“Go Tell It On The Mountain” is one of a handful of Christmas carols that is extremely well known and born here in America. It dates back at least to the mid 1800’s and was first written down and published in 1907, words by John W. Work, Jr. But like most African American spirituals it was sung for years before it was actually written down. It’s found in our hymnal on page 251 and says down at the bottom “Words: Afro-American spiritual; adapted by John W. Work, Jr., 1907 (Luke 2:8-20)”

One way of knowing how much people like this Christmas carol is the wide variety of people who have recorded it. Everyone from Simon and Garfunkel to Bob Marley to James Taylor to Dolly Parton to Jewell and of course hundreds of gospel choirs and church groups. It was my favorite in the cantata the choir did last week – a great combination of How Shall I Send Them and Go Tell It On The Mountain.

The message of the music and of the scripture passage it’s based on in Luke is go and tell. Spread the word. Get out the good news over the hills and everywhere. The news that Jesus Christ is born was shared from the angels to the shepherds. From shepherds to all they met in Bethlehem. From Bethlehem to Nazareth to Capernaum to Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the ends of the earth. How did the news travel? Word of mouth. From one person to another.

Christmas Eve I helped with the Family Service which was lots of fun for me because all four of my grandchildren were there. Riley, almost 5, and Meghan 3, went up with me to say the offering prayer. Then I shared the message at the Contemporary Service at 7:00 and about 8:30 I got here to the Sanctuary hoping I was in time to hear John’s sermon. I was and I thought it was a great message. I sat with my brother, sister, Mom, Dad and Baxter so we got to take communion together and participate together in the candle lighting.

Because I was near the back it took quite awhile for the light to reach me. I watched it coming down the pew from one to the next to the next to the next. I thought about this sermon. Go and tell. Share the light. What if someone on my row would have kept it to themselves and not passed it on? Someone in front or behind would have surely shared.
But it made me think about those of us who are Christians. Are we passing on the light or keeping it to ourselves? Are we going and telling or sitting silently? Some are certainly sharing.

Here are at least five ways the good news is being told over the hills and everywhere.

1 In **character**. When Christians have integrity and can be trusted non-Christians notice. When co-workers see one of their own living by high moral standards it is noticed.

Margie and Wanda were co-workers at a bank. When Margie was telling her story of coming to faith she said “I guess I took the first step with Wanda. It was obvious she was a Christian. She read her Bible at work and always seemed to have a cheerful disposition. And that’s not easy with the tyrant we have for a boss.”

So a question: do your co-workers, neighbors, friends and family members see reflected in you Christian character? Not perfection, but the kind of character they would identify as Christian?

2 In **words**. Witnessing to just about anything, sharing news about most anything involves using words. Go and tell. Sharing your faith means being ready, willing and able to share simply from your own life. Why do you go to church? Why do you believe in God? How have you handled adversity? What do you believe about Jesus?

This does not involve a seminary degree or answers to every theological question ever asked. In fact un-churched people who were asked who you would rather talk to about faith answered lay people over clergy by a large margin.

Regular people want to hear from regular people does your faith in God help you? Is it worth it to believe? To go to church? To try to follow Jesus?

More of Margie’s story, in her own words, “I finally got up the courage to talk to Wanda. I basically asked her why she read the Bible. Deep inside I was hoping she would give me more information than I was asking. Boy did she!”

Question: Has anyone hinted lately that they want to know more about your faith? Did they make a joke about you attending church or come to you with a question about faith?

This often happens when character issue is settled first. If you are seen as someone who is trying to live a life of faith you will be identified as a possible bridge to a faith of their own. I love the scripture in 1Peter that says always be ready to give a reason for the hope that is within you.
A key to Margie’s story is she asked a question hoping that her co-worker would share more than she asked. Why not assume when someone asks you a faith question that there is more behind the question than is immediately obvious?

Tell the good news of Jesus with your character and your words.

3 Your generosity. It’s fascinating to me how strong a witness people make when they give. It is almost as though some are watching to see if we put our money where our mouth is. Talk can be cheap, but being financially invested in something is a whole different level of belief, faith, and action.

Next part of Margie’s story: “I guess she knew right away that I was a lost person seeking Jesus. She not only answered all my questions, she asked to take me to lunch the next day. And she was buying, I couldn’t refuse.”

Most un-churched people, even the ones who want to come to church, believe they should come to church, want to learn about Jesus or the Bible, most – well over half – will not come unless a friend, family member or co-worker invites them personally, meets them outside or brings them.

They do not want to walk in the door to a strange building they’ve never been in before not knowing what to wear, where to go, what the customs are. The most effective invitation is “Let me pick you up and we’ll go to lunch afterwards, my treat, and tell me what you think about the whole thing.”

Somewhere around 60% of un-churched people said yes “if a family member or friend, asked you that question” they would say yes. Be generous with your invitations and be generous picking up the tab for lunch or breakfast. Generosity in all its forms is a great positive witness.

4 Your service. When you serve someone in some act of kindness it speaks volumes about your character, your faith, and the central truth of Christianity: love. Followers of Jesus love God and love their neighbors. That involves generosity with yourself, your time, and your abilities.

When Margie’s fiancéé broke off their engagement, which co-worker do you think shared the most empathy, comfort, and understanding to her? Wanda. She listened, one of the truly underrated acts of service in this world. In fact when you think of who cares the most for you I suspect everyone on the list is someone who really cares enough to listen.

Who could you call if you needed help? I keep a list in my mind. People I know in this church who love to help people, who would actually be hurt if I needed help in some way and didn’t call them!
Question: Is there a non-Christian or an un-churched person you know who would feel comfortable calling you for help or asking for a listening ear? Some people will not begin to believe until Christianity is demonstrated to them as for real. Service. Compassion. Acts of kindness. They speak volumes in answer to the command to “go and tell.”

5 Lastly, in prayer. A surprising number of atheists appreciate it when a Christian prays for them or a loved one. People who are not yet ready at all to talk to a person about faith will talk to God in prayer.

“Jesus if you are there, if you are real, I need some answers” or “I need some help” or “I need some hope.”

64% of un-churched people say they pray. 60% say they pray every day.

Wanda told Margie she was praying for her. In fact she offered to pray for her out loud at the restaurant the first time they went to lunch. Margie wasn’t quite ready for that – the out loud part – but she appreciated that Wanda cared enough about her to pray for her.

Three months after that initial lunch Margie was ready to pray with her Christian friend that she would become a Christian too.

That is how it happens. How it has always happened from the first believer through the centuries and generations to today. One person holds a lighted candle and another opens their life to receive the light. Then they share with another. And so the good news spreads over the mountain and everywhere.

What do you say? Will you “go and tell” with your character, words, generosity, service and prayer?