Then George asked the most unexpected request: It was time to bring their youngest two daughters, aged 7 and 2, to receive Baptism. Could I call on his wife and him, and arrange it, and also talk about their greater involvement in the life of the congregation?

So we are going to do so some time next week. Through my ministry, but more importantly, that of the congregation, and fundamentally, that of the unknown five-year old friend, the Holy Spirit has touched and changed the lives of an entire family.

God has called all of us, clergy and lay, young and old, male and female, also to be such witnesses of the Good News revealed in Jesus Christ. Whom, on behalf of God, did we invite to be part of the body of Christ yesterday? Whom, on behalf of God, will we invite tomorrow? Amen.