

## The Mission of the Church

[Matthew 28:16-20](#)

Trinity Sunday

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Sunday, May 22, 2005

Worship at 8:30, 10, and 11:30 a.m.

In the quiet, gracious Lord Jesus Christ, may we hear the word from God your Father. May we be empowered by your spirit as we seek to follow you and make disciples. Teach us now. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We have come out of an era in the church where much of the church said that the primary responsibility, the mission of the church, was about converting people to Christianity. Another group of people said that the primary responsibility of the church is to get people to be engaged in the justice action of the Gospel. I believe that the great commission of Jesus Christ really puts both of those together in a way that leads us into action. We are clearly called to make disciples, to be people who practice the faith, people who live the faith. Discipleship is not something that comes because we have gotten a person to convert. Discipleship is the slow, constant reinforcement day by day, month after month, of what it means to live a life of faith in Jesus Christ, and to walk with that person.

We in this congregation declare, in our mission statement, that we are a ministry of grace and passion are about Christ's mission in the world. Well, here is the mission statement: "Go into all the world and make disciples. Baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything that I have commanded you, and I will be with you always." That is the mission of Jesus Christ to which we are being invited to become passionate. How do we reach the place where we are passionate about this mission? Discipleship is about living life with people day after day. It is about looking for opportunities to share faith as we are on the road of life together. Discipleship is about how parents are with their children day after day, and it is how they show their children their faith. It is demonstrated by the kinds of things they say, in the way they say it, and in the kinds of words they use to teach.

Today, a little later in the service, we celebrate an event that the women of the church have invested in for over 100 years. It's a place where women gather clothes, toys, and other things from all of us and sort them out and put them on sale to raise money for mission—the annual bazaar. It's the event where women gather not only to practice their discipleship, but to make disciples. Recently I received this little story from one of the young mothers who gathered there to sort through the clothes. Over a period of years, as her children were growing up, she would take her young children with her and they would be there on the floor nearby playing with the toys and watching her sort through the clothes with other women. As her oldest daughter grew up, she began to ask the question, "Mommy, what are you doing?" "Well, I'm sorting through these clothes so that we can help people who do not have the clothes to wear and do not have the money to live life. We are helping people in other parts of the world." "Well, why is my stuffed animal in the pile of clothes?" "Well, there are children who need that, and you've outgrown it."

And finally, getting the essence of the responsibility, when her younger sister was too large to be in the crib any more, she turned to her mother one day and she said, "Mommy, now the baby sister is too big for the crib, we should give the crib to somebody who needs it." Discipleship is the communication of the responsibility to the child from the faith of the parent about what life should be when we live it in Jesus Christ. Children absorb the model.

But not just children. Any human being who sees a model of faith, who lives with that person in sustained relationship for a period of time begins to absorb the impact of the faith. Discipleship is not just a classroom. It's not just learning or memorizing a certain set of passages of the Bible. Discipleship is life on life; it is the person with the person. It is the communication of the person who you really are with the person with whom you are sharing life.

The disciples here who gather to hear from Jesus on the mountain gather in front of Jesus and worship him. We are a worshipping church. Probably the centerpiece for our existence and purpose of life together is the worshipping place and the experience here. Matthew does not hesitate to say that people gather to worship, but some doubted. It's okay to come and, in your discipleship, to have doubts. The disciples who walked with Jesus for three years carried their doubts with them, even at the time of worship. But Jesus doesn't leave them in worship and doubt. Jesus sends them beyond and out. If you think that worship is the end point of the purpose of the church, then we miss the point of this whole day. Jesus says that worship is the launching pad, the beginning point, the place where we come with our doubts, but we're sent out to do something constructive, to be people who are different in the world.

We are called to go. It's nice to come here to pray, to sing and to celebrate. But when we walk out the doors, we are called to go into a world that may or may not receive us. There is a powerful universality to this mission. Matthew wants to make it clear that this is a breathtaking and panoramic view. All authority, Jesus says, is given to him. "Go to all the nations of the world. Baptize in the whole name of God—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Tell people everything that I have done and commanded. Always, I will be with you, all the way through time and every place." A huge, panoramic view of the significance of the mission.

Now, here's the point. Those disciples were not the unique few who were called to go. Any person who names the name of Jesus Christ and is a follower who takes Jesus seriously is called to go. Each one of us is called to go. We are invited into worship, we're glad you're here. Bring your doubts and who you really are; hear the word of God and go out and be disciples who make disciples of others. Between our worship moment of reception of grace and our action of mission, there is some work to be done. And what Jesus is trying to say to the disciples is, "If you will recall what I've done with you in these events of life for the last three years, I want you to go out and do those kinds of things with other people." Jesus said, "I want you to come and be with me, so come and follow me." Our responsibility as people who go and do discipleship is not only to be a disciple, but to invite other disciples to come and be with us. And not just alone, but Jesus invited the disciples to be in community with him. So there is some place where we need to gather on a regular basis with a few others, to be around Jesus, and listen to Jesus, and learn.

Not only that, but there is a process on the way--on the road--where we see Jesus doing things. We need to bring people along the road with us and let them see us do our faith – put our faith into action. One of the things that makes people nervous in the history about the gospel of Matthew is, there's not a lot of conversation here about grace and salvation by grace. There's a very strong statement here that one demonstrates one's salvation by action. It's to the point that some of the great reformations at times in history have said, "Well, we don't know about the gospel of Matthew." I believe the reason why the gospel of Matthew is so important today is because Christians must be different. We must be able to demonstrate that we can put our faith into action, that we are not just all talk and no proof. For that is some of the imagery that has haunted the church in recent years.

We are in an era where discipleship is important because people do not grow up in the faith. They do not necessarily grow up in the church. We are becoming one of the most unchurched nations in the world. And so, like the disciples of old, Jesus is turning to us today and saying, "You go and make disciples." Because chances are most of the people around you don't have a clue about it. You invite people to watch you. You invite people to be in relationship with you. You go, and you immerse them in the presence of the Father, the Son and the Spirit. You baptize them. You bring them into a sense of family and community. You become the missionary. You are the disciple who makes disciples.

Now, it may be that you are a bit nervous about the direction that I'm suggesting. Part of what goes on here is: "Well, we're not up to the task; we're not ready to make a disciple; we're not good enough; we're not perfect enough." I think one of the humorous things in this text is that Matthew says that Jesus met the eleven on the mountain. You know, the number 11 doesn't quite make it in the gospel. There's something inadequate about that number, something incomplete. In all other places there are twelve; one is missing. The disciples are kind of a motley crew at this moment with doubts and wonderment.

Now the good news is that Jesus is sending this motley crew out into discipleship and mission. So it is not that we are adequate. It is not that we have our acts together and we're perfect. We are going to go out

with all of our flaws, our mistakes, our concerns and our doubts. Well, how can we make disciples if we don't have everything together? Because Jesus is with us. Jesus is the one who is powerfully present. And when we're going, Jesus promises to be the one who communicates through us if we are willing to put ourselves into the presence of the most holy God. In all of our inadequacies and mistakes, Jesus says: go and make disciples. Move out. Take the risk. Go to Unique Learning Center and sit with a child and tutor them. And as you tutor them into their subject that they struggle with, they will begin to absorb the character and presence of who you are because you are a person of faith.

Go into the place where you can serve breakfast to the homeless, because as you serve with others, you will find that you build community with those with whom you serve. And you will make an impact upon those who receive food from you, because one of the most important statements in Matthew is that Jesus is seen in the giving of food and water to people. Make disciples by simply being a person who serves. Go. Be in a short-term mission trip to South Africa. Take the risk to venture outside of your comfort zone. Go to a place where you do not understand all the dynamics of what's happening, and be in a group of people with whom you can share life together and hear the voice of Jesus as you meet with people from a different nation and different culture where Jesus Christ is present among them. Go.

Sometimes in our historic view of mission in the church we have heard the words "stay... pay...pray...display the mission goods...relay the stories and the messages...let those other people go." But times have changed. We are very much returning to the apostolic age where Jesus is saying to us, "You go." Each one of us must go. Each one of us must get to know the people with whom we are working. Each one of us must show who we are as a person of grace. Each one of us must grow in faith and maturity as we are willing to be a disciple and vulnerable in the world. Let people know that you are a follower of Jesus Christ. You don't have to wear it on your shoulder; you can simply act it out and relate it when asked. Discipleship is a verb; it's a point of action; it's a commitment not just to teach the words of Jesus but to make the practices of Jesus.

What does Jesus do? He goes out intentionally as a presence with those and offers a healing possibility in their life. He models a good life. He follows a process of welcoming children in a context where children aren't welcome. He provides a model of servant leadership in a place where dominant, controlling and tyrannical leaders rule. Jesus is a counter-cultural presence. He's different; he's attractive. People see that he is unique. He is a disciple himself.

The culture in which we live today is hungry for people to show our discipleship. Invest in YouthInc in the church, because we want to make children and youth disciples in this church. Invest in the Presbyterian School on our campus, because the school wants to make disciples of the children and help them grow in faith. Be supportive of the National Center of Leadership, because we want to help young adults, to invest in professions as Christian leaders. It's all about discipleship. It's all about our sense of mission and becoming passionate about that, because each one of us absorbs the passion of Christ.

The commission does not say, by the way, "Go into all the world and make Presbyterians." The commission does not say, "Go into all the world and make Republicans...or Democrats...or go into all the world and make capitalists." No, it clearly says, "Go into all the world and make disciples, followers of Jesus." It is important that we see our core mission to focus on Jesus the Christ, who has clearly articulated, as the person who lives a life of grace in the presence of the Father, empowered by the spirit, and practices discipleship. Jesus, who is not afraid to call the disciples to resolve their conflicts and to allow them to be in conflict with each other. Discipleship struggles. Jesus invites people to be immersed in the presence of the Father, Son, and the Spirit, because he, too, is a person who is baptized and immersed in the presence of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

We live because Jesus lives in us and through us. We invite people to be baptized because we want them to experience the kind of home and domestic life that Jesus experienced. Being loved by the Father: "This is my Son whom I love. I am very pleased with this Son." If you take simply that presence with you of a person who is loved and blessed by God, you will change the world.

The baptism is about being at home. It's about the children who find a home where parents can love them, and grandparents can spoil them. (I don't believe that's what really happens, by the way.) I think

grandparents do the exponential additional pattern of love. It is being in the home where there is a sense of safety and care, because the Father, the Son and the Spirit are together with you. It's finding peace at home because the spirit of God comes upon you like a dove and rests upon you. The baptism focus for parents is about helping the children see that you follow Jesus. You come to church because you want the church to inspire your child to follow Jesus, but actually this is about who you are and how you follow Jesus. The number one influence of your child as to whether they will follow Jesus is you, the parent. So raise your children. There are times we struggle with our children. And that's a good thing, because it is in the point of crisis, difficulty and pain that our true sense of grace is tried and proven.

And finally, when we teach it is a teaching by example, by coaching, by modeling. It's a teaching by being in proximity to, by being a life-on-life; it's a teaching by being a real human being who really knows Jesus Christ personally. So go into all the world. Be a disciple. Make a disciple. Be in community and bring people into the loving framework of family. It's our responsibility; it's our passion; it's our ministry. Each of us is a disciple, each of us makes disciples, and every one of us is a missionary in Jesus Christ. Amen.