

Go and Make Disciples of All Nations
Matthew 28:16-20
Key Verse: 28:19a

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit....”

Good morning! This is the last Sunday of 2007. Today, let’s review the mission of the church based on Matthew 28:16-20. I pray that we may find clear spiritual direction for the coming year and renew our mission in Christ.

In this passage the Risen Christ appears to his disciples. This is the only time he does so in Matthew’s gospel. The other gospels describe more appearances: to the two on the road to Emmaus, to the Eleven in the upper room at Jerusalem, to Simon, to Thomas. In the epistle of 1 Corinthians, Paul tells us that the Risen Christ appeared to James, and to himself. Paul mentions another appearance of the Risen Christ to more than five hundred brothers at the same time. Some Bible scholars suggest that he may be referring to this event described by Matthew. Let’s see how it happened.

I. They worshiped him (16-17).

When Christ rose from the dead, he first showed himself to some women who had come to his tomb to mourn over him. The Risen Christ wiped away their tears and turned their sorrow into joy. They recognized God in Jesus and they worshiped him. Then Jesus sent them to his disciples with the message to meet him in Galilee, according to his promise. On the night of his arrest, Jesus foretold that he, their shepherd, would be struck, and they would be scattered. He also promised, “But after I have risen I will go ahead of you into Galilee” (Mt 26:32). Jesus wanted them to hold this promise in their hearts as they went through the difficult ordeal. But Peter did not really accept it. Peter was too busy proclaiming what he was going to do for Jesus; he could not hear what Jesus was going to do for him. Nevertheless, what Jesus had foretold happened. Jesus was arrested and all of the disciples fled. Peter denied Jesus three times. The disciples never thought they would abandon Jesus. They were shocked and began to grieve over his sudden, violent death. They felt that everything was over and everything had failed. However, just as Jesus had said, he rose again and went ahead of them to Galilee. Despite our emotional ups and downs, Jesus’ words of promise are absolute; they will surely come to pass.

Verse 17 begins, “When they saw him....” On coming to Galilee they saw him. It seems that he revealed himself in a majestic way, exposing his glory as King of kings and Lord of lords. Jesus was no longer just a humble shepherd who looked like a friend and brother. Now his divine bearing was unmistakable. They recognized God in Jesus. So they worshiped him. What does it mean to worship him? First of all, it is to recognize God in Jesus. Worship belongs to God alone. Then it is to love Jesus with all our hearts and souls and strength. This love comes when we know how Jesus has loved us. While we were lost in sin, Christ died for us. He shed his blood on the cross and took all the pain and shame that our sins deserve. Those who really understand this bow at his feet and confess love to him from their hearts. They pledge loyalty to him and are ready to give their lives for him. This is what the disciples did. However, some of them doubted. They were free to doubt. Jesus did not force people to believe in him. Even though they met him in person, they did not automatically receive great faith. Each person had to decide to believe before they could worship Jesus.

Verse 18 begins, “Then Jesus came to them....” Now Jesus comes to them. Perhaps they felt they should not get too close to the Risen Christ. But the Risen Christ, who was glorious, came to them to allay their doubts and to give them peace. The Risen Christ had come to Thomas and allowed him to put his finger into his nail-pierced hands, and to put his hand into his wounded side. Then the Risen Christ said, “Stop doubting and believe.” Thomas knew without a doubt that Jesus was his Savior and that Jesus was God. Then Thomas said, “My Lord and my God!”

This is what Jesus really wants from us. Jesus wants us to accept his saving grace and to love him with all our hearts. This is worship. This is the point of our life of pilgrimage in this world. We saw this from the Magi who sought Jesus at great expense and ended their pilgrimage by worshiping him. Then there was Jacob, who was a man of human struggle. But in the end, he learned to worship God and is commended for this in the book of Hebrews. The goal of discipleship is not just for us to be saved from sin, but to worship Jesus as God. From this love relationship, mission flows. It comes from love, not heartless duty. Paul’s great mission journeys were initiated by the Holy Spirit

during worship service at the Antioch Church (Ac 13:2). World mission is rooted in vibrant and loving worship of Christ.

As we have worshiped the Lord wholeheartedly, he has worked mightily to send out pioneering missionaries to Ukraine, Turkey, and Canada, and to send out pioneering shepherds to Columbus, DuPage, Richmond, St. Louis, U. Chicago, Omaha, Yale, UIUC, Hawaii, St. Paul, Boston, UNC Wilmington, and Stanford. Last year, on the final Sunday of 2006, we had a farewell worship service with our coworkers from IIT. Then from the first Sunday of 2007, they began an independent worship service. Their worship service has grown in number from 25 to 35, and God sent us double the number we sent out. This year, on the last Sunday of 2007, we are having a farewell worship service for the new West Loop UBF Chapter. We believe God will again double our number. The Lord is spreading the worship of Jesus through us. Our worship services are very important. Let's dedicate ourselves to worship Jesus wholeheartedly in the new year.

II. All authority has been given to Christ (18).

Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Wow! That is quite a statement. Yet Jesus had already exercised great authority. Jesus had the authority to forgive sins. To demonstrate this authority, Jesus healed a paralyzed man. Sin is what paralyzes us spiritually. But Jesus' power to forgive sins heals our spiritual sickness. Jesus empowers us to serve God in holiness and righteousness. Jesus had authority to raise the dead. When Jesus said to a dead girl, "Little girl, I say to you, get up," she got up and asked for something to eat. Jesus had authority over Satan. After defeating the devil in the desert by standing on the absolute word of God, Jesus drove out demons and set prisoners free. In John's gospel, Jesus claimed the authority to give eternal life and the authority to judge. Jesus had this authority already. However, it was contingent on his obedience to God's will. Jesus had to obey the will of God to the end to confirm his authority. Through his suffering, death and resurrection he fulfilled his obedience to God completely. God gave Jesus all authority in heaven and on earth. The most powerful angels in heaven are in submission to Christ. All human beings must bow before him, either as willing worshipers, or as self-condemned sinners. All powers of darkness must submit to him. Philippians 2:9-11 says, "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Jesus wants his disciples to know his power and authority and to trust in it. It is on the basis of his authority that he sends them out to do his work. When we accept the great authority of Jesus Christ, it affects us in two ways. First, it gives us a right view of life and the world. For example, before knowing Jesus' authority, Peter was scared of the Jewish leaders. They had crucified Jesus and seemed to be stomping around to do evil without any constraint. However, after meeting the Risen Christ, Peter realized that they were very limited; they only did what God allowed them to do. So he said to them, "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge, and you with the help of wicked men put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him." Peter rebuked them to repent and many did. Jesus has absolute authority over our lives, over our nation, over this world. We don't need to fear any worldly authority or the power of darkness. There is a saying that "Fear knocked on the door. Faith answered. There was no one there."

Second, faith in Jesus' authority enables us to experience the power of God in our lives of mission. In Ephesians 1:18-20 Paul wrote, "I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead...." Jesus' power gives us victory over everything, even the power of death. At the Young Disciples' Conference this past week, one young woman shared her testimony with us. When she was a teenager her older brother suddenly died in a roller coaster accident. It was on the day of her parents' 24th wedding anniversary. The family went into mourning and was almost devastated. But as Karen studied the word of God, she could meet Jesus who rose from the dead. Darkness turned to light; she overcame the power of death. She has been a good influence to her family and is helping them to know Jesus' resurrection power. Though Karen is small in size, she is powerful in doing the work of God. Let's all believe Jesus' great authority from our hearts.

III. Therefore go and make disciples (19-20).

What did Jesus do with the great authority God had given him? Look at verse 19a. “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...” Jesus sent his disciples out to spread his saving grace to all nations. Jesus wanted to liberate mankind and creation from bondage and restore God’s righteous reign with spiritual order and peace and love. Jesus chose to do this by using his disciples to make disciples. Now they must imitate what Jesus had done.

For example, Jesus called Matthew to be his disciple. At the time, Matthew was Levi, a tax collector. He was regarded as a public sinner because he collaborated with Rome to extract money from his poor and suffering people. In our time, he may be compared to a drug dealer. He did not mind that others were badly damaged by his actions as long as he made money in the process. However, he became a wretched man inwardly due to his selfishness. Yet when Jesus saw him, he was simply a man who had made a wrong choice. Jesus saw that he could be a truly great man and the best man in the world. With great hope, Jesus called him: “Follow me.” Jesus bore misunderstanding by the religious leaders with great hope for Matthew. Jesus was with Matthew for the next 3 ½ years. Jesus showed Matthew his grace and power. Jesus taught Matthew his compassion. Jesus planted faith in God Almighty in Matthew’s heart. Jesus planted the grace of forgiveness and the power of the resurrection in Matthew’s soul. Matthew was changed from the inside out. Matthew became a man who loved God and others, and one who served with a life-giving spirit. Matthew wrote this gospel, which includes the Sermon on the Mount. According to tradition, his gospel became the training manual for raising disciples in the early church. As Matthew was discipled by Jesus, he went out and made disciples.

The primary task of Jesus’ disciples is to make disciples. With this truth in mind, Henrichsen wrote, “Disciples are made, not born.” Disciple making must be intentional. We must decide to make disciples. They do not magically appear as we worship God on Sunday. They do not simply mature because we meet them for one hour a week to study the Bible. They are raised when shepherds are with them as Jesus was with his disciples. It requires a deliberate effort that involves sacrifice, humility, faithfulness and suffering from their shepherds. Recently, Greg Hawkins, the executive pastor of Willow Creek Church, co-authored a book called “Reveal: Where are you?” It contains the results of a survey carried out by Willow Creek which indicates that the seeker-sensitive movement has been ineffective in raising disciples of Christ. It concludes that more time must be spent in Bible study and prayer and in personal mentoring to raise disciples effectively.

The strength of UBF has been in making disciples of Christ among college students. One prominent missiologist has called UBF, “Navigators on steroids.” After accepting Christ during my college days, I was discipled by Dr. Samuel Lee for 18 years. We were together almost all the time. Especially he trained me in Bible study, message delivery and shepherding. He did so with a father’s heart. He celebrated my small successes and agonized with me over my many failings. Sometimes he spent the night praying for me as well as for others. He literally poured his life into making disciples of Christ. Now we are trying to follow his example. We emphasize one-to-one Bible study and caring for God’s sheep as our own children. However, through this passage I realize the need for a new decision to make disciples of Christ. We must all pray to raise one disciple of Christ in 2008. We must focus our campus ministries on making disciples of Christ.

Verse 19 includes the words, “...of all nations.” Jesus’ end goal is to make disciples of all nations. As we care for individual people, we must pray that the nation may be changed through them. We must pray for North America to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. We must pray for all nations to be Christian nations through influential disciples of Christ.

Then how can we make disciples? Look at verse 19b,20a. “...baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” First, we must baptize people. This goes beyond performing a ceremony. It means helping them to repent of their sins, accept the saving grace of Christ, and enter into God’s family with a real life commitment.

Second, Jesus tells us to teach them to obey everything he has commanded us. The emphasis here is on planting a right attitude toward Jesus’ words: we must obey Jesus’ words. It is not obedience to another sinful human being or to a system. It is obedience to Jesus’ words. In teaching obedience, we must practice obedience and show an example. When we obey Jesus practically we can help others to learn of Jesus. We cannot pick and choose which teachings to obey and to teach others to obey. We must obey everything Jesus commanded us.

In teaching obedience, accountability is implied. We must be willing and courageous to hold each other accountable. This is why testimony sharing in small groups is so valuable. This must never be a habitual activity that borders on hypocrisy. It must be a time of sharing spiritual struggle together and praying for one another from our hearts.

Finally, Jesus gives us a promise. Look at verse 20b. "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." When we obey this command, Jesus works with us. In fact, it is Jesus who raises disciples through us by his own grace and power. Mother Barry claimed this promise when she went to Korea in 1955. Now we can see how Jesus used her to make disciples.

Today we pray especially for the new West Loop UBF chapter. God has already used Dr. Ben Toh's family and his coworkers to raise many disciples of Christ. May the number of Jesus' disciple in their chapter double by 2010. May our entire Chicago UBF ministry double the number of disciples by 2010. Let's all decide to make disciples in the coming year.