

December 31, 2023
As You Are Going: Church on Mission
Matthew 28:16-20
Vernon Advent Christian Church

Welcome to the last day of 2023. Tomorrow starts a new year which reminds us of new beginnings and, for us as a church, a time to set our focus on a new theme. And as we launch our new theme for 2024, Pastor Bruce and I are often asked how we come up with theme's that we choose. Each year is different and not always the same. A few times we have been able to build one off a previous theme so there is somewhat of a flow of thought. Other times, it's been in response to something we perceive that is happening among our church body and we develop a theme to address that issue. And that's what we have done with the theme going into this next year. When preparing this week, I came across this quote from Alistair Begg (for those unfamiliar, he is the pastor of Parkside Church in Cleveland and the voice behind Truth For Life Christian Radio). I think this quote will help set the scene for our new theme. "From time to time, it is good and it is important for us [as a Church] to assess what we're doing, and at the same time to consider why we're doing what we're doing, and to consider how we're doing what we're doing as we consider why we're doing it." Clear as mud? In essence, it's always important for us to take a step back in all areas of our lives and ask ourselves, "What are we doing? Why are we doing it? And how are we doing at it?" This is especially true when we consider the church and our part in it.

When we meet for our annual meeting as a church in September, there is always a report given by our church clerk as to our current membership number. As a part of this report, the number of conversions and baptisms in that year are also tallied. Now, this is not meant as any type of condemnation, but as a truth and a reality to open our eyes to our current situation. Over the past several years, both of those categories, conversions and baptisms, have read zero. Meaning zero conversions and zero baptisms have taken place here in the last several years. Thanks be to God that this doesn't mean that God hasn't been at work amongst us and that we have a couple of baptisms coming up next month! After this past years meeting, this became the topic of conversation between Pastor Bruce and I and it became basis for our new theme.

Back to Begg's quote, How are we doing at what we're supposed to be doing? I'll let you be the judge. To help us out, and before we get to our passage today, I call your attention to our very own church's purpose and mission statements found in our by laws, as well as, on our church website. First our purpose statement, "We purpose as a Church to glorify God, promote the gospel of Christ, and make disciples as directed in God's Holy Word." And our mission statement, "We believe we will glorify God as we love and worship Him, love and care for each other in the spirit of unity, and become an effective church for the cause of Christ until His return. We believe an effective church is one which: consistently wins the lost to Christ, lovingly builds up the body of Christ teaching believers to obey everything Jesus commanded, systematically equips "the saints for works of service" which God would have us do, and patiently develops new leaders whom God raises up from among us. The means by which we aspire to this mission are the studying and teaching of the Word of God and dependence upon God through earnest prayer under the leading of the Holy Spirit."

Now there is nothing wrong with these statements. In fact, they are good statements based in the very passage that we will be looking at today. The problem is in our execution and

how do we fix it? Although this is a difficult task, one that can't be fixed with just a few sermons on Sunday, I believe the starting point is we must come to the realization that we serve a God who is always on mission and we are called and invited to take part in his mission.

God has revealed himself from the very beginning as a God of purpose and mission. When Adam and Eve willfully chose to disobey God in the garden, all of the human race was condemned to death and the effects of sin. But immediately, God set out to redeem man back to Himself, out of his gracious love. And if you remember the story, when Adam and Eve fell in sin, we know they were aware of their sinfulness. How do we know this? We're told that they hid from God. They did not wander around the garden, saying, "Help God, where are You?" It was God, in Genesis 3:9, who came into the garden and said, "Adam, where are you?" This was written this way on purpose to let us know that it is God who initiates his work of salvation, its his mission. Fallen man does not even seek after God, indeed he cannot, as Paul says in Romans 3:11, "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God."

It is God who took the initiative to call man back. And from the first call in Genesis 3:9, "Adam, where are you?" to the last call in Revelation 22:17, "And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price," and everything in between, God is a God who longs to redeem fallen man to Himself. God has been seeking, and will continue to seek, to redeem people for the purpose of his glory. That is his mission. It glorifies God when sinners are saved. It glorifies God when those who are lost and separated from Him are brought back by his grace into fellowship and made into members of His family. But how did he intend to accomplish this mission? Scripture says in 2 Cor. 5:19, that "in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself." As a way of accomplishing his mission, God became a man. God invaded human history. God came into our world, in the person of his son, Jesus Christ, to fulfill his mission of redemption by "seeking and saving that which was lost as we are told Luke 19:10. And so, it was God who set out to redeem his creation.

So, if God the Father's mission is to redeem fallen man to himself for his glory. And Christ came as the way that mission was to be accomplished by seeking and saving that which was lost. What, then, are we, as the church, to be doing? What, then, is the church's mission? Lucky for us, Jesus gives us the answer to this very question, and in it, we will find our area of focus and our theme for the upcoming year. Our theme passage that we will look at today is Matthew 28:16-20 and our theme is, "As you are going...the Church on Mission." If you are able, please stand with me as I read God's word.

[Read Passage]

The verses that we read here this morning are probably not new to us. Many of us know these verses as The Great Commission. We're told that Jesus called his disciples to mountain where he would meet there with them after his resurrection. We read that there they worshipped him, but some doubted. The word used for doubt here is not "disbelief" but "hesitation," almost as if this was all too good to be true. This should encourage us that God doesn't use perfect people. We are meant to notice that there are only 11 disciples here, for Judas is now no longer among them. But at the same time, we find Peter who denied Jesus times, Thomas, who doubted and would not believe unless he physically touched Jesus in his resurrection and countless others who abandoned Jesus and were hiding in fear when Jesus was arrested and crucified. Jesus doesn't call perfect people but a redeemed people.

We understand that this is the task that the Lord has called us to. The word "commission" here literally means "the authority granted to a person or organization to act as an agent for another." But I like to think there is also a double meaning here in the English and that is that this

task God has for us believers is a “Co-Mission,” in that it’s not a new mission, but the invitation to join God in his mission from the beginning and we are not to go it alone but together as the body of Christ.

As we look at our mission as a church, I want us to make five important observations from this familiar text. First, we see the authority of Jesus in vs. 18. It is important for us to recognize the basis for this command of Jesus. We must recognize that the Great Commission doesn’t start with our efforts. Jesus starts by saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” Many translations use the word “power” here. It is showing that Jesus not only has power, but He has the right and the authority to demonstrate His power. We see this all throughout the gospel of Matthew.

In Matthew 7, we learn that the crowds were amazed at Jesus’ teaching because He was teaching them as one having authority. In Matthew 8 we learn that He is One who has the authority to heal all manner of diseases and the power to command the wind and the sea. In Matthew 9 we learn that He alone has the authority to forgive sins and in Matthew 10 we see clearly that Jesus had authority over Satan, and He delegated that authority to His apostles, giving them authority over unclean spirits. By the time that we get to beginning of the 28th chapter of Matthew we read that Jesus literally rose again from the grave displaying his complete power and authority over even death itself.

The point is that over and over we are reminded that Jesus wasn’t just a man. He was completely God in flesh. He was and is the King of kings and Lord of lords. Jesus has all authority over everything in heaven and earth. He has authority over Satan, demons, angels, the universe, over all plants and animals, over all nations and governments, over all armies, over every business and industry, over all neighborhoods and families, over all churches, over every moment of every life that has been or ever will be lived. Jesus has absolutely all authority. This is important because we need to understand who it is that is calling us. This is not just anyone. This is the Lord Jesus Christ that is calling us. And the one who has all authority has something specific for each of us to do.

His power and authority must be the driving force of this mission because we are incapable of accomplishing it on our own. We can’t do it on our own. And Jesus knew that what He was calling his disciples to do was greater than them. So, Jesus reminded them and us that his power and authority are the foundation for the mission we have been called to.

Secondly, in vs. 19, we see the action that we must take. The context of this mission is found in the word “go.” The word, “therefore,” means that on the basis of the authority of Jesus we are to get going. When we read this in our English texts we read it as a command. But, in this passage there is actually only one command and it isn’t this word, more on that later. The Greek word translated “go” here is a present participle which means that it is suggesting continual action. In other words, the word has the implied meaning of a continuing action, “going.” So, Jesus is saying, “Get going, and as you are going...” and here we have the basis for our theme. There is a very practical and important point to be made here. To accomplish this mission, some sort of action is required on our part, we must first personally answer the call. We must all come to the place where we acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus and yield our lives to him by faith. Then we must recognize that’s not the end of the story, that we can’t stay on the sidelines and accomplish this mission. In order for us to accomplish the task we must get going. We must be about his business. This is so simple, yet it is also so profound. I share this by way of example. I wasn’t very successful in my hunter ventures this year. I saw a lot of deer, probably more this year than in any years past, but never could get a shot. But I went out, because as the old saying

goes, “you can’t shoot a deer from your couch (at least not legally).” We all need to know if we are going to make disciples we have to go and get out of our comfort zone to accomplish the mission.

Fortunately for us most of us we are constantly on the go. We are going all throughout our towns and communities and on a regular basis. However, most of us aren’t going to these places with our mission in mind. We don’t even think beyond our shopping lists. Can you imagine all the places that we all go on a daily basis? We go into the grocery store, the mall, the classroom, the office, to the barber, to the doctor’s office, to the dentist, for walks in our neighborhoods, etc. We are going to these places all the time. Can you imagine all the people that we interact with on a regular basis? What if we went to these places like we were on a mission? What kind of difference would it make in how we act and in your conversations? Jesus calls us to recognize that everywhere we go we have a responsibility to share the gospel to make disciples.

Which brings us to our third observation, who is it that we are to go to? Notice who Jesus is calling us to go to. V. 19 calls us to go to “all the nations.” We must recognize that Jesus wasn’t simply referring to specific nations but he was referring to people of every race, tribe and tongue. Our witness is to begin first with our own family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. Our witness should be very clear and it should always start here and we’ll talk more about his next week. But, without question, Jesus demonstrated for us that His desire is that all nations will hear the good news and that disciples would be made in every nation.

He has called us to go into all of the world. Again, this is not an option. This is a command. Luke 24:46-47 says, “It is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to ALL the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” And again in Mark 16:15, “And He said to them, ‘Go into ALL the world and preach the gospel to ALL creation.’”

This is why God has us here on this earth. This is why God has you here for this specific time. This is why we as the Vernon Advent Christian Church must take the calling seriously. Why? Because God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. God has a plan to reach the lost. Jesus paid the price for our sin and made a way to the Father for us to be reconciled. The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin and guides us to this truth. But God has called us to go, and as we are going, to share the truth of the gospel with everyone.

We see the process of the mission as our fourth observation from this text. Our mission as Christians is summed up in one command. It is the only imperative in this entire passage and it is found in verse 19. Jesus said, “Go therefore and MAKE DISCIPLES of all the nations.” Jesus’ clear command to us is to make disciples. Again, it is a commission, or a command, not a suggestion. Jesus is commanding us that as we go, we are to be making disciples. We often have the idea that missionaries are those who have gone to another country to share the gospel, but at the heart of the Great Commission we are reminded that every Christian is called to be a missionary. I like how Spurgeon said it. He said, “Every Christian is either a missionary or an impostor.” God has called us to make disciples.

We’re going to be looking at what that looks like over the next several months. But for now, we are given two parts of the process, two other participles, like the word go used earlier, that show continuous action, and they are “baptizing” and “teaching.” As we go, we are to share the gospel and invite others to believe on the Lord Jesus. When this happens, we don’t just leave them there with our congratulations and a pat on the back, we are to continue on in our relationship with them.

The first step in obedience after we have come to faith in Christ is baptism. Baptism is the outward sign of an inward faith. It is an important step in a person's faith journey, one that symbolizes the death and burial of the old self and the rising up of the new life we now have in Christ. But even baptism isn't the end.

Again, Jesus tells his disciples to continue on in the disciple making process by "teaching them all I have commanded you." The implication here is that the Christian life is a journey. And those of us who are on that journey are at different places. We all have had, and should have, people in our lives who are helping to teach us the things of Christ and what it means to be a Christian. And what we do have, what we have learned, we are to pass along to others. The disciples had spent 3 years following Jesus. They had heard him teach. They saw him perform miracles. Now they are being told to go and tell everyone everywhere what they had seen and heard. And once a person responded in faith, then they were to follow the Lord into his baptism and to be taught what it means to be a follower of Jesus and we are to do the same.

Lastly, we see the promise of the mission in vs. 20. It should be understood from our passage today that we are to share the good news of Jesus with everyone everywhere we go. It should be the common practice of our life. But, to some, if not most of us, this thought is intimidating. It may cause anxiety and fear in our hearts. Or even doubt and disappointment. But if we look at the promise of Jesus here at the end of our passage all of those doubts and fears should melt away. He says, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." The one who has all authority over every enemy and over every circumstance promises that He will be with us. It means that He will be with us to the end, at all times and in all places. He is with us. He himself promised that He will never leave us or forsake us. Every time we share the Gospel with another person, He is with us. Every time you go out into the marketplace or the workplace, wherever we go, He is with us.

Please don't miss this fact. The passage began with the reminder that Jesus has all power and authority and it ends with His promise to be with us to the very end of the age. This means that the very one who has all enemies under His feet, the one who died and rose again, the one who has all power and authority will never abandon us or let us go alone. We must take comfort in this promise and step out in faith to accomplish the mission He has called us to.

The point is this and I want us to get it: we have been given a mission from Jesus himself. And our mission is no different than what God's mission has been from the very beginning, to seek and save those who are lost for the glory of God. That is our mission. God the Father sent Jesus into the world to rescue the world from sin and now this same Jesus sends us out into the world and invites us into this same mission. Jesus said, "Go, make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them all that I have commanded you." This is our mission. So go, and as you are going, let's be the church on mission.