Go Boldly Where No One Has Gone Before

Matthew 28:16-20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

Forty five years ago this summer, Buzz Aldrin and Neil Armstrong stepped on the moon. For many of us it is a day we will never forget. The landing on the moon of Apollo 11 took place at 1:18 PST, and 6 hours later humans set foot on another celestial body, looking up into the heavens to see planet earth. The words Neil Armstrong spoke were "One small step for man, one giant step for mankind." Apollo 11 effectively ended the Space Race and fulfilled a national goal proposed in 1961 by President John F. Kennedy in a speech before the United States Congress, "before this decade is out, of landing a man on the Moon and returning him safely to the Earth." It was a dramatic accomplishment to go where no man had ever gone before.

Since it was on a Sunday, Buzz Aldrin decided to ask his pastor to prepare communion to bring with him so he could receive the Eucharist on the moon. While Aldrin was able to take the Lord's Supper, he had to so in private so as not to raise the ire of atheist Madelyn Murray O'Hare.

Since then, however, we've not been boldly going much of anywhere else in terms of human exploration. Sure, we're sending probes to other planets like Mars and mapping the human genome, but finding real adventure in places where few or no humans have been before is elusive.

Then again, maybe it's not that there aren't places left to explore; it's just that we have to be a bit more creative, and even aggressive, in finding them. Sometimes, those out-of-the-way places are as close as the edge of town, on the way to work or even right under our feet.

According to a magazine article in GQ last year, young urban explorers are sneaking into well-guarded venues to see things few have ever seen before. They call themselves "place hackers", sort of like computer hackers who break into computers to steal information. But rather than stealing something, they just want to physically sneak in to see something, like the arm holding the torch on the Statue of Liberty. Other places they have broken into include old military bases, a ghost town in Brazil built by Henry Ford,

Dr. Bradley Garrett, an Oxford University academic and renowned place hacker says, "It's about going into places that are essentially off-limits and, because they

are off limits, have been relatively forgotten. The goal of the urban explorer is not just to explore these places but also to photograph them and share these with others so they can see what they're like."

When Jesus was walking around the Middle East, he too explored places others feared to tread. He ate in the homes of sinners, dined with the outcast, touched the lepers, entered tombs to raise the dead, and walked on water. After his resurrection he sent his disciples on mission trips to faraway lands when he told them to go out into the world to make disciples in every nation. They went, and soon the good news of Jesus spread throughout the world.

You've probably noticed the trend that fewer people are attending church services, and that development extends to baptisms, funerals, and weddings. I frequently get requests from young parents who want their child baptized but have no interest in the church or Sunday School. This week I conducted a memorial service in a club where the majority of those in attendance had an alcoholic beverage in hand. I've had weddings where the bride and groom have asked me to leave out the "religious stuff". I usually recommend they see a justice of the peace.

I don't expect the younger generation to "place hack" into church. The reality is we need to "place hack" into their world. Where could we go in our community to tell others about the good news of Jesus? Where are the places in our town that we could go where we might be needed? Where are the dark alleys and hidden places that shelter people who hide in shame from the rest of the world?

Could we open up our church for 12 step programs? A free community dinner? Would someone be willing to start a Bible study at the Brookside Tavern? Did you know that more than 80 families in our school district are on the free or reduced lunch program? Are you aware this is a homeless family attending school in our town?

Where does a person in despair turn to when they have no place to go? We have people in our community struggling with gambling addictions. We have people of all ages in our town who struggle with or have family members with chemical addictions. In all of our neighborhoods there are children who are being physically and sexually abused. T is estimated that 25% of the women in our town have been

abused. Are you aware of the fact that suicide is the third leading cause of death in teenagers and that in LGBT youth it is higher?

Jesus commanded us to go into the world to share the gospel with all who need it, and God only knows that our community needs it. People are hurting, they are broken, some are fragile and lonely, and the last thing they need from us is to feel judged or excluded.

After 2,000 years of history, it's become easy for the church to get complacent, to expect people to come to us, to prefer safety and the security of counting butts in pews and bucks in the offering plates. And then we count this as "following Jesus."

But Jesus authorized us to "go," not sit. He asked us to baptize believers, not build buildings. Few people in an increasingly secular culture are ever going try to place hack our churches anyway. The only way forward for the church is to go and get dirty, taking nothing with us but love, and leaving nothing but footprints.

To boldly go where no one has gone before.