

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I want to take a moment to talk about someone special. Marilyn Laszlo was a missionary in Papua New Guinea. She put the language of the village where she was stationed into written form and taught 200 people to read and write. One day, people from another village visited and saw the people from the first village going to church, singing, and being taught the Bible in their language by one of their own villagers. The leader from the second village asked Marilyn to come to his people and put their language into writing "so that we might know about God too." Marilyn told him she had "several more years of work in this place," and the leader left very disappointed.

Weeks later, Marilyn organized a search party to find that village. After an all-day search, they found it, and the village leader "was thrilled" to see them. Marilyn says, "We were the first white people to come into that village, so we were quite a sight. As we were walking through the village, I noticed in the center a new building, very different from their regular houses. I asked, "What is that new building in the center of the village?" The leader said, "Oh, that is God's house - that's our church." "Your church?" Marilyn asked. "Do you have a mission here?" "Oh no, we have never had a mission here." "Well, do you have a pastor here - you know, someone that comes to preach God's Word?" "Oh no, we've never had a pastor here." Well, is there someone here in the village that can read and write Pidgin English who holds services in your church?" "Oh no. There is no one here who can read or write. And we have no books." Marilyn looked at him and said, "Then what is that building for?"

He said, "Well, we saw the little church in your village and our people decided to build a church too. Now we're waiting. We're waiting for someone to come and tell us about God in our talk, in our language." Can you believe that? That's a true story.

Today, there are over 6,000 people groups in the world who have not yet heard the gospel. To His first followers, Jesus the Good Shepherd said, "I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also." How will Jesus bring them? Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus said to His closest followers, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends." (John 15:13). As you know, Jesus did that. He showed the greatest love that anyone can show. He died on the cross because He is the divine Good Shepherd and He loves those who are His own.

A hired hand flees at the first sign of danger. A hired hand is not going to endanger himself for others. As a result of this, a wolf comes in and grabs some sheep while the rest of the sheep scatter. The unity of the flock is destroyed by the wolf, but the hired hand doesn't care.

The hired hand is after selfish gain; he doesn't care at all about the safety of the sheep entrusted to him. Have you ever worked with someone like that? They clock in, do their work, and clock out. Maybe they constantly watch the clock while they're working, and they can't wait to be done. They don't love their work; they don't even like it. They work for the paycheck and nothing else. They couldn't care less about the quality of their work. All they want is that paycheck at the end of the work week.

Jesus knows those who belong to Him, and they know Him. Think about that second village that Marilyn Laszlo visited. They had the barest of exposure to the gospel, yet they wanted it in their village. They were hungry to know God. They were passionate about learning about Jesus. They prepared for the gospel to come to them.

Jesus compares His relationship with God, His Father, with the relationship that He has with His followers. Jesus knows His followers intimately, as well as He knows His divine Father. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is also Jesus, the Divine Son of God. In His infinite knowledge, He knows all. Because Jesus loves His followers, He willingly dies for them. Jesus dies not only for His first followers, but also for others whom He will bring into His flock. Note the priority that Jesus attaches to this. Jesus says, "I must bring them also..."

In His High Priestly Prayer in John 17, which Jesus utters before His betrayal and arrest, Jesus prays not only for His first followers. He prays, "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word..." With those words, Jesus points us to the church's ministry that began after His ascension. Immediately before His ascension, Jesus casts His vision for His Church:

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." [Acts 1:8]

Marilyn Laszlo's story about two villages in Papua New Guinea is from over 35 years ago. Lest you think it's dated, listen to this letter written more recently to New Tribes Mission. The letter is from Aiben Awanhi of Isahu village in Papua New Guinea. He writes,

"Yes, I am writing because I have some thing with you ones. (sic) I have a big worry that I am not sure what will happen when death comes. I have heard from the other tribe that has the mission that they know now, I am sorry for myself that I do not know. I worry for my life, so I am asking that you will send the mission to my village. The men and women of Isahu we are very hungry for this talk that it will be in our bellies. Please have pity on us. In all

other places of the ground we have heard that they have the talk of God but us ones of Isahu are still standing without, we have nothing. I have heard of others hearing of this talk in other villages but this talk is not in Isahu yet. So please send some to learn our language and teach us this talk so we can know it too.”

That’s today. Not 35 years ago. Right now. So, what can you do? First, pray. Second, support a missionary, a missionary family, or a mission organization. Third, if you feel the spirit moving you there, go! Mission societies are always looking for more people to assist. Young or old, you can help. This world needs Jesus the Good Shepherd. There are still hundreds of millions of people worldwide, as Patrick Johnstone says, who “have not sufficient exposure to make a decision for or against Christ.” How will we reach them? How will you reach them? Pray. Give. Go. Amen.