

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW
AN OLD PLAN TO SHAPE NEW LIVES
(8) SEND OUT THE MESSENGERS

Matthew 28:16-20

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SCRIPTURE

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ And when they saw him they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age”(Matthew 28:16-20 RSV).

MESSAGE

The Gospel of Matthew is a wonderful way to begin the New Testament part of God's story – the story of God saving a people for his Name through the death and resurrection of Jesus, and sending them into the world to be the bearers of his Good News and to make disciples from all the nations, thus fulfilling the covenant with Abraham and Sarah!

The Gospel of Matthew can be divided into six sections. The sixth section of Matthew is like the sixth book of the Bible – the Book of Joshua. The Book of Joshua is filled with actions dealing with conflict, victory, and the responsibilities that come with that victory. Here in the sixth section of Matthew you also have conflict, victory, and the implications or responsibilities as a result of victory. Over the last two weeks we looked at the conflict Jesus faced that led to his crucifixion and the victory he achieved when he rose from the dead. Today in our 8th and final installment of this series, we shall consider some of the implications of that victory for us today.

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him; but some doubted (28:16,17).

It must have been a relief to return to Galilee. Here the Christian mission has its proper starting-point, in a meeting with the risen Jesus, now enthroned as ruler over all. Mention of the eleven disciples pointedly excludes Judas, but equally pointedly includes Peter, despite his dismal failure the night Jesus was arrested. “Doubted” is the same word Jesus used of Peter when Peter sank after initially walking on the water like Jesus. (See 14:31).

The word does not refer to intellectual unbelief but the hesitation natural to those confronted by a unique and “impossible” situation.

Jesus is alive. He wants his followers to be his agents in the world, continuing his work of reconciliation. In his earthly ministry Jesus said he had authority as the Son of Man to forgive sin (9:6) and to reveal the Father (11:27). Now as the risen Christ he is the fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy of the Son of Man who has been given all authority, glory, and power (Dan 7:13-14). And after making it clear that he possesses all authority, what is the first command he issues? Make disciples!

Grammatically, the main verb in verse 19 is “make disciples” and all the other actions (go, baptize, teach) are subordinate. But in actual practice, the work of making new disciples is not only subordinate in the church it is often ignored by the church! It is called the Great Commission but perhaps it should be called the Great Omission!

But the Great Commission is a command and not a suggestion. We have no right to omit it. A commission is a commitment put into action. In this case, the commitment to Jesus Christ is expressed through the action of reaching out to others with the love of God and inviting them to make a personal response to Jesus Christ.

But what is a disciple? A disciple of Jesus Christ is not someone who has “made it” or has all the answers or has done something to merit God’s love. Quite the opposite, in fact. A disciple is one who, by the gracious work of the Holy Spirit, knows that he or she has done nothing to deserve the love of God, but in humility receives the free gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

The people whom Jesus called had to make a decision. In the language of the New Testament the word is *krisis* (kree'-sis). This word comes into English as crisis. Coming to faith is a crisis moment in a person’s life. The word *krisis* originally meant “a separation.” Peter and Andrew experienced a separation. They separated themselves from their livelihood in order to follow Jesus. James and John experienced a separation from family in order to follow Jesus. Zacchaeus separated himself from the love of money. The woman who entered Simon the Pharisee’s house separated herself from an immoral lifestyle. The rabbi Saul who later became the Apostle Paul separated himself from his violent past. And so on and so forth...

Everyone who makes a decision to follow Christ has to separate themselves from “something.” In broad terms this means we must separate ourselves from evil. The specifics will vary from person to person. But there are also situations where we may have to separate ourselves from something that may not be evil but our attachment to it keeps us

from doing what God wants us to do.

I want you to note the context in which the earliest disciples were called by Jesus. It was not in the synagogue or the Temple, although it could have been. Rather, it was while they were engaged in their everyday work of catching fish and smelling like the same.

If you desire to respond to Christ it must not be for an hour or two on Sunday. The decision to follow Christ has 24/7 implications. The decision to follow Christ is a decision that must be part of our everyday life: work, home, school, social and recreational activities. It is a decision to hear and respond to Jesus Christ in a personal and visible way. This is the call to discipleship.

The word that is translated as “disciple” is from a word that means “to learn in a particular way.” It has three necessary characteristics: learning by experience, learning with consistency, and learning by submission.

Learning by experience means we are not content with having mere head knowledge about Jesus but we also want to live out what he has taught us. We want to experience him in the here and now.

Consistency is at the heart of the word “disciple.” Indeed, it is the heart of discipleship itself. Anyone can be prayerful, loving and dedicated for a short time. But Christ calls us to have a consistency in the way we serve him.

The athletes who compete at the Olympic Games do not get there by talent alone. It requires discipline, that is, training with consistency. They train in all kinds of weather, when their muscles are wracked with pain, and whether they are “in the mood” or not. Consistency builds discipline and discipline yields effectiveness. So it is with those who follow Christ. Consistency builds discipline and discipline yields spiritual effectiveness.

None of us will be perfect at this in this life. We will make mistakes. We will get distracted. We will from time-to-time stumble and fall down. But the good news is, if we turn to God in such circumstances he will forgive us and restore us, pick us up, dust us off and send us on our way again.

Submission means to put oneself under the authority of another. Americans in general do not like to do this. But Christ is not some worldly authority or some clever con artist trying to trick us into doing what we do not want to do. Rather, Christ is worthy of our full trust. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows and can fulfill our deepest needs. It is a good and wise thing to turn our lives over to him and place ourselves under

his direction and authority.

Experience, consistency and submission are the characteristics which give meaning to discipleship.

Jesus said:

“Follow me, and I will make you fish for people” (4:19).

Disciples have work to do. Jesus wants disciples to fish for people. He was not telling them that he wanted them to teach other people how to catch fish in the Sea of Galilee. He was using fishing as a metaphor for the work of making new disciples.

Throughout the Scriptures there are two different ways that fishing is used as a metaphor: fishing with hooks and fishing with nets. Fishing with hooks represents a type of judgment as when God chastises his people for going astray (see Amos 4:2). The image is borrowed from the Assyrians who would take large fish hooks and shove them through the nose of each prisoner followed by a strong cord that linked the prisoners together. This enabled one soldier to handle a large group of captives.

Fishing with nets is an entirely different symbol. It is not about forcing people to do things against their will. It is not about manipulating people and doing violence to their personhood. It is about welcoming people into the Kingdom of God. It is about a gracious invitation that asks people to trust in Jesus Christ and demonstrating the love of God regardless of their response.

The atheistic German philosopher Nietzsche once said, “I could believe in a Savior if more of his followers looked like they were saved.” If you have received the “Good News” of Jesus Christ then act like you have received the “Good News.” And others will see the light of Christ at work in your life and be drawn to the Savior. This concept is expressed in our congregation’s mission statement: “To share God's love and grace with all people and celebrate the truth of Jesus Christ.” It is also reflected in our Core Value in which we seek to demonstrate a Gracious Witness. Fulfilling our mission in a gracious way results in new disciples.

To help us learn to be more effective at this, we will be offering a short-term campaign next fall based on Bill Hybel’s best-selling book, *Just Walk Across the Room*. Some of you know this book as we had a Wednesday night class on it a couple of years ago. Now our Connection Team would like to make this available to the whole congregation.

There are three ways to participate. You can read the book. You can follow the sermon series. You can be part of a small group.

It is our prayer that this month-long experience will inspire you to:

- Discern when the Holy Spirit is speaking to you •
- Reach out to people far from God in a natural way •
- Clearly and humbly tell your faith story — in 100 words or less •
- Spread God’s love through something as simple as a walk! •

Paul says that Jesus:

“Has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God”
(Rom 7:4 NRSV).

Disciples are known by their fruitfulness. One important way to be fruitful for God is to fulfill the Great Commission, that is, make new disciples.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (28:19,20).

Matthew concludes his Gospel with a most wonderful promise from Jesus but sometimes this is misunderstood. A certain nun refused to fly but instead took a bus or train if she had to travel some distance. One day a friend chided her, “Why sister! Are you afraid to fly? The Lord promises to be with you always! Do you doubt it?” “Oh, I don’t doubt the promise of the Lord,” protested the nun, “but he did say, ‘*Low*, I am with you always. So I’m staying on the ground!’”

The Great Commission is about making disciples. The fact that Jesus wants disciples raises three important concerns. And the first question each of us needs to ask ourselves is, “Am I a disciple of Jesus Christ?” A disciple is one who has not only heard about Jesus but has also made a decision to respond to Christ in a personal and visible way.

The second question each of us needs to ask ourselves is, “Am I growing as a disciple of Jesus Christ?” The meaning of discipleship is integrally connected with experience, consistency and submission to Christ’s authority.

And the third question we need to ask ourselves is, “Am I helping to make new disciples

of Jesus Christ?” It is the task of disciples to make new disciples.

Jesus wants people to follow him. He wants you to follow him. He wants us to encourage others to follow him. There is no greater joy, no greater adventure, no greater privilege than to follow him as his chosen disciples.