

MISSIONAL IS NOT A FOUR LETTER WORD (Matthew 28:16 – 20)

Over the past few weeks, Pastor Steve has been sharing with us some fundamental principles that we must embrace if we are to fulfill our calling to reach out to our community: we must love God deeply, we must truly love our neighbour (and our neighbour is everyone) and we must live courageously moving forward boldly in our faith.

Over the years, the church has worn many labels to describe different movements or types of churches in its modern history – fundamentalist, seeker sensitive, attractional, emergent to name a few. Some of these monikers have taken on both positive and negative connotations both within the Christian community and the community at large. Recently, the word “missional” has become a buzzword to describe both a movement and style of church.

This morning I want to walk us through a passage of Scripture that will demonstrate that “missional” is not simply a movement, nor is it just a style of church, nor it is something to be feared. Missional is a lifestyle, one that is commanded by Christ. Turn with me to Matthew 28:16 – 20, page 706 in the Pew Bible, or you can follow along on the screen.

¹⁶Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

JESUS HAS ALL AUTHORITY

We're going to focus specifically on three verses, verses 18 – 20. But as we begin, let's remember who Jesus was speaking to, his disciples. So, if you sit here this morning and claim to follow Christ, these words are for you too.

Let's begin with verse 18. **¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."** All authority, not some, but all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. I think Jesus is pretty clear here. This is why we call Him Lord. We need to acknowledge and understand this truth to fully grasp the remainder of this passage. Matthew 7:28-29 says, **²⁸When Jesus had finished saying these things (he was speaking about building houses on rock or sand), the crowds were amazed at his teaching, ²⁹because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law."** The people sensed something radically different. He taught as one who had authority because he was and is God.

We need to understand clearly here that this church, Bramalea Baptist Church belongs to Christ. The ultimate authority in the church is not Steve, it is not the other pastors, it is not the elders or directors, it is not the congregation. Jesus Christ is the head of the Church and BBC and He has ultimate authority. That being said, we must also remember that under his authority overseers are placed in authority – pastors, elders and directors in our church - who are responsible for leading the church. And, in deference to Christ, the leadership that Christ puts in place should be encouraged and respected.

JESUS COMMANDS US TO “GO”

If you come to a red light what do you do? You stop, hopefully! When the light turns green, what do you do? Do you stop and consider whether you should proceed? No. You go proceed. Why – because our traffic laws command us to stop when the light is red, to go when the light is green. Verse 19 begins with these words, **“Therefore, go”**.

Whenever you see a “therefore” in Scripture, you must look back at what has just been said. In this case Jesus has just reminded us that He has all authority in heaven and in earth. So, it is out of this authority that Jesus commands us to go. He is giving us a big green light here. He doesn’t suggest it, doesn’t ask us to consider it, he commands it.

If you’re going to go somewhere you need to know where you are going right? Where are we to go? We are to go to **“all nations”**. “Oh, good I’m off the hook” you might think. “God isn’t calling me to be a missionary. I’m not meant to go overseas.” “I couldn’t eat strange food, I couldn’t possibly live so far away from family.” Not so fast. This statement is not simply about a call to overseas missions. We, the church, are all called to go. Some will definitely feel the call to go to the ends of the earth. I think of Shannon Connaghan or Ryan de Weerd, two young adults from our congregation who are living out their lives in the mission field. But most of us will live out this command where we live, here in Brampton or Caledon or Mississauga; in our workplaces, schools and on our streets. No one who is a Christ follower is exempt from this command of Jesus.

Oswald J. Smith said, ***“Any church that is not seriously involved in helping fulfill the Great Commission has forfeited its biblical right to exist.”***

JESUS COMMANDS US TO MAKE DISCIPLES

We are to go, we know where we are to go, but what are we to do? Verse 19 tells us we are to **“make disciples”**, verse 20 that we are to be **teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.** Making disciples is really the **key focus** of these verses. But, what is a disciple?

A disciple, simply put is a person who is a student of the teachings of someone else. When I studied voice, I was a disciple of my voice teacher, of

his particular technique. You could be the disciple of a particular political leader, business leader or a religious leader or even the world champion hot dog eater. In the New Testament, the words connected with disciple and discipleship however, pertain almost exclusively to followers of Jesus; therefore this definition is too simplistic.

To truly be a disciple of Christ we must learn what it is that Christ taught; this goes without saying. But that alone does not make us a disciple of Christ. When I studied voice I spent hours alone in a practice studio putting into practice what I had learned as I was being taught. How to breath correctly, how to develop my range, learning what muscles were involved, how to relax properly while singing. I had to do this so that it would gradually become second nature to me. If I didn't practice and incorporate what I had learned, it would merely have been theory.

Similarly, as we learn what Christ teaches and commands it must be incorporated into our daily lives; we must live out what Christ says. Otherwise it remains only theoretical. This is why Christ says, **“teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you.”** As we mature, we must then pass what we have learned through living out our faith to others. So we could define a disciple this way, **“A person who follows Jesus, understands and lives in obedience to his teaching and seeks to lead others to follow Christ.”**

The challenge that we have faced in the North American church is that we have not been very good at making disciples. The focus of the church for many years has been on *being* disciples not *making* disciples. We want to grow and mature in our faith, we want to know more about the Bible. We often see knowledge and how much we have learned as a sign of maturity in our faith. The reality is there are many Christians who know a lot about the Bible and Christianity but have an immature faith. It isn't about how much we know; it's about what we do with what we know.

Making disciples, which is Christ's command is very different. Think of the example of Christ in the Gospels. Jesus called people to follow Him. They then made a choice to follow Him. As they did so, he taught them and they learned and incorporated what he taught them into their lives. There were times when he taught them specific principles and ideas but it didn't just happen in a classroom, it happened in everyday life. Jesus walked alongside them, and then sent them out to practice what they had learned. He was there to correct, to encourage and to hold them accountable. Jesus' expectation was that his disciples would go out and make more disciples.

This is our model for discipleship. We begin with someone who is not a follower of Christ. We build a relationship with them and take what we've learned through your study and your life about Christ and following him and you bring that to bear on the life of another person. When they come to trust Christ, we continue to walk alongside them, encouraging them to live out what they are learning. We laugh with them, cry with them, pray with them and

hold them accountable. And, we send them out with continued support to share the Gospel and begin making disciples themselves.

David Kinnaman, author of *You Lost Me*, a book about why many young adults are leaving or staying away from church makes this observation, **“God has also called us to be about the business of making disciples, which means showing (not just telling) them how to trust Jesus, live for God, and participate in the Spirit’s work. People want to meet God, so let’s make sure we’re helping not hindering.”** Did you ever think that your life could be a hindrance to someone coming to know God?

Noted author and speaker Francis Chan, says, ***This generation sees the potency of a church where pastors equip and shepherd disciple-makers rather than service-attenders.*** This is not to diminish the value of attending church. But this is a place where we gather to glorify God, to meet with and hear from Him, to be sent out to do His work, His way. It is a reminder that we must be participants, not simply spectators.

The apostle Paul said, **“imitate me as I imitate Christ.”** We should live our lives in such a way that they become a model of what it means to follow Christ. Making disciples can be a frightening challenge. It can be messy. It’s not black and white. It takes time, it takes patience, and we certainly won’t do it perfectly. Ask my family, close friends or anyone in my small group and they would be the first to tell you that I don’t do it perfectly; hard as it may be to believe, I mess up. But I think that they would also tell you that I do my best to imitate Christ, to model Christ.

There is another aspect to discipleship woven into these verses as well, Jesus tells us to **“baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”** Who are we to be baptizing – disciples of Jesus. Once someone has decided to follow Jesus, we are to baptize them. Baptism is a significant step in the life of a Christ follower. It is a public proclamation of a person’s allegiance to Christ. In going under the water and emerging from the water, it symbolizes a death to self and new life in Christ. It is something that should and must be celebrated!

There are some who have followed Christ for years and have never been baptized. Some of you might be sitting out here today. If so I would ask you why haven’t you been baptized? One of the stumbling blocks to people being baptized is often the church itself. When I have interviewed people about being baptized who have waited a long time, I have often asked, “Why did you wait so long?” The reply is almost always, “Because I don’t know enough about the Bible yet.” Or “Because I’m not good enough yet.” Where do they get that idea – from well meaning individuals or churches.

There is nothing in this passage that would lead us to conclude there is a certain amount of knowledge that needs to be attained. In fact, the way it is worded it is woven into the process of making disciples.

We offer a baptism class for a few reasons. So that we can be assured that the person genuinely wants to follow Christ and isn't being baptized because of pressure from family or friends, so that they can fully understand the significance and process of baptism and to answer any questions they might have. So don't delay people, if you have given your life to Jesus and follow Him, get baptized so that we can celebrate with you!

JESUS IS WITH US

I mentioned a few moments ago that I try to live out what is important to Christ. I couldn't do this on my own and, thankfully I don't have to. Listen to the words of Jesus from John 14, "**¹⁵If you love me you will obey what I command. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – ¹⁷the Spirit of Truth.**" Later in the same dialogue with his disciples he says, "**²⁵All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all thing and will remind you of everything I have said to you.**" Now look at the latter part of verse 20 in the passage we're learning from today, "**And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.**"

God sent the Holy Spirit to guide us, to teach us, to correct us, to grant us wisdom and insight that only he can bring. If you are here this morning and have truly given your life to Christ as Saviour and Lord, then the Holy Spirit dwells within you. He has taken up residence and he is not moving out!

Jesus said He would be with us always and He is with you – now! He is not some distant, unapproachable entity that we worship. He is alive, he loves you, and he cares deeply for you and desires an intimate relationship with you. And the Father has sent the Spirit to empower us, so that you, so that we can live out the abundant life that Christ calls us to and so that we can live and walk in obedience to him; that includes what we've been talking about this morning, making disciples. In his book *The Passionate Life*, Mike Breen whom many of you have heard speak when he has visited here says, "***Take some deep breaths of God's Spirit and see what a powerhouse He becomes in your life.***"

How different would our world look if the Church took seriously the responsibility and privilege of partnering with Christ in making disciples? He is seeking to reconcile people to himself and to redeem this world and he wants to partner with us! How we respond to his command reveals a great deal about how important he is in our lives.

So, what have we been reminded of this morning? That Jesus, in his authority, commands us to "go", to all nations including our community, to make disciples and that He is with us as we do so.

The passage that we've been looking at this morning is known in Christian circles as the Great Commission. In the past number of years, many authors who passionately love Christ and his Church have referred to it as "The Great Omission". Why? – because the Church has not done what Christ has called and commanded us to do, make disciples. Why? – because the church has become too focused on its own human wants and needs. Why? – because the church has become content to grow by simply welcoming or inviting people to come who are already a part of an existing church. Why? – because we have forgotten that we exist for the glory of God.

Let's read our mission statement together, out loud. ***"We are a movement of people, following Jesus, so that others are drawn to follow Him too."*** That in a nutshell my friends, is the Great Commission. So let's make sure that we take what God has been teaching us over the past few weeks and live it out. Let us join together in unity, loving God, loving our neighbour and stepping out in courage so that we embody and live out the Great Commission. That, my friends, is what it is to be "missional". It's not simply a label, a style of church, it is not something to be feared; it is a way of living that we must embrace. The only question that remains is, "Will we do it?"