

Step 8- Completing the Cycle
Matt 9:35-38, Matt 28:16-20, 2 Cor 5:11- 6:1

So friends, according to the website volunteer.ca there are 13.3 million Canadians who contribute about 2.1 billion volunteer hours every year.

And these good-willed people help out in shelters, hospitals, charities, service clubs, at festivals, sporting leagues, youth camps, environmental groups, crisis lines, human rights groups, disaster relief, flood relief and so on... and it all adds up to the equivalent of about 1.1 million full-time jobs. *(Canada Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2010).*

That's a lot of work that gets done for organizations and good causes because people are willing to give their spare time and energy and help out in some way.

And the fact is that volunteers are needed because organizations and charitable causes don't always have the financial resources to pay someone to do what needs to be

done, and the people who are receiving their services can't afford to pay for them either. This is why we need volunteers!

For example - there are companies and workers who can go into someone's house after it's been flooded and remove all the damaged belongings and materials and clean everything up.

But we know that when a home owner is faced with the cost of replacing all their belongings and rebuilding their home after a flood, paying someone to come in and do the clean-up for them is not an option.

So we volunteer and to provide services and assistance to people at no cost in order to help them get back on their feet again.

As one person describes it "*Volunteers provide desperately needed human resources to charities and voluntary organizations and the people they serve... they do everything from stuffing envelopes to serving on boards of directors.*

They raise funds for charity, coach sports teams, run youth and children's programs, deliver meals, shop for the elderly, help recent immigrants settle in, work to protect the environment, help feed hungry people, guide museum and art gallery visitors, and build homes for homeless people." (Noah McIntock – Understanding Canadian Volunteers pg. 2)

So when we look at the list of what volunteers do... it's not hard to see that volunteering is important, that it's very necessary... and that it's a good thing.

And this morning, as we look at the final step in the process of making disciples - which really isn't the final step because it's all about going back to the beginning of the process and showing that we are mature disciples by discipling others and thus completing the cycle...

And you might have been thinking, especially from looking at the title of this last step, 'Completing the Cycle' and because we read from Matthew 9:37-38 where Jesus says *"The harvest*

is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field..."

You may have thinking "ok – here it comes, this is where he makes the pitch for people to sign up and volunteer to be a part of making disciples. And he's going to try to either guilt me, or inspire me to volunteer my spare time to go out and try to recruit people to come and be a part of Valleyview..."

But brothers and sisters, for all the good that volunteers do - I'm not looking for volunteers this morning. Rather I'm looking to help us come to a mature and complete understanding of what it means to be a mature disciple and then live that out.

Volunteering is good - and it can provide us with opportunities to GO OUT connect with the community by volunteering with other organizations and charities - but the essence of volunteering is something very different from being a mature disciple who completes the cycle by helping to disciple others and it's important that we understand this right of the bat.

Friends, when someone volunteers - they give whatever time and energy they have **left over** in order to do all the good things that volunteers do.

Case in point – when we used to recruit volunteers from the community to help host the Inn from the Cold program, I would get a lot of phone calls from interested people.

But as soon as I explained that it was hosted on a week night and explained everything that was involved from Thursday afternoon all the way to Friday morning – ninety percent of them told me that it wouldn't fit into their work and family schedule.

So you see friends – volunteers give what is leftover, whatever they have to spare.... Whatever they can afford **after** they have taken what they need for themselves and their family. Now this isn't a bad thing... in fact it's totally understandable, and please remember – I've said that volunteering is good...

But it's important that we understand it's a very different kind of activity from being obedient to Christ's command to "*go and make disciples.*"

In some ways the difference between a volunteer and a mature disciple - when it comes to the work of making disciples, is very much like the difference between a chicken and a pig when it comes to cooking bacon and eggs for breakfast... the chicken contributes, but the pig is all in and totally committed.

So this last step is not about a call for more volunteers, or an attempt to guilt you into contributing more of your spare time and effort to try and get people to come to Valleyview – rather it's about ensuring that those who have been progressing and maturing as they go through the 8 Steps of discipleship do not fail to come to complete maturity because you miss this last step – but that you do and you are able to give of yourselves, just as Christ did.

Because brothers and sisters, someone who has come to completion as a mature disciple realizes something very important – they know they did not make it to maturity on their own, or by their own efforts.

They know and understand that all the benefits they experience from being connected to Christ and to his Body – forgiveness, peace, hope, healing, provision, assurance of eternal life and living in the new heavens and earth - knowing God himself intimately and personally...

All of this was made possible because another mature Christian was obedient to Christ's command to "*go and make disciples*" and they took time, made time, maybe even sacrificed time – (not volunteering it) in order give of who they were, who they had become, so that an unbeliever might become a believer... so that a young immature Christian might progress to maturity... so that a maturing disciple might learn how to disciple others themselves.

Why? Because whoever helped to disciple them had received that same investment from someone else – and most importantly brothers and sisters, a mature disciple who is fully mature knows this pattern of sacrificial giving to invest in making disciples reflects and reveals the very work and ministry and the love of Jesus Christ himself.

Thus the Apostle Paul writes in the passage of scripture we read this morning "*For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.*" (2 Cor 5:14-15)

Brothers and sisters, think back on your own process and progress as a disciple of Jesus Christ and take note of all those who in some way did not live for themselves - but who lived for Jesus Christ and sacrificed in some way to help disciple you.

Who was it that helped you with Step 1; where you came to realize that someone loved you enough to come and seek you out, to make a connection with you, to incarnate Jesus to you?

Or maybe since you grew up already connected to the church – Step 2 was more important where you needed to see that Christianity has credibility – especially in your teenage years? Who was it that made Christianity credible to you?

Was it your parents? Or maybe a youth leader who you looked up to and could relate to? Or someone more arm's length who you admired?

Who helped to connect you to Christ in Step 3 and understand that Jesus can meet your needs – especially your spiritual needs you didn't even know you had? Was it the guest speaker at summer youth camp? Did you attend an evangelism rally? Was it a Christian friend who shared how Christ met their needs that are similar to yours?

And was there a particular group of Christians or a Church that you were a part of that made Step 4 possible – where you were grafted into that Body of Christ and you could see the fruit of it being produced in your life...

And who helped you to be able to understand and articulate what God had been doing in your life – and give voice to confess that you were once a sinner- but now you had been saved by Jesus Christ, and helped you go through Step 5 and Confirm your Faith?

Who was it that was instrumental in bringing about a time of new and exciting Type-A spiritual growth in your life? Who was it that walked alongside you when you had to go through the trials and testing of Type-B spiritual growth? Who was involved with you in Step 6?

And who was it that identified a particular gift or potential in you and encouraged you, prompted you to use and develop that gift? Who gave you a chance to get involved in some part of the church's disciple-making process and nudged or pushed

you along to complete Steps 7 & 8 and set you on the path of helping others in a similar manner?

Who were these people that made this possible in your life?

Brothers and sisters, I don't doubt that many of us are growing and maturing as disciples and I can see that the Holy Spirit is working in our lives and producing good fruit - but every once in a while it's good step out of our present reality and spend some time reflecting back on our history and the discipleship process which has brought us to our present state – and especially identify and remember the people who have been used by the Holy Spirit in the specific parts of that process.

Because it helps us realize that who we are now, has been formed through the Holy Spirit orchestrating all these other people, over many years, to make a contribution to our discipleship and help move us along to maturity.

And the realization that we are not self-made Christians, and remembering that we did not arrive at where we are now instantaneously or in a short period of time, should bring about a humility and remind us that the very essence of who we are now... needs to give expression to itself, needs to prove itself and bear fruit... by completing the discipleship cycle in being obedient to our Lord's command to "*make disciples*"

You really can't say that you have been fully disciplined until you realize that it brings you around to helping disciple others.

So in this way Step 8 is very different from a call for people to volunteer their spare time to try and convince people to come to Valleyview – I hope you can see that?

However, it has been my experience that our understanding of "making disciples means being a volunteer in this way" is deeply ingrained in us and very persistent in our thinking.

We automatically identify ourselves as volunteers.

But Step 8 is really about a change in our identity and making sure that we think differently about ourselves now. Listen to what Paul says about identity in 2 Cor 5:17 *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation. The old has gone, the new is here!”*

So – as mature disciples of Jesus Christ, there is no question that we are “in Christ” but that means we are not the same as we were before.

Now we should understand part of that – having gone through Step 5 where we have confessed transitioning from being unsaved to saved... but coming to maturity in Step 8 also means that the whole understanding of how others sacrificed to disciple us – that is part of our new identity and it is a new part of our identity.

Our old identity is based on our own efforts, our independence from God and others, our sense of self-righteousness (self in the sense of source of what makes us worthy or good).

As we come to maturity in Christ, this new part of our identity is given to us as we experience other Christians investing time and effort into helping us go through the process of discipleship successfully – so by the time we reach Step 8 much of the old in our identity is gone, and much that is new has replaced it.

And it’s important that we are able to name that new identity – to describe who we have become as mature disciples who are in Christ, and Paul gives us three terms that we can use to identify ourselves now.

So brothers and sisters – with respect to completing the cycle of discipleship we should think of ourselves, and identify ourselves, and thus conduct ourselves as “*messengers*” (vs. 19) “*ambassadors*” (vs.20) and “*God’s co-workers*” (6:1).

This is our new identity when it comes to making disciples, no longer thinking about it in terms of volunteering your spare time– but as something we are messengers, ambassadors and co-workers in.

Sharing the good news, as Paul writes that *“God is reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them”* (vs.19)

Bringing the very presence and love and mercy and grace and authority of the person of Jesus Christ in your own person to wherever you are, whenever you are there, in whatever activity is going on - because through the Holy Spirit you are Christ’s ambassador and represent Him.

And we co-operate with God himself, co-workers with the Holy Spirit to help move people along from that point when the Holy Spirit first calls to them by their name – to that point when the Holy Spirit sends them out by their name.

Brothers and sisters, this is what we have become as we grow to maturity in Christ, as we become mature disciples, as we complete the cycle in obedience to our Lord and make disciples.

This is who we are – so it’s not a question of if we will go and make disciples – it’s a question of which step are you going to get started in...

Will you be that person who connects to someone who is not yet a Christian in step one?

Will you be the one who builds credibility with unbelievers in Step 2?

Will you be the one who tells their story about how Christ met their spiritual thirst and invites someone who is seeking Christ to connect with Him in worship for Step 3?

Now at Valleyview, God has been telling us we need to pay more attention to these steps and build up our ministry and intentionality with them – so it’s important that we consider if the Holy Spirit is nudging us, and prompting us in who we have become as disciples to go out and complete the cycle in this way.

And who we have become also has implication for how we see ourselves participating in Valleyview's current ministries that tend to be more focused and more options for Steps 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 - we are not just "volunteering" for these ministries when we have spare time or we are not gone for the week-end and so on...

We are co-workers with God and these are ministry callings that we set-aside time to pursue, that we even sacrifice time to participate in – because it is a critical part of the discipleship process – and others have done this for us, so that we may be blessed in maturity as we are.

So brothers and sisters – there is no appeal for volunteers to go make disciples this morning.

There are only the words of Jesus who said "*Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.*" (Mat 9:38)

Let us pray that we will work to be obedient and Go and make disciples of all nations. Amen.