

MAKING DISCIPLES

Matthew 28:16-20 [MW18-33]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai & Wellsford, Sunday 21 October 2018

Picture the scene [PP Slide]

- eleven disciples up the mountain with Jesus
recall some thing of the rollercoaster ride they've been on ...
- the time they spent traveling around with Jesus
that triumphal entry into Jerusalem – the joy and celebration
the absolute gut-wrenching despair as Jesus died on the cross
- the confusion on the Sunday when the women came with the news
that the tomb was empty ...

Now here they are, eleven ordinary men

- in a small insignificant country
being told to go out to all the nations of the world
- heck, they couldn't even get the Romans off their back
how were they ever going to cover the rest of the world???

I think those eleven disciples were probably relieved, amazed, happy

- to be once more in the presence of Jesus
and at the same time absolutely stunned at what Jesus told them to do
to be sent out on this world-changing mission
- “you've been with me all this time,” says Jesus, “you know how it goes ...
get out and get on with it ...”

I imagine eleven men swallowing hard and shaking their heads

- what? us? the rest of the world?
tell them about you, okay we can probably manage that ... maybe
but this teaching and baptising thing ...
- you get the idea

Nothing ... nothing, but nothing, is ever straightforward with Jesus

- not even coming back from the dead
he comes back and meets with his disciples – great
- then he tells them to do something that would have seemed even more unlikely
more inconceivable, more impossible
than Jesus' coming back from the dead
- that is to tell the rest of the world, the whole wide world, about Jesus
making disciples, baptising, teaching
- and yet, and yet, they did

They were eleven ordinary men with absolutely extraordinary help

- they were not on their own
they were sent on this overwhelming mission with an amazing promise
- Bible scholar William Barclay writes about it like this:

It must have been a staggering thing for eleven humble Galileans to be sent forth to the conquest of the world. Even as they heard it, their hearts must have failed them. But, no sooner was the command given, than the promise followed. They were sent out ... on the greatest task in history, but with them was the greatest presence in the world.

In response to this morning's gospel – two points ...

First, being a disciple in Jesus' day was a big deal

- disciples were handpicked, special, an exclusive group and up until this point Jesus has had only twelve
- but from this point on the barriers are down and the invitation is extended to the whole world

As M. Eugene Boring writes in his commentary on Matthew's Gospel:

After the resurrection the invitation to discipleship is open to all people of all nations. That is, people are not called to become individual believers but are to be enlisted as disciples within the Christian community, whose reception of the Christian message must be actualised in their lives ... the call to the fishers, the tax collector and the rest of the Twelve is now extended to all.

You, me, all of us here this morning

- everyone gathered in worship in Mangawhai/Wellsford everyone who is a member of a church, the body of Christ in Aotearoa New Zealand
- every Christian in every church in every nation is called as a disciple of the greatest Master ever

And so on to my second point, which is:

- what exactly is it that we are being called to do as disciples of Jesus Christ ... is it coming to church and being involved in church activities?
- is it Bible reading and bible study? is it prayer?
- these are all good and necessary undertakings yet they are more about passively receiving
- this morning Jesus is calling us to be active Jesus is sending us out

The words Jesus spoke to the eleven on the mountain are just as much for us today:

- "Go to the people of all nations and make them my disciples" coming to church, Bible reading, Bible study, prayer are what we do in order to be
- renewed, refreshed, recharged, built up, encouraged, stirred up to go out and spread the good news
- Jesus did not call us to be regular church attenders he called us to go out and share the good news
- gathering for worship, reading and studying the Bible, praying are really important for helping people live as a disciple of Jesus but that is step two
- step one is to go out, to go beyond our doors

I came across this cartoon which I think sums it up well: [PP slide]

Anglican evangelism is like an aquarium set by the ocean's edge. Any fish from the ocean are invited to jump into the aquarium if they happen to be passing by and feel like it.

Ours is an incarnational faith

- in Jesus, God came to us, where we are, and shared our life Jesus went where people were he used words and images that they could relate to
- he ate and drank with them where they were comfortable on their terms

We are to do the same: be the presence of God where people are

- to meet them where they are comfortable, on their terms to in a sense 'share their life'
- and in doing so share the good news you have found of life and love in Jesus Christ
- however that comes about

The good news is that this sharing the Good News is not 'one size fits all'

- there is no set formula or sales patter
it is what is laid on our hearts, guided by the Holy Spirit
- to be where God calls us to be
with the people God calls us to be with
- sometimes there is a "restlessness" or "disturbance" in our spirits
because we know we are supposed to be doing something

At All Saints' church in Wellsford

- there are two young guys whose spirits are indeed "restless"
they are acutely aware they are to be doing more than just sitting in church
they have heard the commission of Jesus to "go"
- these guys, Timothy and Matthew, know the good news of Jesus Christ
they experience it, they are living in it ... and it is not enough
there is more, they know they are to share this good news of Jesus Christ
- and so they are going to do this
by going house to house, beginning in their neighbourhood
and telling people about God's love, about Jesus, about forgiveness of sins
and new life

There does not have to be a special event or anything out of the ordinary

- I believe the opportunity will come up with the people you are with
this very week
- remember Jesus was where the people were and was God's presence
you will be where the people are and can be the presence of God

Something might come up in a conversation

- you might ask to pray with someone
you might ask them if they know anything about Jesus
- in a particular situation you may be able to share how it is for you
and how Jesus makes a difference

Remember this is about helping people become disciples of Jesus

- it is actively walking alongside another person
it is not doing a "dump and run"
not handing someone a tract, speaking a scripture verse and then leaving them to it
- it is helping people to develop a relationship with Jesus

You are walking with Jesus in your life

- the call is to walk with Jesus, beside someone else
until they are able to walk with Jesus themselves
- and in fact go and do the same
that is they themselves walk with Jesus alongside another person

Scary stuff? Heck yes!!!

- just imagine those eleven disciples on the mountain looking at Jesus, looking at each other ...
- what do you mean us? him? and him? and me? out into the world
- the big wide world

Yes, we are to go out like those first eleven disciples

- and just like them we do not go alone we have the greatest promise ever:
"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" [PP slide]

I will be with you always, even until the end of the world (CEV)

I'll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age (The Message)

Here's those words from William Barclay again: [PP slide]

It must have been a staggering thing for eleven humble Galileans to be sent forth to the conquest of the world. Even as they heard it, their hearts must have failed them. But, no sooner was the command given, than the promise followed. They were sent out ... on the greatest task in history, but with them was the greatest presence in the world.

I invite you to take a moment or two to reflect on all this

- to allow the Holy Spirit to move among us and through us then I will conclude in prayer

[PP Slide]

Time for reflection

Prayer [PP Slide]

