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Go and As You Are Going

“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore 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.’” (Matthew 28:18-20)

How many commands do you read in the following Bible verse?

“Therefore 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” (Matthew 28:19).

One? Two? Three? Four?

The common belief is that Jesus gave us four commands: Go. Make. Baptize. Teach. In reality, there is only one command. In the original language, only one is written in what is called the imperative: “make disciples.”

The word “Go” certainly sounds like a command doesn’t it? It is, however, a participle in form. Now, please understand that when it comes to grammar, participles sound more like vegetables to me. I suspect that I was thinking of other things during the days of ninth-grade English and Grammar. Participles and prepositions didn’t quite match up to the important things, like baseball. However, it is important for the sake of understanding our mission that we understand participles in this case. Jesus is saying, in effect, “As you go. . .” or “Going along the way. . .” or “Having gone. . .” In other words, He is assuming that the disciples will not sit still, waiting for the world to come to them. He assumes that they will be on the move. In essence, He is saying to them, “Wherever you are, make disciples!”

To understand the word “Go” as a participle is to understand the strategy of Christ for our mission. Christ does not establish His Church on a “build it and they will come” mindset, but rather, “As you are going along the way, make disciples.” Let it become a natural part of your everyday life.

Actually, when you review history, it has been the Divine strategy long before the birth of Christ. In the sixth century before Christ, the Southern Kingdom, Judah, which had lasted about 200 years longer than the Northern Kingdom, was captured and brought into exile, far from their homeland. From that time forward, the Old Testament people of God (the nation of Israel) were scattered throughout the world. Wherever they went, they carried their faith with them. Their faith was quite different from the other religions of the world. It was a belief in one God—a God who had provided His people with clear teachings of His mercy and grace. It was a teaching that called them to high moral standards that were unusual for those living beneath Roman influence. Most of all, wherever the people of Israel went, they went with the expectation that God would send His Messiah, a King. As much as the Jews longed to be back home, being dispersed helped to prepare the world for the coming of Bethlehem’s Child.

One can see the impact of this years, even centuries, later when magi travel a great distance to come and worship the promised

king. Where did they hear of this in the first place? The Word had spread throughout the continent because of the “going” of the dispersed Jews.

This is one of the keys to an effective church. The mistake is often made in measuring the effectiveness of a church by Sunday morning’s attendance or the size and creativity of its programs or ministries. Others will measure the effectiveness by the size of its building. The Word, however, measures maximum impact and effectiveness by a different standard. What Jesus holds up in His teachings is our ability to be salt and light.

“You are the salt of the earth . . . you are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden” (Matthew 5:13-14).

What do salt and light have in common? They both must penetrate something or lose themselves in something in order to be effective. They both must go out from their source in order to be effective. The salt must go into the food and the light must go into the darkness. So it is with missional churches. They are measured by the sum total of individual believers who penetrate the community by means of their “goings” to and from.

This is the assumption behind the Great Commission from Matthew 29:19—*“Go [or as you go along your way] . . . make disciples.”* Imagine the impact potential for any congregation. The worship concludes and the members “go along their way” back to school or work or into their neighborhoods. This is the Church “on the go” in the mission sense.

Have you ever seen a sign that greets members who are leaving the church or the property that says, “You are now entering the mission field!”? This is the attitude of a missional church. The making of disciples occurs as people are “going along the way.”

There is something significant about this charge that Jesus gives His disciples in light of what He said earlier in Matthew 10:5-6. He sends the Twelve out with the following instructions:

“Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, preach this message: The Kingdom of Heaven is near” (Matthew 10:5-7).

You see, there it is again. “As you go. . . .” It is this strategy that says be natural; be intentional. As you go, along the way, preach the message. What makes this different, however, is the limitation, “Do not go among the Gentiles. . . .” Jesus had a very specific objective. Go to Israel first. Later it will be expanded. Jesus was a master at laying the groundwork. He understood the importance of keeping it focused and narrow. Then when the objective is established, widen the scope. He did the same thing with the training of His disciples. He spent three years with them in an intensive leadership and discipling track. When He ascended, the group was small but the base was solid and deep. The Church exploded with growth when the Spirit came upon them on the Day of Pentecost.

In Matthew 28, on his Ascension Day, He expanded the commission:

“Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations.”

No restrictions. No limitations. Go into all the world. What a radical thought for those who heard it. Go into all the world and make disciples of them. The strategy is simple. Be intentional and be natural. As you are going along the way. The vision is huge:

“Make disciples of all nations.”

This commission and vision shape and focus our purpose in ministry at St. Luke. Our purpose is expressed in our mission statement: “Making and Maturing Disciples to Minister.” In this six-word statement, “disciples” is the focus; it is the object of the sentence. It is around this that our ministry is directed. In everything we do, we are either seeking to make disciples, assisting them in maturing to the full stature of Christ, or leading them to minister according to the way in which God

has uniquely gifted and shaped them. Our calling is not to save souls. That is His work. Ours is to make disciples by means of those two other participles in the Great Commission: “baptizing” and “teaching.” Making disciples is directly connected to teaching the Word and baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. In Baptism, not only does the Holy Spirit work faith and cleanse sin, but the Spirit also invites the person into a relationship with the Triune God and His Body, the Church. This is at the core of understanding what a disciple is. A disciple is not so much a student as he or she is a follower—a follower of one person, Jesus Christ. A disciple is one who seeks to model his or her life, submitting to the authority of His teaching.

Everything we do in the Church should focus on developing disciples—those who are willing to follow the call of Jesus for their life. Jesus said,

“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23).

One of the core principles taught in the discipleship class for new members at St. Luke is this:

“A disciple is one who responds in faith and obedience to the gracious call of Jesus Christ. Being a disciple is a life-long process of dying to self while allowing Jesus Christ to come alive in us.”

This process begins in our Baptism where the old nature is drowned and the new man rises up within us. This is not a one-time act as some would think. It is the beginning of a daily dying and re-birth. Martin Luther would make the sign of the cross each morning as he awakened to remind him of his identity in Baptism where he was called daily to die to self as the new nature arose within him.

It is time to get on with the rest of the day. As you are going along the way, keep in mind the one command He gave before He left—”make disciples.” With that one command, however, He also gives us a precious promise: *“And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).*

Prayer: Jesus, I love being your disciple. Thank you for calling me to follow you. As I am going along my way this day, show me how I can fulfill your command to make disciples of those with whom I meet. Let it come naturally to me so that others might see you in me. **Amen.**

Challenge: As you are going along this day, look for natural opportunities to give a witness to Christ being in your life.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 28

From the Book of Concord: “Because of this personal union and the communion that results from it, which the divine and human natures in the person of Christ have with each other in fact and in truth, things are attributed to Christ according to the flesh that the flesh, according to its nature and essence, cannot outside of this union intrinsically be or have—for example, that his flesh is a true, life-giving food and his blood is a true, life-giving drink, as the two hundred *patres* [Fathers] at the Council of Ephesus testified, ‘*carnem Christi esse vivificam seu vivificatricem*’ (that is, that the flesh of Christ is a life-bestowing flesh). For this reason, too, this human being alone and no other human being can say in truth, ‘Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them’ [Matt. 18:20], and, ‘I am with you always, to the end of the age’ [Matt. 28:20]” (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article VIII: Person of Christ, p. 631.76).