

**Connecting People to Christ**  
**Matt 4:23-25, Luke 14:25-33, Psalm 24**

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this morning we are looking at Step #3 in the process of making disciples. And step #3 is where we begin to connect people - in our community whom we have connected with (step 1)... and done so in a way that builds credibility with them (step2) – with the person of Jesus Christ.

Now I think that most of us would agree that it is quite logical that this be the next step in the process - if we are going to make disciples and help people become followers of Jesus Christ then at some point... we need to introduce them to Him. But how do we go about doing that?

Introducing people to Jesus Christ isn't quite the same as introducing people to your wife or your husband, or introducing people to your boss, or your local gov't representative...

Come to think of it how many of us have someone in our lives who we want to introduce to everyone that we know or come across? Maybe only for a short while when we first get engaged and we want everyone we know to get to know our fiancé... or when we have a child and we want everyone to introduce everyone to our kid...

And if our fiancé or child is not with us - then we pull out our phone and show pictures while we describe what our fiancé or child is like.

Or, perhaps you've had some experience working for a multi-level marketing corporation which bypasses the traditional advertising and marketing methods and encourages the advertising of their services or products by their reps through "word-of-mouth" and you've tapped into your relational networks of people whom you know in order to introduce them to the product or service that you have to offer and also get them to join up and help sell the product.

So as we consider Step #3 where we Connect People to Christ, let us acknowledge that we want to be able to introduce people to Jesus in a way that keeps us introducing people to Him long after the initial excitement of receiving His salvation and forgiveness begins to fade away...

and at the same time doesn't come across like we are trying to convince people to do something they would rather not do and sell them something they don't think they need, and sign them up for something they don't want to be involved in – because it benefits us...

Do you understand what I mean here? Good.

Now I also know that it's tempting to think that our job of making disciples would have been so much easier if we could have introduced people to Jesus while He was engaged in His ministry, physically present here on earth over in the land of Palestine.

Because when we read through the gospels there are many instances where we read about how people came from all over to see Jesus and to receive ministry from him.

The passage we read this morning in Matt 4:23-25, is a good summary of what this typically looked like. Word of Jesus' healing ministry "goes viral" and people from all over bring those who are sick or possessed to him in order to be healed.

Large crowds gathered to hear Jesus teach as well. In Matt we have the crowds listening to Jesus teach and when he finished this teaching session the scriptures says that the crowds of people "*were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.*" (Mat 7:28-29)

Word of mouth spreads, and wherever Jesus is, people seek him out and they bring along those who need Jesus... like the example of the men who brought their paralyzed friend to see Jesus but couldn't get into the house where Jesus was teaching so they went up onto the roof-top and made a hole

in the ceiling in order to lower their paralyzed friend down in front of Jesus so Jesus could heal him. (Mark 2:1-5)

And we read all this and we think to ourselves; “wow, surely that is what it means to connect people to Christ!” And certainly in one sense it is – when we see people’s spiritual thirst and their needs we can bring them to Christ by sharing how Christ met our spiritual thirst and needs and we can bring them to Christ through bringing their needs to Him in prayer – in His name.

Remember, we are making incarnation connections with people – which means that because the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon us after Jesus ascended, His very presence is in us and we are in Him and so when we encounter someone’s needs we are able to connect them to Christ simply because we are there as a Christian and – hopefully – full of the Holy Spirit so that we can continue to do Jesus’ work, and do even greater works than He did (John 14:12) because His Holy Spirit incarnates His presence in us.

So, brothers and sisters IN Christ, is actually easier to connect people to Christ after Pentecost than it was when Jesus was physically on earth, there is no need to go anywhere to get to Jesus... we don’t have to spend a day traveling over to the next town or village or dig our way through a roof!

Through the Holy Spirit we have direct access to the risen and glorified and ascended Lord Jesus Christ in Heaven and we can connect people to Him anytime and anyplace through our presence and through prayer in His name.

Now- pause here for a moment.

Part of going through the steps of discipleship is to help us understand the specific things that need to happen in a non-believer’s life in order for them to go from non-believer to full disciple of Jesus Christ...

But as we go through these steps, you might discover some that you’ve not been aware of or haven’t “completed” yet or perhaps you’ve been reluctant about or avoiding... and this

ability or responsibility to connect people to Christ through prayer or presence because you are filled and empowered with the Holy Spirit might be one of them.

So learning about the process of making disciple pushes us to become better disciples ourselves and continue our own training process and look at what it takes to move past where we have plateaued.

So I will say this, anyone who is a disciple of Jesus - let's not use the term Christian right now because that can have too much passive overtones too it – anyone who is a disciple of Jesus, who has started the discipleship process must come through this point where they realize they incarnate the presence of Jesus to others and that they have been equipped with the Holy Spirit to do that anywhere and anytime.

Brothers and sisters – do you realize this is you? No guilt or pressure friends – but this is something that we need to equip you to be able to do, it is part of discipleship.

Ok – so we are able to introduce people to Christ in this way and that is a good thing and we have an easier time with it because of the Holy Spirit than when Jesus himself was on earth.

Now being able to meet someone's need in the name of Jesus, by the power of the Spirit may help us introduce them to Him, but it's not the fullness of what it means to connect people to Christ because Jesus is much much more than a miracle worker who can help you out when nothing else seems to work.

And if people are going to become followers and disciples of Jesus their connection to Him has to become about much more than whatever it is they receive from Him.

Jesus himself had to confront the crowds of people who followed Him on this issue and thus we hear Him say to the people whose needs He was meeting *“If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person*

*cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:26-27)*

Strong words to our ears friends, but let us not get hung up on the hyperbole about hating our own family or our own life and miss Jesus’ message that connecting to Him is about much more than what we can get out of it for our family members or for ourselves... instead fully connecting to Jesus also means we will give up things and sacrifice in order to follow Him.

That’s certainly another discipleship nudge for each of us to consider isn’t it...

But how do we help those people whom we are connected to in the community and have built credibility with to be able to connect to Christ in such a holistic kind of way?

How can we help them grow from their initial introduction to Christ as someone who can help them in their problems to a point where He is someone for whom they will put up with problems?

How can we teach them that Christ is the Word incarnate, help them understand how His incarnation means He is their substitute and provides forgiveness for their unfaithfulness... do they even know they have been unfaithful to the Covenant and thus need a substitute?

Where can we teach them how to live everyday by having faith in their everyday substitute and actually get them connected through the Holy Spirit to Jesus Christ?

And how will they know what the proper response is when they receive the Holy Spirit and all of who Jesus Christ is through that?

There are many important aspects to making disciples brothers and sisters, and we can’t skip out on them or be reductionistic about them by saying things like *“well, the most important about following Jesus is... your relationship with God etc...”*

When Jesus gave us the command to do so he followed it up by saying *“and teaching them to obey everything I commanded you”* (Matt 18:20) not... ‘summarize everything I commanded you into a simplistic phrase that says everything and nothing at the same time.’

So – brothers and sisters – when it comes to fulfilling this part of the command that our Lord gave us for disciple-making and ensuring that people are holistically connected to Christ, there are a number of different ways that we can attempt to do this and cover all the bases.

But as I have reflected on it and studied about it and looked at it I believe that it happens best and most consistently when people are engaged in worshipping Jesus... which means they are Going Out to Church because we are inviting them.

And that is why when you take a look at our diagram of how Valleyview functions as a disciple-making body you see that the arrows from making connections into the community lead into our Sunday Worship service – which is shaped like a heart

to represent that this activity is at the heart of our disciple-making process.

Now, there are other ways to do it – but for us, we work at this part of disciple-making through worship. So let me explain to you how that happens and how this helps to connect people to Christ - with the understanding of worship that we receive from Psalm 24.

So Ps 24:1-2 says *“The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.”*

These two verses give us the Reason why there is such a thing that we call Worship.

If we were to read it in the Hebrew we would notice that the words translated as “founded” and “established” are common construction words used to describe the building of temples. So what this Psalm is saying is that the whole world was

created by God, identified with his covenant name Yahweh, to be a temple.

And what happens within a temple? You worship the one whose temple it is – Yahweh the Covenant God who created us and whose creatures we are, and we use what Yahweh has created by His Word – the earth and everything in it- to worship Him. *(This is why we do Green worship series)*

That is worship at its broadest and truest definition brothers and sisters, and when we understand and engage in this by gathering together on each Sunday morning something important happens in Connecting people – ourselves included - to Christ

It puts God, Yahweh, in His rightful place as the Creator who is in a Covenant relationship with His creatures and creation – and puts us in our rightful place as His creatures who are in Covenant with Him, and it reveals to us that this reality has come about and is still exists because of God’s Word – Jesus Christ.

So this connects us to Christ as the creating and sustaining Word of God and helps us understand that in following Him we are creatures who follow their Creator – and that has huge implications for our self-understanding and how we live our day to day lives.

The Wisdom books of the bible, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Job are all about how to honor the Creator by living wisely and skillfully in His creation. So a disciple of Jesus connects to Him as Creator by being obedient to God’s designs and intentions for His creation.

That is something that should be occurring in your life because of regular participation in Sunday worship... If only because it reflects the created order of working six days and taking Sabbath on the seventh.

And let’s be honest that our work and all our recreational activities that we are engaged in often hinders our progress in growing as disciples and making them – because our lives are

centered on them and they get all our time and energy and engagement. In short they have become idols.

And Ps 24:4 rightly identifies that when we *“trust in an idol or swear by a false god”* we are disqualified from being in a relationship with Yahweh our creator, from coming before Him to worship him because we are unfaithful covenant partners who are worshipping something created instead of the creator by asking the rhetorical question in vs 3 *“Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place?”*

The answer is *“The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god.”*

So brothers and sisters, disciple making through confession in worship drives home the reality that no one has clean hand or a pure heart when it comes to idolatry and worshiping false gods...

The only reason we are able to come into God Almighty’s presence in worship of Him is because worship connecting us to Christ as the one who fulfills the requirements for Covenant faithfulness of clean hand and no idolatry - on our behalf.

In making disciples through worship we must connect people to Christ as the Covenant substitute – whom we worship God through!

Otherwise brothers and sisters we are not making disciples... we are recruiting church attendees who come out when they have a free Sunday morning because it “feels inspiring” or “they like the music” or they “get a lot out of the message” and once that changes they are gone...

Brothers and sisters – we must make disciples who will take up their cross and follow Jesus because He is the only way we can connect to our Creator who is our source of life.

Connecting to God through Jesus Christ in Worship is worth giving up our Sunday mornings for, it is worth telling our kids



that worship comes first and sports or birthday parties come second... it is worth finding another gathering of fellow Christians to worship with when you are away on business or vacation.

As we seek to make such disciples – is this first true of us? Let us worship so that we connect to the Creator through Jesus and are we willing to sacrifice for that – because it is so worth it.

Which brings us to the next way in which people need to be connected to Christ... they need to be connected to Him as the one who rewards and blesses those who worship God through Him.

Ps 24:6 says *“Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, God of Jacob”* Now it is interesting to note that all the blessing and vindication that is mentioned in vs. 5 is received from God - as He is named the God of Jacob.

If you remember anything about Jacob, you may remember how he schemed and cheated and worked very hard in life in order to make something of himself, if you read from Genesis 25 through to Genesis 35 you will find plenty of examples of this...

But if there is a trait which stands out in Jacob, it is the way in which he related to Yahweh as someone whom He needed to be clever with, or bargain with, or wrestle with in order to secure the blessings - which God had already promised to give Him.

So to say that blessing and vindication come from the God of Jacob is to say that God has already chosen to bless in spite of behavior that does not deserve it – and that there is no human effort with regards to cleverness, or bargaining or even striving and wrestling with God that secures that blessing for us. That is entirely of God’s own sovereign choosing.

And people need to be connected to Christ as God’s sovereign Choice to give us all the blessings promised to Adam, Noah,

Abraham, Moses and David and to vindicate us against the accusation that we do not deserve such blessings because of our unfaithfulness.

In other words, when people are connecting with Christ through worship they are blessed in Him because God has chosen Christ, and not because they've convinced God to reward them for good behavior or for doing what is right and so on... or for sacrificing to come to worship.

Engaging in Worship through the practice of giving and through celebrating the Lord's Supper helps make disciples who are realizing more and more that Christ has connected to them and any response on our part is gratitude, and not cleverness, or bargaining.

Worship connects you to Christ as God's conduit and source for His blessings. There is no need to wrestle with God for any assurance of forgiveness and if you will be a part of the new heavens and the new earth that Christ will establish when He returns.

And that is where worship ends up according to Ps 24, anticipating the return of the King.

In the ancient world when a King would come, a city would open its gates to receive him and welcome him and so Psalm 24:7 and 9 repeat this exhortation to welcome the King. *"Lift up your heads, you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in."*

When we gather to worship, everything we do is centered around Jesus as He connects us to God and empowers us with His Holy Spirit and participating in that helps people to connect to Christ as the King, as the center of their lives, as the one who has the right to command them and have their allegiance.

But even more than that friends, vs. 8, 10 say that the King of Glory is Yahweh who is strong and mighty in battle.

This implies a clash of kingdoms, it implies a city that has been captive held by hostile powers that have been defeated and

the city is set free and opens the gates to welcome in the King who has defeated the occupiers.

So participating in worship also connects us to Christ the Conqueror, and makes disciples whose loyalties and allegiances to the powers of this world as changing and shifting over to the Kingdom of God.

And it makes us ambassadors and who announce Christ's impending return where, as it says in Rev 11:15 *"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever."*

And the good thing about how worship helps us make disciples by connecting people to Christ in all these various ways is that it's not just a one shot deal – it's something that happens week after week, year after year over the course of someone's life.

The more we engage in worship, the more we help those we are discipling to engage in worship, the better we help to

connect them to Christ as Creator, as Covenant substitute, as God's Choice to bless us, and as the Center of our lives and the Conqueror who brings in God's Kingdom.

That's why worship is at the heart of what we do at Valleyview and plays such an important role in the process of making disciples.

So, who have you started to connect with in the community? How are you doing in building credible connections with them? Because the Holy Spirit will use this to give you the opportunity to introduce them to Jesus, and then help them start the discipleship process and connect them to Christ by inviting them to come and participate in worship, and encouraging them to do so regularly.

This is so much more than just one hour on Sunday morning with some songs and a message - it's the heart of discipleship where life shifts from being about ourselves to becoming centered on Jesus Christ in the fullness of who He is. Amen.