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**Advent 3 A – December 11, 2022**

**“Go!” Read & memorize: John 3: 16 & Matthew 28: 19 – 20**

There are three verses of scripture that guide every Christian. The first many have memorized: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.” The genesis of our relationship with God is His love.

Because of that love, God commands us to go! Our going has a goal: To make disciples. God’s loves does not depend on our going. He loves us even when we are disobedient. He is more joyful when we go and make disciples. It’s the mission of the church, found in Matt. 28: 19 – 20, often called the Great Commission. We seek to make disciples because we have been changed by God’s love. We express it with this shorthand: “Sharing Christ, Changing Lives!”

Last year, we launched a campaign, a ministry campaign to enable us to do three very dramatic things: provide funding for two important aspects for the future of our congregation: pastoral staffing and renovation of our church home. We also wanted to take a step out into our community in a direct, hands-on mission that would have great impact.

To accomplish all this we first asked you to recommit to the covenant that we ask each member to sign, stating that you will be an active member, offering time, talents and treasure to the mission and ministry of our congregation. You did that and helped us launch our ministry campaign.

Last December we had a wonderful celebration and when commitments were tallied, we had commitments of about \$475,000 to enable us to carry out the goals we had set before you. In our first year, you have already given over \$300,000. From those funds we set aside \$50,000 for mission. We invested \$30,000 of that in a partnership to help us build a home with Habitat for Humanity of Ontario County. We became the major sponsor.

**We didn't just hand them money. We also offered our talents and time. Along with our prayers for the mission and ministry of Habitat, a Christian organization that helps people to secure substantial, safe housing, we also put sweat equity into it. Habitat does a great job of vetting families, helping them gain the skills they need not only to own a home, but to care for it.**

**Our gift actually had a bigger impact than that. Because Habitat was secure in this funding, they were able to realize some of their aspirational goals for some other projects they were working on because they did not have to raise the \$30,000 for Christine's home.**

**In a sense, we accomplished exactly what we wanted to do: make an impact on Habitat which would increase their capacity. The partnership has worked well. My hope and prayer is that, having partnered with Habitat, we will find ways to continue to be involved with them. It has been a wonderful opportunity for us to meet and serve people in the community; to see firsthand how our stewardship impacts others and to share the joy of a family having a safe, secure home finally.**

**The focus of the "Go" Campaign was to get us going, going out into our community, going out into the future for generations to come. One of our needs was the renovation of this building. Where we are sitting is part of the original building, built in 1964. Until recently, it still had the original floor and paneling in it.**

**One of the comments we heard as you reentered our worship space is how much lighter and brighter it feels than it did before. Lightness and brightness reminds us of Christ's love and care for us. How we care for our building and property is an important indicator to people, especially guests, of how we might care for them.**

**We certainly hope that people will find the love and care of God here. It is always my prayer that when people come they will see the love of Jesus through the people of Good Shepherd. They will feel the warmth and hospitality that God has shared with us being passed on to them.**

**Yet, I also know that a physical space can impact how people see us. God certainly confirms that when He uses one third of the book of Exodus to give His people directions for the place they would worship Him. From that I take it that how we physically present is vitally important also. As you read those chapters of Exodus you know that God was asking His people to make great sacrifices to have that place of worship.**

Many people in our community tell me how impressed they are as they observe our property. We owe a great debt of thanks to our Lawn and Garden teams, led by Bob Jauch and Sandy Voigt for that. When people see places that are properly cared for, it gives them an impression which may lead them to come in and find out who we are and what we're about. That gives us our opportunity to be "Sharing Christ, Changing lives!"

We want to remember that the "Go" Campaign isn't just about physical plant. It's really about our spiritual lives. Generations before us came and built up Good Shepherd. We are building on their foundation. Someday, future generations will build on our foundations so that God will be glorified through the mission and ministry of Good Shepherd. We do all this to serve God by serving others.

Just this past week you received your Christmas offering envelope. This time of year we seek to raise funds for two organizations. Both are very close to our hearts: Canandaigua Churches in Action, which is a ministry of all the Christian churches in Canandaigua which provides a community food pantry. Many of you bring food during the year to help stock that pantry.

Each Christmas, we seek to raise a substantial gift for CCIA that will enable them to continue that ministry throughout the year. This is our witness to the people of our own community of our joint care as the body of Christ. CCIA's tagline is that we be "the hands and feet of Jesus Christ" in our community.

The other half of that offering will go to Lutheran World Relief. Lutheran World Relief is assisting both those who have fled Ukraine and those who have remained. It has committed over \$15,000,000 already to their needs. It does development work in many of the poorest communities in the world. The likelihood is that we will never meet any of the people that are assisted. Through CCIA and Lutheran World Relief, we are being the hands and feet of Jesus throughout the world.

On Monday, we'll be shopping for and packing food baskets for fifty families. Some of them are in our own community; some of them are beyond our community because of partnerships with ARC, Happiness House and Blue Star Mothers. These are people we might very well know and they need help.

Ron and Kathy Chapman do a really great job of getting us boxes from Ryan's liquor store. Those are just the right size boxes to pack food. They were talking to one of

the ladies who works at Ryan's and she asked them why they were getting all these boxes. They explained that food would be packed in the boxes by Good Shepherd Lutheran Church and given out to families in our community.

She then responded, "Yes, I know about that. I was a recipient of one of those baskets a number of years ago. It was an incredible blessing to me and my family." We help people because that's what God calls us to do. We don't help them so that they'll come to Good Shepherd, although we are very happy if they do. We help people regardless of where they worship or don't worship at all. It's one of the ways we get the opportunity to be "Sharing Christ, Changing lives!"

What does the future hold for us? We know it holds a new pastor, someday. Our Call Committee is actively seeking that pastor. I know that sometimes we think that it is taking a long time. I want to remind you that we are working in God's time. He has a pastor in mind for us and is preparing him to come at the right time.

Unlike our national church, we have not been in decline. We have figured out how to do ministry that attracts people to come to believe in Jesus Christ. It challenges them to serve Him by serving others. When we stop living for others, there will be no future generations to come.

The mission of the church is to make disciples, more and more fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ who live to make a difference for others. We have made that difference in this year, just as we have in most years. I firmly believe that it is one of the reasons why people come to join us.

We have our eyes focused on the future that God has in store "For Generations To Come ..." I thank you for your support of the "Go" Campaign, but beyond that, for your support of Good Shepherd in all the ways you offer it. I rejoice in being the pastor of a congregation that is looking forward to new generations of followers of Jesus by going out into our community; going out into the world to make disciples. In obedience to God we can rejoice in "Sharing Christ, Changing Lives!" "For Generations to Come."

Count me in: How will you reflect the light of Jesus into the places you go and the people you meet?