

Week 1 Matt 28:19a1

As Matthew closes off his Gospel he concludes with the now famous words of the Great Commission. For these next 7 weeks we are going to be exploring the why and how of this Bible passage in the context of the Ablaze mandate. Doesn't it stand alone, you say? Of course it does. Does Ablaze stand alone and independent of Scripture? Definitely not! In the Southeastern District we have taken on the joyous burden of wanting to be more courageous in reaching out to the lost in our geographic areas, beginning new ministries, and building up established ones.

Just where do we get the framework to make this all happen? As the people of God, we have to go to the Word for our direction and encouragement. So that is where we begin.

In the opening words of this Great Commission statement Jesus calls his disciples to action. The Message translates this in its paraphrase as, "While you are going." The NIV puts it as, "Go!" Either way, we are called to an action. Begin the journey and more will be given to you as you start out as the Message indicates, or just move as the NIV puts it.

Action is called for. We must "do" something. The Great Commission is about us moving and being the eyes and ears of the Lord in His creation. We carry the Word. We bring the Word. Our action is the reaction God is looking for. Without us, it just doesn't happen. We are as important to the process as the disciples were. It is still the Body of Christ, His Church, who takes the message to the world. When we understand this and are willing to act, move, GO, we join the ranks of believers from all over the world and from every age doing the very thing God has asked of His children.

Sum it up like this, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Wouldn't you want to hear about the best news ever? Certainly you do. So do the people around you. Live in the light of movement. Go! It is a blessed work we are about. The joyful thing is we aren't alone as we move out.

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Matt 28:19-20

Week 2 Matt 28:19a2

Make disciples. What is a disciple and how do I make one? Where do I find the tools? How do I know if I have been successful? What if I make a mistake? I am afraid. What if I don't make a mistake? Valid questions all.

Look at how Jesus called and made disciples. In Matthew 4:19, Jesus shows us just how He made disciples. "Come and follow me." Could it be any simpler than that? We lead others into discipleship. I can hear you saying now, "Not me, that is a job for the pastor or someone who can talk to people. Certainly he doesn't mean me does he?" Yes, you, and if not you, then who? You talk to people every day. Of course, we think that once we start talking about God we have to be different than we are. If that is the case, then there are some things that need to change anyway.

The thing that I like about how Jesus made disciples is that it seemed so natural, such a part of Him. It is not the divine part, though that is a big part of it. Reread the passage from Matthew 4 and look at John 1:35-39. What do you see? Miracles and lightning, or maybe a neon sign over Christ's head showing just who He is? Do you hear angel choruses singing their hearts out? No, you read about a man who just talked to some men and said for them to follow him or come and see where he was staying.

We are asked to only imitate what Jesus did, no more and no less. Can we be natural in our conversations and interactions, looking for ways to be ourselves and yet allow Christ to show Himself? It can't be done overnight, and yet it also doesn't take special classes or a certain sort of person to be successful at it. It does, however, require a naturalness that doesn't seem forced or contrived. That takes prayerful practice. As with any new skill, practice means action. I will share a story from my own life. I took music lessons as a child. The instrument isn't important, but the fact that I walked by the instrument without practicing and just wishing that I could be good at it has caused me to pay the price of not being able to play that instrument today. Only with actual hands on practice could I have made that instrument a part of who I am.

When we make disciples, it takes the practice of carrying Christ naturally and revealing Him as an active part of our life. In other words, to make disciples, we have to be one, too.

Matt 28:19-20

Week 2 Matt 28:19a2

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Week 3 Matthew 28:19b1

All Nations

As Christians we really put up a fuss when it comes to this part of the Great Commission. We only want to deal with people we can relate to. We want to be comfortable if we are going to go and make disciples. We almost or actually do start to bargain with God. “If I have to go and if I have to make disciples, can they at least be people that I am comfortable with, people who are like me and that I can relate to?” We want to put qualifiers on our outreach.

When we were little, the neighborhood kids would form clubs. They were clubs that kept people out and had, by the nature of the organization, limited membership. You could only be a boy or a girl or from our block. The list of qualifiers goes on and on. As we got older, the qualifiers changed and we had to be pretty or handsome, athletic or smart, to fit with “the” group. Even in today’s internet world we separate into groups. We call them interest groups. However, they can be just as restrictive as your neighbor’s tree-house or fort was.

The pain of separation and exclusion is something you never forget. It is a hurt one never recovers from. For that very reason, God’s people can never sink to that level of operation. That was the hallmark of Christ’s ministry. He never excluded anyone and often went out of His way to include people who had been shut out so long; it never occurred to them that they could be included. Lepers, tax collectors, prostitutes, foreigners, women and children, some of the most shut out members of the society and culture of the day were not only included, but sought out, singled out and given a special blessing.

We are called to that same exciting and inclusive ministry with the words, “all nations”. That means that everyone we meet has the potential to be a brother or sister in Christ with us. It is scary and yet at the same time exciting too. Isn’t it?

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Matt 28:19-20

Week 4 Matthew 28:19b2

So far we have explored what we are to do, how we are supposed to do it once we start, and to whom we are to go and do it to. Now that we are hopefully more open to living that part of Matthew 28:19, just what are we to do with all these disciples we are meeting and getting to know? This week and next we will explore together the answer to that question.

What do we do with a disciple? That is the real question. That is assuming that we have made a connection and revealed Christ as we have been told to go and do, practiced enough to be natural at it, and stopped being exclusive in who we share ourselves with. Yes indeed, the fulfillment of the Great Commission is ultimately learning how to share ourselves. How and why you say? "I thought the Great Commission was all about sharing Christ?" It is! The Christ who dwells in us is the only Christ we can share.

What about the Gospel? The Word is important and don't think I am playing it down here. Time and time again in the New Testament we are told that the Word is alive, that it dwells in us, and that it dwells there richly. How did it get there? Baptism! That is why it is so very important to include this powerful Sacrament in the game plan for discipleship.

In the book of Acts, Philip shares who Jesus is with an African court official.

Take a look at that text for just a moment, Acts 8:26-40. In this account we see the Great Commission done as Jesus is asking us to. Philip goes, Philip shares himself and what he knows, not what he thinks he knows. A true maker of disciples can only share what is real to them or part of them. It is based in the Word of God. You can't find two more different people than Philip and an African Court Official.

So we have all the ingredients for the Great Commission to work as the plan was intended for. What was the result? Baptism! The power of the very covenant God uses to make us His children is the natural response by the Ethiopian to Philip following the steps of the Great Commission.

When we live the Great Commission as a part of our lives, the results are people demanding to be a part of the Kingdom of God. That happens through Baptism.

Matt 28:19-20

Week 4 Matthew 28:19b2

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Matt 28:19-20

Week 5 Matthew 28:20a1

Here is the second part of what we are to do with the people that God puts in our path to disciple. This is for us, too, because this part of the Great Commission we never leave, no matter how long we are a Christian, our age, or background. We continue to be students and teachers all our lives.

No matter what the person or where they are in their walk with Christ, they/we need to be life-long learners. We don't just leave people and begin all over again to look for new fish in the sea, so to speak. We are called into relationships with the people God would have us encounter to guide in discipleship. That may mean a life-long relationship. That may mean that we continue to share our faith with them long after they become brothers and sisters in the faith with us.

This sort of intimate relationship of student and teacher is the very reflection of the relationship that Christ has with us. Again and again we are drawn to how Jesus did it to see how we should. The hallmark of His ministry was a life led by love. It was a life led by the need to draw people to Him and keep them there. When Jesus was going to leave the disciples He promised them a new teacher. The Holy Spirit picked up where Jesus left off in the training of the disciples. Even when they became Apostles, the learning never stopped.

The Book of Acts is full of stories where all the apostles continued to learn and grow in their faith as time went on. We are no different. The formal term for this is Sanctification, the process by which the Holy Spirit continues to make us more holy all of our lives. We as life-long learners also fulfill a role for those around us by sharing what we learn as the Holy Spirit grows us. This is the "teaching" part of Matthew 28:20. By fulfilling that role as teacher and learner we convey to those around us what God has commanded us as the children of God to be about.

Remember, you never stop learning and the best learning is shared learning.

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Matt 28:19-20

Week 6 Matthew 28:20a2

“I am with you always.” The sheer comfort of those words has the ability to give the listener or reader deep peace. The promises of God are proven to be true over and over again. In the NIV the phrase starts off with the word, “surely.” Jesus used this word when he wanted to get the attention of His hearers. Think of it as a drum roll, a statement in itself that something important is about to be said.

There can be nothing more important to the weary traveler, life-long Christian, or a new believer than the promise that God will be with us no matter what, to know that no matter where we go or what we do, God is there with us. The security in that promise is almost life itself. It remains the ultimate statement of hope.

For those of us already in the family of God, we almost take those words for granted. What an eye-opener to see the look of wonderment on the face of a person new to the ways of God to find out they are never without the comforting presence of God again. We need to see that look to understand the power behind that promise. There is no person that can make that sort of promise and keep it. God can and does.

When was the last time you felt all alone in the world? Was there a time when you felt God wasn't listening? Have you ever wondered if your prayers were heard? I am sure that everyone has felt that a time or two. The great joy for us is that the promise of this verse isn't dependent on how we feel or experience God! It just is a statement of fact. So that means that even when we don't feel the comforting presence of God that it isn't there. It is, because God says so. That alone should give us hope amid strife and discord. It should be a comfort when we feel lost and alone. Even if the rest of the family abandons us, the Father promises to be with us.

How wonderful is the news of never being alone. Even if we shared nothing else of our relationship with God, this point of our relationship must never be withheld. It would be a cruel thing to offer the saving message of the Gospel and leave out this promise that says to the believer that when you risk, when you step out in your faith, you never go alone. It says to the new disciple, I am with you in the newness of our relationship and as your God. I am there for the long haul. What a powerful promise.

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Matt 28:19-20 Easter Insert Series

Week 7 Matthew 28:20b

“To the very end of the age” There is a limit. There is a time when God will say, “Enough!” and this space and time will cease to be. There is a limit. Until that time we need to be about the work of the Great Commission.

We have been told by Jesus and the writers of the New Testament that the time is short. This is not short as we know short to be, but contained in the framing of “end” in this passage is the concept that we work as if the time could be ending at any moment. It is a controlled haste that moves us no matter how much time we have.

There will come a time when no more will be able to be reached to hear the saving message of new life and birth. The time for action is now. We can't put it off. The concept of Ablaze understands the time frame we have to work in.

For too long we have sat on the sidelines and waited for others to do the work that we should be doing - work we have been called to - work we have been gifted for - work set aside for us to do and no one else.

Each of us has a set of gifts for spreading the Gospel and helping to make disciples that nobody else does. We are part of a team. Each of us plays a major role in the accomplishment of the task. The task is to make disciples, baptize them, train them, teach them and not worry where they come from. We have only a set time frame in which to accomplish the task.

Ablaze is the call to become a part of this Great Commission. It is a call to each of us. Go back again and review the promise made to us right in the middle of the Great Commission. This is a statement so bold that it is hard, almost impossible, to miss. “I am with you” is the promise that if we are faithful in stepping out in faith to do this work, it will be accomplished. It will be accomplished in His time and in the way He wants it done.

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