

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"The Great Commission"

Scripture: Matthew 28:16-20, Psalm 40:1-3, 9-10

Opening Hymn: At the dawning of salvation 248

Closing Hymn: Go ye, go ye into the world 755

Children's Hymn: Jesus is risen from the grave 254 (1,5,6,7)

Choruses: Mighty to save, the River

Choir: "The Power of the Cross" Keith Getty & Stuart Townend

Rev. Steve Filyk

Communion Sunday

May 5, 2018

After the resurrection

Jesus meets his disciples in Galilee

And he gives them, gives us, these marching orders:

"Go and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father
and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
and teaching them to obey
everything I have commanded you."

So is this commission familiar?

Are these marching orders central to the practise of your faith?

Or has this call be displaced by other things?

As one preacher has noted:

"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 like in worship.

Jesus didn't say, "Try to do some good every once in a while."

Jesus said, "Go and make disciples!"ⁱ

So what does Jesus mean?

The call to "go" and "disciple the nations"
implies that sharing in Jesus' mission
will often take us across cultural boundaries.

"Jesus earlier told his disciples to "go" only to Israel,
not to the Gentiles, in their preaching of the kingdom (10:5-7);
here he revokes the earlier limitation."ⁱⁱ

The call to baptise means more
than simple sprinkling of water over infants.
Given the cultural context
it might better be understood evangelism.

You see "In Matthew's day Jewish people baptised Gentiles
who converted to Judaism...

[And] because baptism could function as an act of conversion,
this part of discipling the nations involves calling people to respond
to the good news of the kingdom."ⁱⁱⁱ

The call to teach, more specifically to teach obedience,
Might be seen as making disciples through Christian education.
It means more than sermons or Bible studies;
It involves apprenticing people into a new way of life.

After the resurrection

Jesus meets his disciples in Galilee

And he gives them, gives us, these marching orders:

“Go and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father
and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
and teaching them to obey everything
I have commanded you.”

So how do you feel about this order, this command?

Crossing cultural boundaries

and engaging those who are different is challenging.

Sharing the good news story about Jesus is intimidating.

Mentoring new believers is time-consuming.

Most of us aren't too enthusiastic about this mission.

Like the pastor observed we are more interested

In meeting with our Christian friends

Singing our favorite worship songs,

And doing the odd good deed.

So why do we lack this interest in discipleship?

I think it may have something to do with our theology.

Most of us affirm the teaching

That we are all made in God's image.

Most of us can easily recall those Bible stories

Which display Jesus' acceptance and love.

You may conclude that if God is love and we are all God's children,

Teaching others about Jesus doesn't seem necessary.

That the fact that you go to church to worship,

While they tinker in their garage, or read the newspaper

Is really insignificant, just a personal preference...

But the Bible doesn't simply educate us about God's love.

Our faith also teaches us about the reality of sin.

Consider what *Living Faith*,

Our church's statement of belief

says about sin:

2.5.3 Sin alienates us from God.

It offends the holiness of God,

separates us from our Lord,

and leads to spiritual death.

It mars the divine image in us

and infects our relationship with others

and with ourselves.

We forget that without Christ,

That neighbour who spends his Sunday's tinkering in his garage,

is alienated from God.

He has not reached his fullest potential as a human being.

That we might reach that potential
Is why we celebrate Easter.

God sent his only son
To deal with this our alienation.
Our sin was the reason
That Jesus was obedient to death on a cross.
His resurrection means there is forgiveness and life.

Listen again to *Living Faith*:

2.5.7 All people fall short of God's standards
and need salvation.
God's way to salvation
has been revealed in Jesus Christ.
Through the death and resurrection of Christ
our sins are forgiven.
Salvation means life, forgiveness, healing, wholeness.
It comes from God's grace
received through faith in Christ alone.

I think one of the reasons we don't engage in discipleship
Is that we don't think it is necessary.

But that philosophy "I'm okay, you're okay"
Is not what Christians really believe.

The full Gospel tells us that:

"the wages of sin is death,
But the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"^{iv}

But if one of the reasons we don't engage in discipleship
Is that we forgot the reason for Christ's death and resurrection,
another reason is that we lack confidence
in the gospel and our ability to share it.

There are times when our faith doesn't seem real to us.

You might have noted in today's Gospel lesson
that when the eleven disciples saw Jesus
we are told "they worshiped; but some doubted".

There are times when faith doesn't seem real to us.
But even when our faith feels secure and solid
Most of us are afraid to share the Good News:

How am I supposed to relate to that biker who moved in next door?
How do I find the right words to talk to my family about Jesus?
I've made so many mistakes: can I really be a mentor?

Even if we acknowledge that sharing the Good News is necessary
We lack the confidence that we have the skills and the training
To participate in Jesus' plan.

We say to ourselves:
"I'm no missionary
I'm no apostle or evangelist.
I don't know the first thing about making disciples."

Well if that's what you're thinking
Just consider the situation when Jesus first gave his marching orders.

As one commentator has noted:

“The scene is one of near-comic irony.

Jesus says, "All authority in heaven and on earth
has been given to me,"
but nothing in the surroundings
seems to support such a claim.

If Jesus had been speaking to vast multitudes,
rank upon rank stretching toward the horizon
as far as the eye could see,
with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir humming
the "Hallelujah Chorus" in the background,
perhaps it would seem plausible.

However, Jesus is on an unnamed mountain
in backwater Galilee
with a congregation of eleven,
down from twelve the week before,

and even some of them are doubtful
and not so sure why they have come to worship this day.”^v

And yet it is this same small group of disciples
Who carry Jesus’ mission to the nations.

These people weren’t communication experts.
They didn’t have their bachelor’s degree in education.
They were anglers, bureaucrats, rebels.

And yet they responded to Jesus' call to make disciples.

And now there are disciples in every corner of the world.

So how did they do it?

Jesus' presence.

The Holy Spirit.

Jesus said he would be with them through this mission.

If the Gospel's understanding of sin and salvation

Makes discipleship necessary,

Then Jesus' promise makes it possible:

"And surely I am with you always,
To the very end of the age."

'Surely I am with you always,
To the end of the age.'

One preacher shares a story

"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."^{vi}

Where do we get the power to teach our children

And our grandchildren about Jesus,

When their parents aren't interested?

Where do we get the daring to apprentice

Baby Christians when there is so much we don't know?

Jesus said, "Go and make disciples and I will be with you always."

May we step out in confidence and conviction

Knowing that Jesus is with us,

And knowing that his life

Is what people desperately need. Amen.

ⁱ Charles Reeb "The Great Omission" June 15, 2014 http://day1.org/5868-the_great_omission

ⁱⁱ Craig S. Keener "Matthew 28:16-20" *The Lectionary Commentary, the Gospels* 159

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid

^{iv} Romans 6:23 NIV

^v Thomas G. Long "Matthew 28:16-20, Homiletical Perspective" *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year A, Volume 3: Pentecost and Season After Pentecost 1 (Proper 3-16)*.

^{vi} Charles Reeb "The Great Omission" June 15, 2014 http://day1.org/5868-the_great_omission