Jesus had risen from the dead and spent time once again with His disciples. Now, it was time for Jesus to leave them and to return to His father. Jesus’s last words are interesting – Jesus tells his disciples, who have been with Him and seen all that had happened, to tell and show others how their lives had been changed by being with Jesus. Jesus says to spread the word to Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. I’d like us to look at that phrase in its original context and then think about how that applies in the context of today.

The disciples and Jesus were physically in Judea right then. Bethany and Jerusalem were both part of the province known as Judea. The name Judea originates from the Hebrew name Yehudah, one of Jacob’s sons from which later came a tribe. So Jesus is telling his disciples to spread the word about what they’ve seen among those people living nearby and among Jews – those of the same ethnicity, culture, and religion as the disciples.

We are to spread the word of what Jesus has done for us among the people in our local area and among people who are like us. If we’re gifted with words, we can use words. But we can also use a welcoming spirit, an invitation to join us at our church, or a helpful hand.

Samaria is an interesting choice. Samaria was a central region in the land of Israel. The Jews did not like the Samaritans; in fact, they hated them. When Israel broke into two kingdoms, the northern kingdom, and the southern kingdom, the northern kingdom eventually established its capital in Samaria. When the Assyrians conquered them, they intermarried and intermarriage was believed to violate God’s commandments. The Samaritan version of the Abrahamic faith continued to evolve differently than it developed in the Southern Kingdom, and the Southern Kingdom felt that Samaritanism wasn’t the true faith.

When the Southern Kingdom was invaded by Babylon, carried off into exile, then some permitted to repatriate, the Samaritans did everything they could to prevent this repatriation. The wedge dividing the Southern Kingdom Jews (which included the disciples) from the Northern Kingdom Samaritans continued to deepen.

So, what or who is the equivalent of the Samaritans for us in our culture. What group of people or peoples are we commanded to tell or show about Jesus today?

All those who are different from us. All those we don’t like. All those who oppose those things we want to do. All those with whom we’ve had longstanding grievances. All those who worship in ways that we feel are less legitimate than ours.

Let’s think of some examples. Those of different races or sexual orientations. Those we are angry with. Those who do mean things – like murder or rape, or robbery. Those who do things in church we don’t like. Those who come only Christmas and Easter and act like this is their church. Those who like to worship with loud music and clapping their hands when we like to worship in a quieter way. Those who are Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, or Sikhs. Those who prefer to worship on Sunset Island or on Zoom, or on their mobile phones. Those who are afraid of the church or who have been hurt by the church. Those who are spiritual but spurn religion.

Obviously, we’re called to witness to Jesus differently with some of these modern-day Samaritans than we may be with those like us. For example, we don’t spread the love of Jesus to a Muslim by pounding our fists on the table and telling them their religion is wrong and ours is right. And we don’t tell those who are spiritual but not religious that they need to come to our church just as it is. Instead, in both cases, we go to them in love. With the spiritual but not religious, we make possible alternative forms of worship that are welcoming. We pray for them. We go to them where they are and stand beside them. We make the love of Jesus accessible to them because of how we act and treat them. We are hospitable and kind. We show them unconditional love, without judgment, just like Jesus did in his encounter with the Samaritan woman.

Now let’s look at the ends of the earth. Jesus, of course, knew better, but most of the ancient world was unaware of how large the earth really was – how many different peoples inhabited it. Today this commandment to tell others about what Jesusto the ends of the earth simply means everywhere and in everything. We are called to proclaim Jesus in how we treat all of creation. We are called to proclaim Jesus in every action of every day – through kindness and tolerance and good stewardship.

Last words are important. Many of us likely remember the last words we had with a loved one before that loved one left us. Jesus chose in His last words to give us a commandment to tell and show others about his love, in whatever way is most effective in the context. We’re not called to stand around forever just looking up into heaven. We are called to go out and show and tell others about Jesus.