

## “THE CALL OF DISCIPLESHIP”

Matthew 28:16-20 June 7, 2020

A story was told about a church in Atlanta. A man noticed in the Yellow Pages in the listing of restaurants, an entry for a place called Church of God Grill. The peculiar name aroused his curiosity and he dialed the number. A man answered with a cheery, “Hello! Church of God Grill!” He asked how the restaurant had been given such an unusual name, and the man at the other end said: “Well, we had a little mission down here, and we started selling chicken dinners after church on Sunday to help pay the bills. Well, people liked the chicken, and we did such a good business, that eventually we cut back on the church service. After a while we just closed down the church altogether and kept on serving the chicken dinners. We kept the name we started with, and that’s Church of God Grill.”

The easiest thing in the world to do is to lose sight of the mission of the church. The clearest and most comprehensive command of our Lord is given in today’s text. This command was the last command given to the chosen disciples after Christ’s resurrection and just before Jesus’ ascended to heaven. *“Therefore go 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 obey everything I have commanded you.”*

As Christians, we only have three things that God requires of us: love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength, love our neighbor as ourselves, and make disciples of Jesus Christ. To make disciples means to be witnesses of Christ in order to bring others into a relationship with Christ.

At the end of Matthew before Jesus ascends to the Father, Jesus’ last words to his followers were not, “Go and find a comfortable church and have covered dish dinners.” His last words were not, “Go and sing the songs you love in worship.” Jesus didn’t say, “Try to do some good every once in a while.” Jesus said, “Go and make disciples!”

This is called the “Great Commission,” not the “Great Suggestion.” The church is the only institution in the world that exists for those outside of it. Unfortunately, many churches don’t even see it as a suggestion. Instead, it has become the “Great Omission.”

As the church has turned inward over the last 30 or 40 years, it has lost sight of its mission to make disciples. This is one of the reasons why the mainline church is struggling to grow. The stats don’t look good. The mainline church is not replenishing itself with a new generation of disciples. We are not reaching the younger generation. Fewer and fewer churches are bringing in even one new person to Christ in one year.

What has happened? Why can’t the Church today be like the early church? The answer comes through something A.W. Tozer said long ago: “If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the Church today, 95% of what we do would go on and no one would know the difference. If the Holy Spirit had been withdrawn from the New Testament Church, 95% of what they did would have stopped, and everybody would know the difference.”

Is the Holy Spirit the driving force of the church today? If we are to reclaim the fire of the Spirit the early church had, if we are to share our witness effectively, we must get back to fundamentals—what we believe and what we practice. We must be willing to open ourselves to the movement of the Holy Spirit! That’s what the early followers of Christ did! They were not sophisticated people. They hadn’t been to seminary. They hadn’t read books on church growth and marketing the church. They simply made themselves available to the Holy

Spirit. And look what happened in Acts chapter 2, verse 6: “each one heard them speaking in his own language.” Now this was not the gift of speaking in tongues. What happened on the day of Pentecost was that a bunch of people from all over the place, all speaking different languages, all coming from different cultures, heard the gospel in their own language. The good news of the saving love of Jesus Christ was communicated to them! It was clear!! The Holy Spirit did it through them because they were simply willing to be used!! The Holy Spirit broke through communication barriers and the gospel translated.

How is it that the early church was able to communicate so clearly and we have so much trouble? The answer is revealed through a humorous but painful cartoon in “Leadership Journal.” The church secretary is holding the phone, hollering to the pastor in the adjoining room. She says, “A man from Ripley’s Believe or Not wants a picture of someone on fire for the Lord? Do we have one?”

Where is our passion and love for God and our passion and love for people? This is what translates! This is what translated at Pentecost and that’s what translates today!! Believe me, when you forgive when everyone else wants revenge, that translates. When you are loving when everyone else is being hateful, that translates. When you don’t give up on people when everyone else wants to, that translates.

I like the story Wayne Cordeiro tells about a bakery he knew about. It was located in a bad part of town. The bakery was small, rundown, and nondescript.

Yet at 5am every morning the aroma of delicious bread emanated from that bakery. People would line up around the block to get their hands on that bread.

That is a parable for us as the church. It is not about appearances or gimmicks; it is simply about offering the bread of life. People are so spiritually hungry that all we have to do is to offer the bread of life with passion and authenticity, and they will come from all over to taste it.

Does the sweet smell of Christ emanate from your life? Are you sharing your witness? Are you letting your light shine?

The unavoidable truth is that as Christians we are called to bear witness, to testify to the hope that is within us, to tell people about Jesus-to make disciples. Now, this may scare some of you to death. But, take heart and listen closely. By the grace of God, you are able to preach. You don’t do it on your own power. This is why Jesus said, “I am with you always, even unto the end of the age.” Jesus is always with us, helping us and empowering us to share the good news. I know he is. Without Jesus empowering me, I would not be able to be up here preaching to you now. As a pastor, I have heard many great sermons and so have you over the years. The church is covered in wonderful preachers.

I heard about a woman who had a friend who was an addict. Her addiction was destroying everything she loved. Most people would have said, “Well, we need to pray that she gets the help she needs.” But that is not what this woman did. She wrote her friend a letter telling her that she was going to lose everything including her life unless she went into treatment and received the help she needed. And then she wrote in her letter that the only one who could make her whole is Jesus Christ.

Now, where did she get the power to write a letter like that? Jesus said, “Go and make disciples and I will be with you always.”

He was a young man still living at home. He was rather quiet and kept to himself. One day his coworker found him in the restroom crying. His coworker asked him if he could help. The young man confided in him. He told him that his girlfriend was pregnant, and he had just revealed this to his parents the night before. They were very strict and religious. They screamed at him and said that he had embarrassed them and shamed the family and told him that he should never set foot in their house again.

What did his coworker do? He reached out, put his arm around him and said, “I am sorry that happened to you. I am sure this is difficult for your

parents, and I am certain this is difficult for you. But I am a Christian, and I believe that God loves you, and his love will help you through the most difficult situations.”

Now how was that coworker able to say something like that? Jesus said, “Go and make disciples and remember I am with you always.”

The Rev. Dr. Charles Reeb tells this story: I remember preaching at a youth camp several years ago. The worship service was really late. I didn’t get up to preach until about 11pm. It didn’t help that I had the flu. But it was the last service of the week, and I had to finish. I don’t know what I said. I was so sick. I was just trying to get through it. I thought it was the worst sermon I ever delivered.

After the service, a teenage girl approached me. She looked very angry. She said, “I have to find out if something is true.” I replied, “What’s that?” She said, “You mentioned tonight that God loves me. Do you believe that? I don’t believe anyone has ever loved me. My dad left me and my mother abused me, and I moved from one institution to another. I’ve been sexually abused, neglected, and you are telling me that God loves me?”

I looked into her eyes, and said, “That’s right. I know this for certain. God loves you. You want to know how I know? God got up on a cross and said, ‘This is how much I love you.’” She paused for a moment and tears began rolling down her cheeks. Then she said, “Well, if God loves me, then nothing else matters. If God loves me, that’s all that matters.”

Deep down you know there are people all around you who need the love, forgiveness, grace, power, strength and comfort of God in Jesus Christ. Give me one good reason why you wouldn’t want to share it?!?!? *Let us pray.* Dear Lord, give us new eyes to see those around us who need your love. Give us new hearts to be sensitive to those who need your love, and give us the courage to share