

The Great Commission
Matthew 28:16-20

Friends, you may remember that back in October of 2011, couple of aid-workers, Jessica Buchanan and Poul Hagen, had been captured by Somalia pirates and were being held hostage.

Then four months later on Monday, January 23rd of 2012 President Obama – the Commander in Chief of the US Armed Forces, gave orders to go ahead with a covert rescue operation.

And so the men of SEAL Team Six were commanded to go and rescue Jessica and Poul.

And two days later, on Wednesday, January 25th, the rest of the world heard the news that SEAL Team Six had successfully carried out their mission and rescued the hostages.

And later on that day President Obama personally made a phone call to Mr. Buchanan to tell him that his daughter had been rescued and she was ok!

What a great “good news” story, especially for the aid-workers and their families!

And there were many things that contributed to the success of the mission right? Collecting intelligence on the location of the hostages, finding out what sort weapons the pirates had, the skill and training of the Navy Seals and so on...

But probably the most critical element to the success of the mission – and it’s so basic that we just assume it – was the willingness of the Navy Seals to obey their orders and complete the mission.

Can you imagine if that willingness to obey wasn’t there?

Imagine if the officer in charge of SEAL Team Six walked into the soldiers lounge area and says Men – you’ve got orders from the President to go on a mission!

And the marines look around at each other and say *“you know, we’re kind of comfortable here, we just started watching a movie so... we don’t really feel like going on a mission now- but thanks anyways...”*

Or what if SEAL Team Six started their mission and they had parachuted into the pirates’ territory, and were about to storm their headquarters, but then they quit the mission because the leader of the pirates had come out and yelled at them, called them a bunch of nasty names, and told them to go home.

Those are ridiculous scenarios aren’t they? That just wouldn’t happen would it?

Soldiers **obey** when their commanding officer tells them to do something don’t they? And no matter what happens they

don’t stop obeying until they complete the mission, or they die trying.

And friends, we may not realize it, but this morning we’ve heard our commanding officer give us our mission orders – in the passage of scripture which we read the Risen Lord Jesus Christ says to us *“Go and make disciples of all nations...”* (Matt 28:19)

And if emphasizing the fact that Jesus is our commanding officer seems a bit authoritarian to us, perhaps it may be better to call Jesus our Captain – since a Captain not only has the rank and authority needed to command our obedience...

But a Captain has also demonstrated the character and the courage needed to win our allegiance

So, Jesus’ command to “make disciples” comes to us after we’ve seen him minister to the poor and needy, heal the sick, cast out demons, stand up to legalistic Pharisees, and lay down his life – on a cross - for the sins of the world.

You see friends he didn't need to... but Jesus has earned the right to command us and to issue orders for us to continue the mission which God gave to Him – the task of “Making Disciples”

And so as we hear this passage of scripture read to us this morning, we need to hear these as our marching orders from our Captain – The Risen Lord Jesus Christ who has been given all authority, and who has won our hearts.

So it's not for us to say – “Go make disciples? Umm that sounds like hard work, so I don't really want to... or, sorry I'm too busy with other things.”

And if we've gotten started on this mission it means that we keep going! We can't give up because the people we are called to disciple give us a hard time, or they tell us they are not interested.

This is not Mission Impossible where it becomes our mission *“should we choose to accept it...”*

This is the great Co-Mission where our Lord Jesus says *“Go make disciples of all nations...”*

And friends Jesus words still stand - orders are orders.

So the only question is if we are going to be obedient or disobedient.

Now that's assuming that you have become a follower of Jesus Christ – and perhaps you are still trying to determine if you really want to sign up and follow Him.

Well, you are welcome to come and hang out with us here at Valleyview and observe and learn and experience more about what it means to be obedient to Christ - and our prayer is that the Holy Spirit will work through that to make you into a disciple!

And for those of us who have been following Jesus, I know that our desire is to obey our Lord – but this mission and task

which has been given to us can seem overwhelming and confusing.

And as Proverbs 19:2 says *“Zeal without knowledge is not good...”*

So we need do some training and sharpen our skills so that we are prepared to carry out this mission and this morning we’re going to start with an overview of what is involved in discipling others.

And we’ll continue that through Sept and October looking at the heart or the Soul of being of Disciple and then learning about Disciplines – all so we are good and prepared to begin focusing on this task which Jesus gave to us.

So, as we start our overview this morning I want to start by looking at who is to be the focus of our mission.

Jesus command tells us to make disciples *“of all nations.”*

And if you look around Valleyview this morning you can see the evidence that previous generations of Christians have been obedient to this.

Because there are people from many nations and ethnic backgrounds here at Valleyview – we have become part of Christ’s body as a result of being discipled.

Thank God for the obedience of those Christians who have gone before us – otherwise we would not know Christ.

So Valleyview has people from several countries in Africa, from Vietnam and Korea and China, the United States and the Caribbean, from Russia and Mongolia... did I miss anyone?

And we have a unique opportunity to continue to bear fruit in this way, because people from all over the world are moving to Calgary, to our community here in Springbank Hill.

Friends, God is literally placing the opportunity to continue to make disciples of all nations right in front of us!

Now this amazing opportunity is not without its challenges.

While we do not have to figure out how to get across oceans, and mountains, navigate across rivers and through forests – we do have to find a way through the jungle of religious pluralism and cultural autonomy.

You see, as we go out on this mission there will be those who will accuse us of being narrow minded, of trying to force our religion on to them, and reminding us of cultural mistakes those who have gone before us have made.

But the focus of this command we've received from Jesus can strengthen our resolve to carry out this mission in spite of this kind of opposition.

Our call to "disciple all nations" is not an expression of cultural superiority – as the pluralists and the cultural autonomists believe – but in fact it shows a high regard and respect for different cultures, it says that they are worth saving.

You see friends, the bible says that when Christ returns to make a new heavens and a new earth and establishes the City of God that *"The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful."* (Rev 21:26-27)

Friends, the glory and honor of the nations is their different cultures – but it's only cultures which have been disciplined, where Christ has removed what is impure and shameful and the Holy Spirit has transformed it so that it gives God glory, only those cultures are going to be a part of the new heavens the new earth.

Friends God loves the cultural diversity He created in this world and the focus of Christ's command to disciple "all nations" is his promise that a redeemed, transformed cultural diversity will always be a part of his Kingdom.

And the means to discipling cultures is of course discipling the people in those cultures, and a quick overview of our order reveals that involves going, baptizing and teaching.

Now if you've been a Christian for a while you may have heard about or met a missionary - someone who has learned another language and culture and traveled to other country so they can share the gospel with people who have not yet heard about it. Some of you may have even done that.

And Jesus' instruction to "go" in this passage certainly means that we should do this.

In fact I believe that some of you who are in our church right now have been sent here by God from whichever country was home for you so that you can help us "disciple" the nations who live here in the communities here on the Westside of Calgary.

But the grammar of this instruction is deliberately ambiguous – and it can also mean *"as you are going about...disciple!"*

In other words as you are going about your day to day activities... look for and take advantage of the opportunities given to you to disciple people.

Which makes sense – that's what God had commanded his people to in Deut 6:6-7 *"These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."*

As you go about your daily business – disciple...

But this doesn't mean that "discipling" is something you are to do all by yourself – that you are to single-handedly make disciples of all your neighbors and friends and colleagues.

Because friends, "discipling" is a team effort. Jesus gives these instructions to his disciples as a group, and it is as a group, as a team.... that we undertake this mission.

And we all have a part to play in it – according to our spiritual gifts, that’s why it is very important that you know what your spiritual gifts are – not just your natural talents and abilities but your grace gifts – and that’s why we talk about these so often here at Valleyview.

And these are gifts from God the Father, given to us out of the grace of Jesus Christ, and we use them by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And so when Jesus commands us to “baptize” people into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; the deepest and most profound meaning of this command is not fulfilled by simply dunking someone in water baptism.

What it means is that we – as the body of Christ – need to work together to immerse others (which is what ‘baptize’ means) in all that God the Father has given us, through the grace of Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

It’s easy to forget that water baptism is the external assurance of this spiritual reality – which is not just a one-time occurrence but something that must continue... as we go about our daily business.

So the good news is that if you are a disciple of Jesus, the Holy Spirit has given you have at least one grace gift – and most likely more than one, and you can always ask for more.

So, being obedient to go on our mission, working together with our gifts as a team to baptize people might look like this.

A team member who has the gift of Helps might create an opportunity for our church to baptize someone by getting some of us together to help their neighbor move.

From this opportunity someone on our team who has the gift of Evangelism might build a relationship with that person and share about Jesus Christ and pray for them.

And this gives the person who started all this a reason to invite them to visit a worship service to experience more of Jesus Christ.

And at the worship service those using their natural talents of music and hospitality through the spiritual gift of Servanthood provide a warm welcoming engaging experience.

And those who have the gift of Preaching and Teaching the Faith help them better understand the gospel and the bible,

And someone who has the gift of Shepherding or Nurturing Leadership helps this person to grow in their faith, and someone with the gift of Giving helps to fund all this work....

Can you see how they are “immersed” into the work of the Trinity in our lives?

And so God works through us to make his grace and forgiveness and new life a reality in theirs.

And to recognize and proclaim the reality of God working in their life and the promise this will continue for their future we give the sacrament of water baptism to them, and to their children.

And isn't this is exactly how the disciples started to fulfill this mission on the day of Pentecost? Remember the story?

The Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples, and they used the spiritual gifts which they had just received - gifts of tongues, preaching and evangelism – and together they went out and immersed many people from the different nations - who were gathered in Jerusalem - in the message of the gospel, and many of them believed!

So the disciples had started making disciples of all nations... baptizing them into the name of the Father, into the Son and into the Holy Spirit...

And of course we can forget the last part of Jesus command. “**teaching** them to obey everything I commanded you.”

Now again friends it takes all of us – the whole team - to do the teaching, not just the person with the gift of “Teaching the Faith.”

Why? Because we’re not just teaching to pass on information, we’re teaching in order to achieve **obedience** to Jesus commands.

Our goal is help people become disciples who **obey** their Lord.

And the most effective way to teach others obedience to **all** of Jesus’ commands, is for us to let them see us obeying them in our own lives as we live and work together – and most importantly that includes letting them see our obedience to his last command.

“Go make disciples of all nations!”

Because friends, Jesus is saying things need to come full circle. We have not matured as a disciple until we are participating in the mission to make more disciples.

So what does this mean for us?

Well, it’s a reminder to us about why Valleyview exists and what our purpose is.

For myself as minister, and for our leadership it means that we have to make sure we are being intentional about how we lead and organize things here, so that Valleyview is truly working and functioning together as a team – and making disciples.

And for other of us it will be an encouragement that we needed to hear - to help us keep going on this mission, to help us continue to be a part of a ministry team. So be blessed good and faithful servants!

But maybe you’ve been resisting being obedient, coming full circle and participating in making disciples of all nations.

You're too busy, it sounds hard, people might think you're one of those religious nuts, or you might think it's really not your problem.

But whatever the reason is, you've not committed yourself fully to the mission Christ gave us.

Well friends – let's go back to our opening story.

Imagine President Obama calling up Mr. Buchanan to explain to him that because the Navy Seals didn't feel like going on a rescue mission, if he wanted to get his daughter back he would have to just pay the ransom to the pirates.

Friends, when we don't commit ourselves to the mission - that's essentially what's happening.

In fact we're telling our heavenly Father that in spite of the fact that He's paid the ransom through the death of Jesus Christ, we are not willing to go and rescue his children.

In spite of someone else's being obedient to make a disciple out of us – through which Christ has rescued us from the power of sin and death.

Friends, I'm sure you can see -there is no valid excuse for not participating in the disciple-making mission with your gifts, not when the freedom and transformation and eternal destiny of our fellow human beings, our friends and family and neighbors is at stake – yes, it is that important.

So this fall as we experience more of what it means to be disciplined and to make disciples - immerse yourself in it, obey our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and in doing so, teach others to do the same.

So hear the words of our Lord, believe and obey “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me... and I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt 28:18,20)

Amen.

