

## Called To Serve

Matthew 28:16–20

Delivered: New Providence Presbyterian Church, Paris, IL

Lying in our beds, I found myself staring at the ceiling unable to sleep from the night before. Across the room, my roommate was lying in his bed while looking at his watch. “Any minute now,” he whispered. “5...4...3...2...1..”

Suddenly, there was a pounding on the door and a frog-like voice shouting at the other side. “0430 let's move, let's move, let's move!”

For anyone who joins the military and goes through boot camp, or in my case Officer Training School in the Air Force, having early mornings such as these, learning how to tie boot laces, roll socks, and endure the wrath of training instructors with large arms, large hats, and thin mustaches are challenges any new soldier, sailor, or wing-man faces in the first few days of their arrival. And while it can be overwhelming as you seek to affirm you made the right decision while feeling overwhelmed by the task which remains in front of you.

It would be safe to say that for Jesus 11 remaining disciples, there was a sense of feeling overwhelmed by the task which Jesus had commanded them to do in the great commission, one of which acts as Jesus hallmark speech of parting words to those whom he had called to carry on his work for him. While some worshiped him, some doubted. However, Jesus does not rebuke them, only simply calls these less than perfect disciples to carry on his work.

As with all callings in scripture, it seems to be the less qualified in leadership, of tongue, and organization that is called to do ministry. And this tradition is carried on Jesus ministry. Phillip, John, and Simon Peter were simple fishermen. While Matthew was a tax collector which made him resented by many of the Jews. Yet despite their lack of education, skills, and knowledge in religious studies, it was them, not the high priests, that Jesus called to make disciples of all nations. And while there doubt and insecurities never faulted, Jesus continued to feel they were the ones called to make disciples.

Often we as a modern day Christian readers of this text sometimes interpret the great commission as being Jesus commission for us to travel out into the world and build the Christian church. But by examining this text a little deeper, we find ourselves learning the translation means something a little different.

In Greek, the phrase “make disciples” is the only imperative verb. The Greek word for Disciples is *mathētēs* which means a learner, a follower of Christ who learns the doctrines of Scripture and the lifestyle. Going, baptizing, and teaching is participles—subordinate to “make disciples” which is the only imperative verb.

For those of us who didn't do too well in English class, here is a better way of looking at it. The word disciple is simply a learner, someone who is open to what a teacher has to teach. Much like if you were learning a trade in carpentry, auto mechanics, plumbing, and farming, you are there to learn from the one who has the skill and experience who can help you form your craft. As many of you know, teaching is a slow process and required involvement on not just the learner, but also the teacher.

It's important to understand what the meaning of the word “disciples” in the context of this time

was because it often shapes how we look at what meaning being a disciple of Jesus Christ means today.

For us, we are not commanded to preach and evangelize to win over the world. Rather we are being charged in this scripture, Jesus as the 11 remaining disciples were charged, to create new people of faith.

However, even if we are called to take into consideration the disciples interpreted scripture in this context, we can still assume that for the disciples, this seemed like an impossible task and the feelings of doubt and wondering what they got themselves into was woven on their minds throughout their ministry. How are they, these simple 11 people who have no theological training going to accomplish making disciples people of new faith in all nations?

For those of you who are parents, the moment you brought your first child home and were tasked with the stresses of being a new parent must have felt like an impossible and overwhelming task you were not prepared to do. For those of you who maybe inherited your parent's farm or business, stepping into the roles of those whom you looked up to and trying to live up to doing things as well as they have done them can seem impossible. Or perhaps for those of you who have taken on a new job, taken in an elderly parent into your home and stepped into the role of caretaker, or a new project one you once felt confident in your ability but soon realized yourself to feel to be over your head, caused you to feel inadequate to do the task that no one else wanted to do?

And what about our faith communities and the difficult tasks it can be for us to sustain our churches while ministering to a changing community? How do we find ourselves carrying trying to carry on a mission of ministry despite feeling unqualified in our ability to make disciples?

The responsibilities of parenthood, caregiving, or being an emotional and spiritual influence on others can seem overwhelming that when presented with such an opportunity, we shy away from them. Not because we feel not sympathetic to the needs of those who need us or our support. But because we feel inadequate in our ability to be that caregiver, foster parent, little league baseball coach, or that deacon or elder.

Growing up in rural Western Pennsylvania as a child I was involved in the Boy Scouts. While through I was able to obtain my rank of Eagle, I couldn't have done so through the help of my scout leaders and my parents.

Looking back, I can remember when I was about seven years old and joined Cub Scouts. The anticipation of going to my first den meeting kept me and the other boys restless. But to our disappointment, scouting almost didn't happen for us because our den leader backed out into wanting to do it and there were no other parents stepping forward. However, even though she felt deeply unqualified, my mother stepped up and became our den leader. And while I can remember my mom being visibly upset at the prospect of having to control 9 eight-year-old boys for an hour and a half each week, she was remarkably good at it. In fact, it was her experience being a den parent that motivated her to go back to school in her mid-40s and become an English teacher.

Later, as I went into Boy Scouts in the sixth grade, there wasn't any magical gift my Scoutmaster Bob, this short and stern welder with a thick mustache had that allowed him to be an influential leader in the lives of us, teenagers. Rather it was his willingness to be a presence, his willingness to take us to different scout camps and lead us through example even if it took some patience in not wanting to kill us sometimes too.

There are three words which I think serve as the best advice to anyone who finds themselves seeking a need to be a spiritual or emotional influence for those in need but afraid they don't feel

qualified in doing so. For me, these three words were shared with me during a few months after I finished seminary and was beginning a year long residency program as a hospital chaplain outside of Norfolk, Virginia. While I had just earned a Masters in Divinity from a Presbyterian seminary where I learned Greek and Hebrew and the theological works of John Calvin, and the various biblical interpretations of the Old and New Testament, I was terrified at the prospect of not knowing what to say to someone dying of cancer or someone who just lost a loved one unexpectedly in the emergency room. And even though I remember shadowing this charismatic Baptist hospital chaplain who would comfort those grieving with inspirational words which seemed they were lifted from a Hallmark Channel movie and end the conversation with a passionate hug, I didn't have those gifts. Being from Pittsburgh, we are not known for our warm and fuzzy words and mind you, I grew up Presbyterian and we aren't known for our hugs like our Baptist brothers and sisters are. But the three words I learned helped me discover my own identity as a chaplain.

Just show up.

You see, God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called. As writer Colton Jansen put it, "Jacob was a cheater, Peter had a temper, David had an affair, Noah got drunk, Jonah ran from God, Paul was a murderer, Gideon was insecure, Miriam was a gossip, Martha was a worrier, Thomas was a doubter, Sara was impatient, Elijah was moody, Moses stuttered, Abraham was old,... and Lazarus was dead. Yet each of these men, despite the lack of qualification and their serious doubts, they showed up and God used them to not only be a spiritual presence to others, but to make disciples.

Theologian Frederick Buechner says that "By and large a good rule for finding out is this: the kind of work God usually calls you to is the kind of work (a) that you need most to do and (b) that the world most needs to have done. ... The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet. When you wake up in the morning, called by God to be a self again, if you want to know who you are, watch your feet. Because where your feet take you, that is who you are."

For the 11 remaining disciples standing before Jesus on the mountain during this great commission, they entered into a ministry not with advanced degrees in leadership or religious studies. Most of them were fishermen and those who worked with their hands. Yet it was them they Jesus had called to be followers and make disciples of all nations not through perfect preaching or amazingly ministry skills, but those who had a heart for carrying the message of hope and redemption that we find in Jesus Christ throughout the world.

"Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ," says theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

For those of us as a church who are part of these communities of ministry, it's not about having a projector, a perfectly in tune band, or a dynamic preacher in the pulpit that makes disciples of others. Nor does it mean for us to be leaders in the church we need to know how to have these skills. But what it means to be a community of believers is to have be a community of believers of Jesus Christ who have a heart and compassion to share His love with others. And while this can be done overseas as missionaries, it also means it can be done right in your own community. From those you work with to those who live with at the end of the road. All of us are called to play a part in being part of the church whether it is teaching Sunday School, serving ans a elder or a deacon and visiting those who are ill or struggling, or even volunteering to preach from time to time. And no, you can't kill anyone if you happen to give a bad sermon.

And for us as individuals, those of us who are venturing into new and unknown aspects in our

lives—seeing needs to be meant in the lives of those who are around us such as elderly who need care and children who need a mentor to a community that needs a leader. God calls us just as who we are and gives us the wisdom, guidance, and patience to do share his Love through words and actions as we are are.

Making disciples of Jesus Christ isn't a process which requires experience, talents, or even confidence. Rather, it's answering a call to bring about love, compassion, and hope in the lives of others through just showing up and sharing the message of hope and reconciliation in the lives of others who need to hear it while continually seeking to hear that message too.

### Bibliography

“Commentary on Matthew 28:16-20 by Richard Beaton.” Matthew 28:16-20 Commentary by Richard Beaton - Working Preacher - Preaching This Week (RCL), [www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=86](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=86).

“Matthew 28:16-20 commentary, bible study.” Sermon Writer, [www.sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary/matthew-2816-20/](http://www.sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary/matthew-2816-20/).