

SERMON: "FROM GONE TO GOING AHEAD"
TEXT: NEW TESTAMENT ACTS 10:34-43
NEW TESTAMENT MATTHEW 28:1-10

April 9, 2023
Easter Sunday

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INTRODUCTION

It is a preacher's job to build a bridge between an ancient text, a bible story and the modern world, the world we live in here and now. One way to do that is to reference current events – pop culture, headlines and things online

I'll try two things in the news to communicate the good news of Easter
Two things people have been passionately arguing about ...
Statues, like the controversy over 6th graders and Michelangelo's David and the books our children and grandchildren read.
Hear me out. I'm not trying to kick start any arguments. You'll see.

The book I want to reference is one I grew up with, Go Dog Go
I consider it a classic. I've held onto it (and all my Dr. Seuss books) and Where the Wild Things Are to read to future grandchildren
I'll take those books with me when we visit our grandson, Leo in NC next week

Go Dog Go is a fun book. Those dogs were very much 'on the go'
In cars, on trees, in the water, at a party on a boat ... wearing hats

You know another great book that features a whole lot of going? The Bible!
The story at the heart of the Old Testament is the Exodus
God leading the people of Israel out of slavery and into the Promised Land
The Christmas story has Joseph and Mary traveling to Bethlehem
Then shortly after Jesus is born fleeing to Egypt as refugees

Jesus, himself was always on the go – teaching and healing from Galilee to Jerusalem, to the cross ... and even after that, even after his death, from the grave. All that going jumped off the page and into my head and heart as I re-read and prayed over the Easter story from Matthew

The story features Jesus very much on the go ... his followers too
The story begins with Mary Magdalene and the other Mary going to the tomb
They were going to mourn. They were grieving because their friend, their leader was gone, dead and gone. End of story ... or so they thought

GONE

Oh, how Easter changes things! The story shifts from Jesus being dead and gone to just being gone (not in the tomb anymore) ... to going ahead of them and us. We pick up the story with the two women finding an empty tomb
And an angel with a message

The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.” So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to tell his disciples.

That is the first movement out of the tomb. Going quickly to tell the others
The women do so following the lead of the angel. “Go, Disciples, Go”
But that going soon gets kicked up quite a bit faster (faster than a
Vin Diesel movie – The Fast and the Faithful, version 1 of 2023)
when they again are told to go. This time by the risen Jesus himself

Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers and sisters to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

“Go, Disciples, Go”

Jesus, risen from the grave, tells these two disciples to go
Go tell the others the news, the good news. And tell them to go
To go on, to go on back to Galilee, where they will see the risen Christ

That is two go's from Jesus. One kind of obvious. Go tell the others.
Of course he'd said that. And of course they would do that
The good news that the tomb is empty, that Jesus is risen
(and on the loose) is very much at the heart of the Easter story
at the very heart of what Christ and Christianity are all about

But the second 'go' is one we haven't paid much attention – go to Galilee
We'd be wise to pay a bit more attention to that, to all this go language
Think about it. These are directions from Jesus himself.
The first things the risen Christ does is give directions ... Go

GO ON

Read the Easter story in Matthew 28 through again later today or tomorrow
Pay attention to all the 'comings and goings' (I counted 6 of them) and ask
'Where is Jesus going?' And just as important, ask yourself,
'Where is Jesus telling me to go?'"

I told you I was going to somehow tie this sermon to children's books and statues
I already quoted P. D. Eastman's classic, Go Dog Go. I know churches
like it when preachers quote fine literature. Books are good for you
I like libraries full of all sorts of different kinds of books for adults and children

And I like statues. I've seen Michelangelo's David with my own eyes. Impressive.
Thinking about the controversy over statues got my thinking about statues,
about statues of Jesus in particular. Notice the bulletin cover?
It is Christ the Redeemer statue looking over Rio De Janeiro

I looked up "famous Jesus statues" on the internet. Found lots of inspiration
But I didn't find what I was looking for. I wanted to find an image that worked
with all this going language. I tried searching for "mobile Jesus statues"
and "Jesus statues on wheels." Couldn't find what I was looking for.
All I found was a figurine you might mount on your dashboard

I'm from Georgia, I figure somebody round those parts (or around here)
has got to have a Jesus statue on wheels you could pull behind your truck.
Or maybe a Jesus flag you can put on your truck or car. Have Jesus, will travel.
Still no luck. Then I realized my search was theologically backward
Jesus would not be the one being pulled. He'd be in the lead.

That's what happened on Easter Sunday.
Jesus went from gone to going on ahead. He took the lead.
He defeated death not just once upon a time for one person, himself.
He did so for all of us. He got up, got out and got going

And then he stopped to offer directions telling Mary and Mary
to go tell the disciples and to tell them to go on to Galilee
"Go Disciples Go." Go on and follow the one who has gone on ahead of us

With his going and telling us to go, he has made us an Easter people with a faith
that is a 'to go' kind of faith. Not stuck in the past. Not stuck in the pain.
But going forward following the One who has gone ahead.

SUMMARY

You know being a nice people we try and find nice ways to talk about death.
Instead of saying someone died, we often say that a person has 'passed'
or 'passed away.' I'm not going to be critical of that attempt to be gentle

I would, however, like to suggest an alternative based on all this 'go' language
in Matthew's gospel, including directions from the risen Christ.

How about we deal with the honest truth that the person we loved is gone
That way we can deal with the sadness of life without them here with us

But they are not just gone, are they?

Not on this side of Easter. Not with Jesus on the loose.

They are not just gone ... they've gone on ahead

Gone on ahead with Jesus

With his resurrection, Christ takes an end that is considered "The End"
and makes a new beginning ... new life, eternal life.

From gone to gone on ahead

Oh ... and one last thing about going on ahead with Jesus.

Back to the statue thing. Let me say it this way.

I'll focus more on the theology than the grammar to say simply ...

"Jesus Ain't No Statue!" Jesus is on the loose!

And on the go ... gone on ahead!