

*On Being [aka Making] Disciples*

*Jesus said ... “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 behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

**Introduction**

Fast forward ... in the moments just after this morning’s text.

Jesus has left His disciples with these parting words. Now, ascended, the risen Christ comes through the clouds into the heavenly realms. The angels and the arch-angels gaze with wonder upon Him, for this is the first time they have seen Jesus in His risen glory, and full, perfect humanity. They worship Him with awe and speak their words of welcome.

“Welcome home, Son of the Father. What of your time on earth – O Son of God?”

“It went well. It is accomplished.” Jesus replied.

“Did you speak the Word of the Father to the people?”

“Indeed, I did.”

“Did they listen to You?”

“Some,” He replied.

“How many accepted your words, O Son of Man? Surely thousands? Myriads of thousands?”

“No, not yet.”

“How many then?”

“Dozens. Dozens of faithful. And then there are the Eleven.”

“Eleven? Only eleven? This seems to us such a small number. So much, so much can go wrong. What, Lord, will You do if they cannot, or do not spread Your message of salvation and hope and healing? What is Your contingency plan, dear Lord?”

Jesus responds, “There is no contingency plan!” [Zehnder, “Ablaze in One Mission by Sharing the Hope of Christ,” *Convention Proceedings*, 2004, 106]

Where, having been gifted with so rich a treasure in Jesus’ name, He now bids us to go and share life in that name. Yes, we love, because He first loved us. We go, because He has so gifted us, and now promises Himself to go with us.

**Main Thought:** Therefore, let us rejoice this day to be His own, for this time and place, where in zeal He calls us to make disciples in His name, with His authority.

Simply put:

“DISCIPLES MAKE DISCIPLES”

[Kirk, *CPR*, 6:3, 15]

Amen.

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<sup>16</sup> ***Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee*** [that region in which Jesus conducted most of His recorded ministry], ***to the mountain*** [Arbel?] ***to which Jesus had directed them.*** <sup>17</sup> ***And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted*** [or “hesitated” – as in “divided within oneself about what to do” rather than outright unbelief<sup>1</sup>].

Just as Isaiah had foretold [9:1-2]:

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<sup>1</sup> Oschwald, *CJ*, 37:2, 147 [a la France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1111-1112]; another possible explanation is that this actually applies to “others” outside of the circle of the eleven. See Matthew 26:67-68 for the same construction; also on the grammatical possibilities, see *Sermon Studies on the Gospels (SSoG)*; “When and where did Jesus appear ‘to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time’ (1 Corinthians 15:6)? The Galilean retreat is the logical answer. What Matthew indicates Paul substantiates.” [B, 219] Either way, “The verse, especially reinforced by other passages from Matthew, gives us a picture not of disciples refusing to worship Jesus because they did not believe in him, rather of disciples who were so confused and overwhelmed by the sight of their risen Lord that they did not know what to do.” [Oschwald, 147]

*In the latter time [The Lord] has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.*

Yes, “dramatic things happen when men and mountains meet.” I can’t recall where I first read that, but how true it is. I think of my own life ... as a Boy Scout camping at the base of Mt. Fuji, or hiking Monadnock.<sup>2</sup>

Just as Moses had Sinai, and Elijah his Carmel, Jesus too, spent many times in the mountains ... tempted (Matthew 4:8), teaching (5-7), transfigured (17:1ff), crucified (!) ... and now, here!<sup>3</sup>

Where, again, it is Jesus – on the mountain – meeting His own, imparting life, where He is “no longer just their rabbi and friend. He was Christ the exalted Son of God, their risen Lord and Savior.” [*Sermon Studies on the Gospels (SSoG)*, B, 218]

<sup>18</sup> ***And Jesus came*** [that crucial first step in our salvation – where, we don’t come to Him before He graciously comes to us ... where “Jesus’ gracious response to his disciples’ confusion and hesitation is to come to them”<sup>4</sup>] ***and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”***

Jesus had prayed for this moment [John 17:1ff] ...

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<sup>2</sup> My most dramatic mountain encounter was Mt. Arbel in Israel, which overlooks the Sea of Galilee, perhaps the very mountain Jesus went with His disciples. Life-changing!

<sup>3</sup> “During his public ministry Jesus had used strategic retreats to avoid hostile Pharisees and Herodians (Mark 3:7) and to seek rest from the crowds of people (Luke 5:16). Withdrawing to lonely places to pray (Luke 22:41) was common for Jesus and his disciples.” [*SSoG*, 218]

<sup>4</sup> Oschwald, *CJ*, 37:2, 147; that Jesus “approaches” or comes near to His disciples occurs only one other place in the Gospels, when Jesus approached His trembling disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration [Matthew 17:7]

*“Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.”*

“Such authority reduced demons to beggars and caused fearful citizens to plead for Jesus’ departure (Matthew 8:31-34).” [SSoG, 219]

Where, in His continual coming in grace – with authority – we are now set about as disciples to make disciples. How?

GOING

**“Go therefore** [the first of three participles to support the main verb in the sentence] **and make disciples of all nations.**”

People of God, GOING has never been more necessary. Where people are not flocking to our doors – even less now. Wherein, the church – this church – was, and always has had it in her DNA to be “missional”. What does this mean?

“Missional Christianity requires that we don’t look to go back to the old normal, but to operate within the new normal reality before us. God’s normal is always to engage the pressing challenges in our day and to invite Jesus’ church to join the Spirit on mission.” [Paul Louis Metzger, “What’s God’s New Normal for the Church in the Wake of the Coronavirus?”]

Where, for a time, this building was inactive ... irrelevant, but beckoning us home. Where now, we are here, to be greeted once more by our original marching orders ... recommissioned, once again ... to GO!

Acts 1:8 is still in force. That having received Jesus’ power, and the Holy Spirit has come upon us, Jesus says:

*“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

Which is to say, God's people are always in motion ... as "there are always new fields, new tasks being set before [us] – new places to carry out this old assignment of letting God's Word grow and bring disciples under His rule." [Kolb, *CJ*, April 2005, 163]

"But we just back here!" True, and I'm glad to see you! But we will not stay here. Indeed, we cannot. We must ... GO.

## BAPTIZING

<sup>19</sup> *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the [singular] name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."*

How many unbaptized people do you know? I bet it is more than you think. How many do you know by name? [Ava, Shantel, Shamus, the Stoeckmann grandson, the latest Allen & Mooney children] How well do you know them?

Would you say that you love them ... love them enough to pray for them? Love them enough to take time away from a favorite pursuit or hobby – or perhaps to use that very pursuit or hobby – to build a relationship with them? Love them enough to "go," to look for ways to bless them? To invite them to get to know and love the Savior, as you have come to know and love the Savior? How far would you "go" to invite them to be "baptized"?

Where, "learning to love begins at the cross, where we see Christ our Lord, who gave himself completely for us. His love [like God's love from the beginning] is purposeful and intentional. Likewise, our love for someone else is intentional. Empowered by Christ, we will add action to our words." [Kirk, 17]

Love goes. Love brings another to the same deep pool of grace out of which we have emerged – baptized, brought to Jesus, now set apart as a people in mission.

How much do you value your own Baptism? How much do you rejoice in that day when Jesus said to you, “This one is mine?” He is not done. There are still other “fish in the pond.” Where, again, we are called to go. We are called to baptize ...

## TEACHING

<sup>19</sup> *“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,*  
<sup>20</sup> ***teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”***

With our sins forgiven, and with the joy of Christ’s commission to baptize ringing in our ears, we also “rejoice when we are taught the good news that Jesus Christ died and rose for us all. We rejoice when we partake of our Lord’s body and blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of our sins.” [Kirk, 17]

Where, the means for our mission of mercy are Sacrament and Word – *“in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”* This is no mere formula for getting things done. This involves the very heart of God, who in Himself – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – has always been missional ... who, out of that seeking love has put His very name on us!

Where, the needy world into which He now sends us is as near as right next door – with those who may be “going through a major life change – a crisis or a blessing – a recent marriage, the birth of a child, a job change, divorce, serious illness, or loss of a loved one. These [too] are in need of spiritual support, care, and healing.” [Kirk, 17]

To what end? That like us, people come to “inherit the Father’s love, the Son’s redemption and the Holy Spirit’s gift of fruitful faith.” [SSoG, 220] Where, curiously, “the disciples themselves speak no word in this final scene, where the focus falls fully on Jesus himself; their role is to listen, to understand, to obey.” [France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1112]

Which is to say, the call to go, to baptize and to teach is really all about Jesus. It was that way in the beginning. It still is. [Adapted from Oschwald, *CJ*, 37:2, 147]

### **Conclusion**

As many race to find a cure for the virus that now plagues this planet, a story from the life of Louis Pasteur, the pioneer of immunology, who lived at a time when thousands of people died each year of rabies, is apropos. Pasteur had worked for years on a vaccine, where just as he was about to begin experimenting on himself, a nine-year-old, Joseph Meister, was bitten by a rabid dog. The boy's mother begged Pasteur to experiment on her son. Pasteur injected Joseph for ten days – and the boy lived.

Decades later, of all the things Pasteur could have had etched on his headstone, among them he asked for three words: JOSEPH MEISTER LIVED. Where, our greatest legacy will be those who live eternally because what Jesus gifted to us, was, in turn, gifted to others – in His name. [Adapted from *FIPT*, 50]

Where, in the end, we do not go, baptize, or teach alone ...

***“Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”***

Where, our risen and victorious Lord still comes to us in compassion ... entrusting to us His commission ... all the while promising His Bride His undying faithfulness and commitment – forever our “Immanuel, God with us, to the [very] end of the age.” [Oschwald, 147]

People of God, with nothing short of that promise – “DISCIPLES MAKE DISCIPLES.” As you have returned to receive, now having received bless ... going, baptizing and teaching ... in the name the name of Father, of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*Amen.*

March 23, 1975. Would you like to venture a guess as to the significance of that date? If you say, my Baptism, bless you. Because that would put me about 15 years younger than I am. But it was the date I confirmed my faith in Jesus as my Savior. Of course, I had confessed that blessed truth many times prior to that date, but it was my day, my time, to publicly profess all that the Lord had graciously brought me to. Nothing held back. I was Jesus' own, though He had long before come near to me, to make that happen.

Reflecting on the gift of our salvation – “*by grace, through faith, for works,*” Paul says in Ephesians 2, there have been – no doubt – many who have nurtured that gift in us. Parents, Pastors, teachers, fellow companions along the way – all in some way have contributed to our coming to our faith in Christ, or having been kept there. Which speaks directly to our Gospel reading for this coming Sunday, from the end of Matthew 28.

*It reads: 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. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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 behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

I probably have either preached, led a Bible study, or referred to that passage hundreds of times throughout my 30+ years as a Pastor in the Lord's Church. And I have to tell you, it never gets old. Every time I read those words, they still stir something in me. To thrill at the possibility that now – just as then – God in His grace would entrust to us with so great a task, based solely on the fact that it is He who calls us, gifts us, and promises to be with us to the very end of the age ... should compel each of us with a desire to make Christ known, especially for those that our Savior still seeks to reach. That we are not at the end of the line, until He says so. That we've still got so much ground to cover, so much work to do.

That compulsion was all the more instilled in me as I stood on top of Mt. Arbel, overlooking the Sea of Galilee. Most likely the mountain referred to where Jesus met His disciples, one gets a panoramic view of the whole region of Galilee, the area in which Jesus conducted the majority of His recorded ministry. In direct fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, Jesus had His disciple look out over the land – "Galilee of the Gentiles" that, once sitting in darkness, "*had now seen a great light.*" Not unlike the world in which we live, filled with so much darkness, so much anger and rage, so much fear ... God still calls His people to be His hands, His feet ... to be a "city set on a hill," drawing all people to Him.

To think, as Peter says in his 2<sup>nd</sup> epistle, it is that name, clothed with His divine power, by which God "*has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.*" That clothed with that triune name – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – we possess everything we need to be salt and light in the world.

So let us, this day, rejoice anew in this blessed calling and distinction, first and foremost to His own by grace – in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is both a privilege and joy to wear and bear that name in the world.

But second, let it be a time for you to reaffirm your own Confirmation – formal or otherwise – of the time/times you have confirmed the joy of Jesus in your life. Then, in the same breath, and with just as much enthusiasm, thank Jesus for looking *your* way and saying, "This one is mine." For it was – and still is – a day that no doubt brought incredible joy. But also a commission – which is still in force.

As one commentator on Matthew 28 states: "God made [this] day for us, His baptized people. Therefore ... we need not be afraid to venture out. True, what this day will bring we do not know. Yet there is one thing we know – God is in it. He has promised to be with us. Now have a good breakfast!"

See you Sunday!