

Sunday June 4, 2023

Trinity Sunday

Matthew 28:16-20

“Time to Go”

I was trying to think of an interesting way to give our text and sermon lighter feel, when I came across a great idea based on a sermon idea by Steven Shepherd a retired pastor from Missouri. Once when he preached on the Great Commission, he made a delightful parallel of this passage to the life of a cowboy, and so I share a few of his insights because many people love cowboy stories.

To get us in the cowboy mood, there is a story about Cowboy Joe who was telling his fellow cowboys back on the ranch about his first visit to a big-city church. "When I got there, they had me park my old truck in the corral," Joe began. "You mean the parking lot," interrupted Charlie, a worldly fellow. "I walked up the trail to the door," Joe continued. "The sidewalk to the door," Charlie corrected him. "Inside the door, I was met by this dude," Joe went on.

"That would be the usher," Charlie explained. "Well, the usher led me down the chute," Joe said. "You mean the aisle," Charlie said. "Then, he led me to a stall and told me to sit there," Joe continued. "Pew," Charlie retorted. "Yeah," recalled Joe. "That's what that pretty lady said when I sat down beside her. Pew!"

Here's another. One Sunday morning an old cowboy entered a church just before services were to begin. Although the old man and his clothes were spotlessly clean, he wore jeans, a denim shirt and boots that were very worn and ragged. In his hand he carried a worn-out old hat and an equally worn-out bible.

The Church he entered was in a very upscale and exclusive part of the city. It was the largest and most beautiful church the old cowboy had ever seen. The people of the congregation were all dressed in expensive clothes and accessories. As the cowboy took a seat, the others moved away from him. No one greeted, spoke to, or welcomed him. They were all appalled at his appearance and did not attempt to hide it.

The preacher gave a long sermon about hellfire and brimstone, and a stern lecture on how much money the church needed to do God's work. As the old cowboy was leaving the church, the preacher approached him and asked the cowboy to do him a favor. "Before you come back in here again, have a talk with God and ask him what He thinks would be appropriate attire for worship." The old cowboy assured the preacher he would.

The next Sunday, he showed up for the services wearing the same ragged jeans, shirt, boots, and hat. Once again, he was completely shunned and ignored. The preacher approached the man and said, "I thought I asked you to speak to God before you came back to our church." "I did," replied the old cowboy.

"If you spoke to God, what did he tell you the proper attire should be for worshipping in here?" asked the preacher. "Well, sir, God told me that He didn't have a clue what I should wear. He says He's never been in this church!" Do you remember our Minor prophet friend Amos? Amos was a kind of cowboy.

Amos describes himself in 1:1 "The words of Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoa – what he

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saw concerning Israel..." Amos was a shepherd under the reign of Uzziah and Jeroboam II. During that time, the people of Israel had experienced peace and prosperity, but there was a great deal social corruption, as in our time and it seems all times.

Amos was a good man. A good shepherd man. Good herdsman. We could think of him as a cowboy preacher. Amos preached about God's justice and righteousness. He condemned all people who made themselves powerful or rich at the expense of others. Not much different than today. And his main message to the people of Israel was this: Amos 4:12 "Prepare to meet your God, O Israel."

And, of course, everyone needs to prepare to meet God in person. This is a big part of what life is about. We start life with God (even though we don't realize this) we continue our lives with God (even though many people stubbornly refuse to admit this. He is our sustainer in life). And we end life with Him even though many people deny this. In a nutshell, we can say that life is a preparation to meet God in person!

Hebrews 9:27 "Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment." All people everywhere in the world need to prepare to meet God. This is why we are called to preach the truth about God and Christ. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life and no one approaches the Father except through Him!

In this so-called "Cowboy sermon," I want to consider some things that a cowboy does and apply these to the Christian life. Here is what a cowboy or cowgirl does.

1- He rides 'em. 2- He ropes 'em. 3- He brands 'em. 4- He corrals 'em.

Speaking of riding 'em; someone once reported the following experience, "I had a near death experience that has changed me forever. The other day I went horseback riding. Everything was going fine until the horse started bouncing out of control. I tried with all my might to hang on but was thrown off. Just when things could not possibly get worse, my foot got caught in the stirrup. When this happened, I fell headfirst to the ground.

My head continued to bounce harder as the horse did not stop or even slow down. Just as I was giving up hope, and losing consciousness, the Wal-Mart manager came and unplugged it." Matthew 28:19 states "Therefore go and make disciples..." Cowboys must ride a horse to get their work done. They must "get up and go" to get anything done. "Get up and go" is one of our problems today. Jesus said to "go" into all the world and get something done for Him.

Quite frankly, getting up and going isn't a real problem for us. When something is important to us, we have no trouble making the effort to accomplish the task or attend the event. We just simply need to apply that same "get up and go" to the work Christ has given us. We need to be ambitious for Jesus. If we compare our efforts at attaining wealth, or entertaining ourselves, with what we offer Jesus, I am sure in our honesty we come up quite short. We are spending far too much time riding projects that have no eternal value.

What has happened to our priorities? What about us? On what do we spend our "get up and go?" Cowboys are also known to be good at roping 'em. Matthew 28:19 reads "Therefore go and

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make disciples of all nations..."

Cowboys round up cows and rope 'em. We need to do something similar with people. We need to round 'em up and rope 'em. In other words, we need to make disciples out of people. We need to make followers or encourage people to become followers of Christ. This of course begs the question: have we made any followers lately?

All my life I've had people try to get me to become a follower in one way or another. I have had people try to entice me to try all manner of activities. Friends have invited me to play golf, try a new restaurant, try a new game, attend the theatre etc. Most of the time I have truly enjoyed myself, but frankly, sometimes I do not enjoy myself. I have even had friends who have tried to lead me to places I simply do not want to go.

It can be very difficult when your beloved spouse wants you to go somewhere you really don't want to go. Sometimes you just buck up and bear through it, but sometimes you try to think of ingenious ways to get out of the obligation. Marketers are always trying to rope us in to buy certain products and services. They come up with clever campaigns, trying to convince us of how much better our lives will be if we buy their product.

Frankly, I don't care how good your chewing gum is, I doubt it will have that much of an impact on my life. It is hard to convince me to be a follower, as I am sure it is hard to convince you. Well imagine getting people to follow Jesus. How hard is that? Have we made any followers lately? That is, have we roped anyone into believing that Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of the world?

Have we convinced anyone that Christ is the way to go in life? Have we even talked to anyone about Christ? This is our responsibility as his disciples, his followers. We are to encourage others to follow him just as Andrew found his brother Simon and brought him to Jesus. We also need to brand 'em. Matthew 28:19 "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Three preachers got together for coffee one day and found all their churches had bat-infestation problems. "I got so mad," said one, "I took a shotgun and fired at them. It made holes in the ceiling but did nothing to the bats." "I tried trapping them alive," said the second. "Then I drove 50 miles before releasing them, but they beat me back to the church."

"I haven't had any more problems," said the third. "What did you do?" asked the others, amazed. "I simply baptized them, and I haven't seen them since." The sad truth of that story is that even baptizing some people doesn't seem to do them any good. Now I still believe in its value, don't get me wrong! We just forget its true meaning. This is where the branding business comes in! Cowboys of old, would round up their herd and brand 'em so that others would know to whom they belonged.

It may sound crass, but truthfully, baptism is a part of God's branding business. It's a sign, if nothing else, to God and the world that we belong to Him!  
It's a step in the right direction and I would never tell anybody that they didn't need this kind of

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branding done.

One preacher said these words about baptism: One good way to think of baptism is to consider it a “signing of a contract” between you and God. If you were to buy a house, you would be required to sit down with the sellers of the home and approve a contract. To show your approval, you will be required to sign your name at the bottom of the paper. Your signature wouldn’t buy the house (the money you probably borrowed from the bank did that), but you couldn’t purchase the house until your name was on the dotted line.

So also, your baptism doesn’t “buy” your salvation. Christ’s blood does that. But your signature on God’s contract is required. When people come to the point where they want Christ to save them, we need to point them to the baptistry. We must encourage them to confess their faith in Christ and be baptized as the people on the day of Pentecost in Acts and the Ethiopian eunuch of Acts 8.

The scriptures are full of verse calling us to this act or obedience.

Acts 2:38 Peter replied, *“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*

Acts 22:16 *“And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized, and wash your sins away, calling on his name.”* Romans 6:4 *“We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”*

Baptism is an act of obedience that all people who believe in Jesus need to comply with. This does not “complete” our obedience to Jesus, but it’s a step of obedience in the right direction.

Finally, we need to corral ‘em. Matthew 28:20 *“Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* After a cowboy has ridden hard, roped his livestock, and branded them, then he needs to corral ‘em. He needs to herd them into the corral and keep them there.

The corral, however, that I am thinking of is the church. When people come to believe in Jesus and they decide to follow Him, they need to be encouraged to become a part of the church. And they need to be taught, which comes in the church.

Some people don’t want to join a local church or fellowship of believers. Why not? One reason is because they will feel responsible to attend that church and support that church in service and in giving. **AND THEY SHOULD!**

Arthur Boers in "The Other Side," (May/June 1989) wrote, “I often visit newcomers in town and find them to be church shopping. They want to know what they can get out of church. Churches have become just one more consumer commodity.

Worship services are not a place for us to serve God and neighbor, but a place where people

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expect to purchase the best: Inspiring worship, good music, moving sermons, quality childcare. As if we buy God and not vice versa.”

That’s not what the church is all about! The church is not here for the purpose of getting something out of it, but rather for us to put something into it! Now don’t get me wrong: I want to deliver the goods to you! I want to preach the best sermons I can for your sake and to honor the Lord! I want to give you and the Lord the best service I can. But this is the way we all should think. If we all give our best service and do our best for the Lord and His church, **ALL PEOPLE WILL GET SOMETHING OUT OF IT.**

It’s the principle of the more you sow, the more you reap. The more we give, the more we get. Someone once said, "There are four main bones in every organization. The wishbones: Wishing somebody would do something about the problem. The jawbones: Doing all the talking but very little else. The knucklebones: Those who knock everything. The backbones: Those who carry the brunt of the load and do most of the work."

Just think, if everybody who believed in Christ joined the church and got involved in service, **JUST THINK WHAT COULD BE ACCOMPLISHED FOR THE LORD?** If you’re not in the church, you need to be, and if you’re not involved in some kind of service, you should be!

There you have it. The great Commission calls us to ride ‘em, rope ‘em, brand ‘em, and corral ‘em. That’s our job as people who belong to the Lord. Or as one church in Kansas City states it as its motto: We will “wake up, sing up, preach up, pray up, pay up, but never give up or let up or back up or shut up until the cause of Christ in this church and in the world.