

# Go Tell What? Where? Why?

A Sermon by Don Cummings  
Grace Church, Buena Vista Colorado  
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Text: "Go Tell It On the Mountain" and  
John 1:1-18

Years ago James W. Sire wrote a book called *The Universe Next Door* (InterVarsity Press), which is a kind of catalogue of worldviews. Sire explained the basics of theism, deism, naturalism, nihilism, existentialism, Eastern monism, the new consciousness, Marxism, secular humanism, New Age philosophy, and postmodernism.

All of these "ism"s are ways of looking at the world and understanding the human condition. We have just come through the season of the year when these competing worldviews come into sharp focus and often conflict. So we are aware that there are many different ways of seeing and understanding the world and its perceived realities.

Most people live their lives within the framework of one of these worldviews. A worldview shapes the way we think, the things we believe, the ways we act, and how we relate to the world around us and to each other. One's worldview is not an inconsequential thing.

One thing we know about Jesus Christ is that when he came into our world he turned the worldviews of his day on their heads. And he still does. As the first Christians grappled with who Jesus was and what he accomplished in his short life and ministry, they pieced together what would become the Christian worldview and the essence of this world view was expressed in the eloquent poetry and theology of John 1:1-18.

As much as I love the New International Version's translation of this passage, I choose instead to share with you today the Good News Version of John 1:1-18. Here the gospel writer articulates the Christian worldview.

## John 1:1-18 The Good News Version

1 <sup>1-2</sup> Before anything else existed,<sup>[a]</sup> there was Christ,\* with God. He has always been alive and is himself God. <sup>3</sup> He created everything there is—nothing exists that he didn't make. <sup>4</sup> Eternal life is in him, and this life gives light to all mankind. <sup>5</sup> His life is the light that shines through the darkness—and the darkness can never extinguish it.

<sup>6-7</sup> God sent John the Baptist as a witness to the fact that Jesus Christ is the true Light. <sup>8</sup> John himself was not the Light; he was only a witness to identify it.

<sup>9</sup> Later on, the one who is the true Light arrived to shine on everyone coming into the world.

<sup>10</sup> But although he made the world, the world didn't recognize him when he came. <sup>11-12</sup> Even in his own land and among his own people, the Jews, he was not accepted. Only a few would welcome and receive him. But to all who received him, he gave the right to become children of God. All they needed to do was to trust him to save them. <sup>b</sup> <sup>13</sup> All those who believe this are reborn!—not a physical rebirth <sup>c</sup> resulting from human passion or plan—but from the will of God.

<sup>14</sup> And Christ <sup>d</sup> became a human being and lived here on earth among us and was full of loving forgiveness\* and truth. And some of us have seen his glory\*—the glory of the only Son of the heavenly Father!\*

<sup>15</sup> John pointed him out to the people, telling the crowds, “This is the one I was talking about when I said, ‘Someone is coming who is greater by far than I am—for he existed long before I did!’” <sup>16</sup> We have all benefited from the rich blessings he brought to us—blessing upon blessing heaped upon us! <sup>17</sup> For Moses gave us only the Law with its rigid demands and merciless justice, while Jesus Christ brought us loving forgiveness as well. <sup>18</sup> No one has ever actually seen God, but, of course, his only Son has, for he is the companion of the Father and has told us all about him.

This is my preaching text for today but as I hold this text in one hand, I want to hold in the other the lyrics from the refrain of one of the hymns we are singing today: “Go Tell It on the Mountain.” So here are the words from the hymn that will also inform our thinking:

Go, tell it on the mountain,  
over the hills and everywhere.  
Go, tell it on the mountain  
that Jesus Christ is born.

And finally, let's bring into the orb of our thinking today the title of my sermon, which is inspired by the refrain of the hymn: “Go Tell What? Where? Why?”

The answer to the first question, “Go tell what?” is clear and simple. Go tell that Jesus Christ is born. That is what the gospel of John does. His

whole gospel tells the world that Jesus Christ is born and what his birth means to the world.

Now, fifty-two Sundays each year this is what we preach and teach about in the church: that Jesus Christ is born, what his life and ministry means, and how a relationship with God through his Son Jesus Christ can transform, utterly transform, our lives personally and globally. So, since this is our focus every Sunday, today I want to concentrate on the other two questions the hymn provokes: “Go tell it where?” and “Go tell it why?”

The hymn directs us to go tell it on the mountain, but what does this mean? John tells us that Jesus is the light of the world who gives life to all people. Later during his ministry, Jesus told his followers, “You are the light of the world.” The light he brought into the world he has given to his followers so that it may continue to shine into the world’s dark places.

And then Jesus said something very important. He said:

<sup>14</sup> “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16)

Have you ever thought about what happens to an oil-burning lamp that is put under a bowl? It isn’t long before it burns up all the oxygen under that bowl and goes out. Then everything under the bowl is plunged into darkness again.

The light Jesus has given us is meant to be shared. In fact it must be shared or the world will plunge back into darkness. And how do we share the light? Jesus told us: “let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

The goodness of the life we live and of the deeds we do is how we share the light. It is good lives and good deeds that transform our world. Just think of Mother Theresa and how her simple life and compassion for the dying poor of Calcutta transformed the final days of people who had literally been kicked to the gutters to die. Her deeds of kindness touched the heart of the world.

And think of the joy brought to the lives of young girls who receive a pillow case dress from our sewing ladies, or to the soldiers who receive a Quilt of Valor they have made. And think of the quality of life you have made possible for your own children by providing for them a home that was

emotionally and physically safe and in which you modeled by your own life the love and forgiveness of God you yourself have experienced through faith in Jesus Christ.

Go tell it where? Every place we live, to every person we know, and to the world around us. This is a vital part of the Christian worldview. Jesus left his ministry to us to continue.

And now the final question of my sermon title, “Go tell it why?” Because we believe Jesus Christ is not only the light of the world, but also the hope of the world.

Now listen, for more than a century the modern world has embraced a fallacy. It has convinced itself that modern humankind has come of age, that our technology can solve all our problems, that our greater enlightenment lifts us to a higher plane of living, that peace will be achieved, that prosperity will be made reality for all, that the war to end all wars will end all wars. And in this fallacy it is thought that the world no longer needs religion. In fact, religion has been a big part of the problem. It is time to leave religion behind. Humanity has grown up and we don’t need superstition any longer.

How’s that been working out for us?

The Christian worldview understands that there is an evil at the heart of the world that is the cause of our suffering and pain and warfare and inhumanity to each other. And it further believes that our condition deeply grieves God—so much so that he sent his only Son to save us from ourselves. He is our only hope of rescue, of salvation, of reconciliation, of forgiveness, of a life that is worth living.

This is neither a pessimistic nor exclusivist view. This is a hope for the universal salvation of all humankind and the world. We go tell it because Jesus Christ is the hope of the world.

Many people today know about St. Francis and greatly admire his life. He is revered by many as a lover of nature, a friend to animals and an advocate for the poor. But some may not know about how Francis came to that kind of life.

In his address last October to the Diocesan Convention, Bishop Robert O’Neill of the Colorado Diocese of the Episcopal Church told the story of how Francis became the saint we still admire. I would like to share with you Bishop O’Neill’s comments about Francis.

The story of Francis is deceptively simple. Francis lived in the hillside town of Assisi in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century. He was the son of a wealthy silk merchant. He was educated. He was well traveled. He had position and prestige and, by all appearances, everything was just fine for Francis. But at the same time, it appears, nothing was actually right for him. He found perhaps the material abundance with which he was surrounded to be empty. He clearly recognized the great disparity between rich and poor. He knew firsthand as a soldier and as a prisoner both the brutality and brutal politics of war. He was dissatisfied with the superficiality he found in many of his relationships, and, as much as Francis tried to conform to the conventional wisdom of the world, as much as Francis tried to follow in the conventional paths that were open to him as a young man, something within him simply was disturbed—unsettled.

One day in church on the feast of St. Matthias, Francis heard these words from Scripture—the same words spoken by Jesus to the disciples when Jesus first sent them on what is known as their first missionary journey. You know these words. You have heard them before. Jesus sends his disciples out, saying simply: “take nothing for your journey, no staff, no bag, no bread, no money—not even an extra tunic.” (Luke 9:3). These words are clear. Jesus is very direct and as you and I both know, they are deeply challenging words. But when Francis heard them on that particular occasion some seven centuries ago, something shifted—something in that moment connected deeply within his heart, some essential truth about himself broke into his consciousness, some level of denial or self-deception evaporated—and there was recognition, deep awareness, awakening, if you will, rebirth. Francis, as the story goes, leapt to his feet and exclaimed, “This... this... is what I want.” There was something about this way—this way of surrender, this way of relinquishment, this way of self-offering and self—emptying, this way of moving freely and nimbly, of giving oneself away in love—there was something about this way that Francis understood not simply as essentially Christ-like, but even more surprisingly, also essential about himself. This way—his deepest self. This way—his true humanity.

Later, as he prayed before the crucifix in the rundown church of San Damiano, Jesus spoke to him from the cross, calling him by name and saying simply, “Francis, rebuild my church.” . . . And with that, as the story goes, Francis gave away his possessions. He renounced his inheritance. He assumed the garb of a beggar, and he lived very much like Jesus. He cared for the poor, he tended lepers. He went off into the

wilderness in solitude to pray and be still and silent, and he taught the Kingdom of God to anyone who would listen.

I would like to return to something the bishop said about when Francis heard the words of Jesus to his disciples. Bishop O'Neill said, that even though Francis had heard those words before, “on that particular occasion some seven centuries ago, something shifted—something in that moment connected deeply within his heart, some essential truth about himself broke into his consciousness, some level of denial or self-deception evaporated.”

May I tell you that this is why I preach? I am seeking that kind of moment for you and for the people who sit around you—that moment when you hear a word from Jesus, or a word from the Lord, that connects deeply within your heart and something in your life shifts and you become a changed person. That's why I preach. And that's why I preach longer than a commercial break on television, and longer than most people's attention spans are supposed to be these days. I'm looking for that moment. And I've seen it enough times across the years to know that it comes. And it makes a profound difference in the life of the hearer.

Now I want to add a fourth question to the three that are in my title for this message: “Go Tell it How?” For a long time the word “evangelism” has been an unwelcome word in the Christian faith. People both inside and outside of the church have come to dislike the word because of the methods some Christians and some churches have used. Let me say that there are those who have abused the concept of evangelism. But it is a good word, one that needs to be redeemed—not rejected. Evangelism simply means telling the good news of Jesus' birth and what his life and ministry means to us and to the world.

Several years ago someone came up with a variation of the word. They called it FRANgelism. The first four letters stand for Friends, Relatives, Associates, and Neighbors. The originator of this term also devised a simple strategy that can help us reclaim the best practices in evangelism. He calls upon us to ask God to lay upon our hearts the name of at least one person we know in each category who does not attend church. Just jot down their name in the space next to Friend, Relative, Associate or Neighbor. Then put this form some place where you will see it everyday so it will remind you to pray for these persons on a daily basis.

Now the next steps are important. Don't tell these persons that you are praying for them. That might scare them to death. And don't initiate conversations about faith with them. Just pray for God to create an opportunity for that conversation to happen, or for you to invite them to church, and then be alert for when God creates that opportunity.

You might be amazed at how often this happens. The key is if we can get them to come to church where they can experience the loving warmth of our fellowship and hear the good news shared through worship, preaching and conversation, God has a better chance of their finding that moment when a word from the Lord will cause a shift in their life. Our end of the task is to pray and love them into coming. God's end of the task is to take it from there.

Is this an assignment you can accept for the New Year? It isn't a New Year's resolution. It is a commission to go tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born.