

It's a BIG World

By Rev. Dr. Paul Mueller

Opening

Tell about the farthest away from home you have ever traveled. Did you travel alone or with a companion?

Sing or read aloud

“Hark the Voice of Jesus Calling” stanzas 1-2 (LSB 826 & 827, LW 318; TLH 496)

After opening with a prayer for the Holy Spirit’s revelation of God’s Word, take a few moments to study the Bible passage and consider the questions:

Read Matthew 28:19-20 — probably the most familiar mission text in the Bible. What does it ask His disciples to do?

Notice where Jesus says to “teach ALL nations.”

How many nations are on this BIG planet of ours? [Answers at end of study]

- a. 117 b. 193 c. 245 d. 450

Taking Jesus’ command in **Matthew 28** seriously seems like a daunting task! But take a closer look at the words Jesus uses in this text. When Jesus refers to nations, he uses the Greek word *ethnos*, from where we get our word *ethnic*. Jesus is not asking us to teach all countries, as overwhelming as that might seem. Rather, He has requested us to teach all ethnic groups.

One way to count ethnic groups is by their languages. How many different living languages are spoken on this BIG planet of ours?

- a. 2,025 b. 3,100 c. 4,775 d. 6,900

If you thought teaching all countries was a BIG task, can you imagine trying to reach nearly 7,000 language groups around this BIG globe, some with millions and millions of speakers and some with only several hundred? Does this planet of ours seem a little BIGGER now?

If you have access to the Internet, go to <http://opr.princeton.edu/popclock/>. How BIG is the world? How many people live on this blue planet?

- a. 4.2 billion (4,200,000,000) c. 5.5 billion (5,500,000,000)
d. 6.5 billion (6,500,000,000) e. 7.6 billion (7,600,000,000)



In comparison, how BIG is the population of the United States?

- a. 100 million (100,000,000) b. 200 million (200,000,000)
c. 300 million (300,000,000) d. 400 million (400,000,000)

That means the world’s population is over 20 times greater than the U.S. But facts and figures are only important if they drive us to understand a most crucial question:

“If Jesus were to come back at this very moment to call all of His followers to heaven with Him for eternity, how many of the 6.5 billion people living today would accompany Him to heaven?”

- a. 1 billion b. 2 billion c. 3 billion d. 4 billion

Of the 6.5 billion people living on this BIG planet, about 33 percent claim Jesus Christ as their Savior. That means a little over 2 billion people may know Christ and look forward to eternity in heaven when they die. That is a lot of people in this BIG world!

But that also means that 66 percent or over 4 billion people live today without knowing Christ as their Savior. Their eternity is registered with Satan (**John 14:6**). Over two-thirds of the world’s population live in fear of the future, follow a false truth, or ignore what is yet to come. And of all those people who live without Christ, 45 percent of them in this BIG world follow religions that we may know very little about — Hinduism, Buddhism, Animism, and Islam.

When thinking about the BIG mission mountain task in this BIG world, it soon begins to seem impossible. So let’s focus a little closer to home...

What is 50,000 miles long and grows a mile longer each day? A single file line of unchurched people! Not only would that line of unchurched people circle this BIG globe twice, but that line would represent only those who live in the United States! Millions and millions of people who live right in our own backyards in this BIG world do not follow Christ as their Savior.

God’s mission to teach all nations need not begin across the ocean. The mission of God may begin right where we are — with our friends, family, classmates, coworkers, and the gal-next-door. We may not need to travel across the ocean: Each individual who lives without Christ — no matter where she lives and regardless of the language she speaks — is the objective of God’s mission plan to teach all nations about the love of Jesus.

We have been given the honor of sharing God’s plan of salvation through Jesus. Because He has graced us with His message and His Spirit, we can respond to this BIG world’s need to hear that Good News. As BIG as this task may seem in numbers, God comes to each individual personally, one by one, by name, knowing even each hair on the head of those who listen and hear. His will is that all be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (**1 Timothy 2:4**).

So how do we get the conversation started? It could be as straightforward as asking someone’s opinion, “How do you know that you will go to heaven after you die?”

— and keeping these Scripture references at hand:

- Read **Acts 4:12**. What does this verse teach us about reaching heaven?
- Read **Philippians 2:9-11**. What do these verses teach us about the focus of our faith?
- Read **Luke 24:44-48**. What do these verses teach us about the content of our faith?
- Read **Mark 16:15-16; John 3:16**. What do these verses teach us about the results of faith?

All these verses together clearly outline God's plan for salvation. He does not leave wiggle room. He is very clear. There are no other options or means or paths to eternity in heaven. It is through Christ. It is by faith in Christ's death and resurrection, which has satisfactorily atoned for our sinfulness and promised us eternal life. It is by faith in Jesus, who has restored our broken relationship with God our Father in heaven by bearing the burden of our rightful punishment. It is at this point that the following verses become so powerful:

Read **Ephesians 2:8-9**. What do these verses teach us about the faith we have received?

What a gift! God's mission began close to home — right in our own hearts and minds — when we were called by Him through the waters of baptism and His Word into His kingdom: freely called and freely given. And finally, because we have been graced with this gift of grace, we respond to the needs in this BIG world as noted in the next verse.

Read **Ephesians 2:10**. What does this verse teach us regarding our own walk in faith?

You may have heard the story of the little girl walking down the beach picking up the starfish and throwing them back into the ocean. There were literally thousands washed up on that beach. Someone watching her approached the girl and asked her what she was doing. She simply said she was throwing them back into the ocean so they could live. The onlooker replied, "But there are thousands of them. What difference is it going to make that you throw back only a few?" The girl replied, "I don't know about all of them, but it makes all the difference in the world to this one." And she threw another starfish into the waves.

When even one enters the kingdom through faith, the angels in heaven rejoice. Is the work enormous? Does it seem impossible? To humans with limited capacity, it seems overwhelming. But God promises that He is able to do *immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine* (**Ephesians 3:20**). It is His mission, not ours, and He will accomplish His plan.

This BIG world in which we live has billions of individuals — each one needs to hear.

You might be like the little girl: living or standing or sitting or working next to that one individual who is living without Christ. Share Jesus with her. Throw her back into the ocean of eternal life by sharing the Good News in Christ, giving her the hope to live eternally with Christ through faith.

Closing Prayer

You, Oh Lord, are the Lord of the universe. You created all and continue to manage it through Your loving and constant care. We see how You continue to share Your love with all people — even those who deny Your love. You have sent Your only Son to live and die and rise, and through that miraculous gift, You offer life and salvation to each person. Lord, help us to recognize the BIG world around us which lives without acknowledging You — even in our own backyards — and give us the voices to speak Your Good News into their ears. In and with Your Spirit's power we pray. Amen.

Closing

Sing or read aloud "Hark the Voice of Jesus Calling" stanzas 3-4 (*LSB* 826 & 827, *LW* 318; *TLH* 496)

[Answers to multiple-choice questions: b., d., c., c., and b.]

Rev. Dr. Paul and Mrs. Joy Mueller serve as LCMS missionaries to Africa, where he is the regional director for Africa. Paul served 12 years as director of the Oswald Hoffmann School of Christian Outreach and professor of theology and mission at Concordia University, St. Paul. He is a graduate of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and holds a Ph.D. in missiology from Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne. Paul and Joy live in Nairobi, Kenya, and have three children: Brandon and his wife, Juli, and grandchild, Jacob; Rachel; and Michael.



Blood ~~Brothers~~ Sisters

By Pat Ehler

How many times have we heard, "You can pick your friends, but you can't pick your relatives"? Our relationships with family members can be good or bad. Sometimes they change over time to grow closer or farther apart. But no matter how we feel about our relatives, we remain tied together by blood.

Pray together: Heavenly Father, help us to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. Help us to be instruments of Your peace and sowers of Your love. In the Name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

