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Making Disciples
Matthew 28:16-20

*Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 When they saw him, they **worshiped** him; but some **doubted**. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 **Go therefore and make disciples** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and **teaching** them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, **I am with you always, to the end of the age.**"*

At some point after *the resurrection* of Jesus, the eleven disciples gathered on a mountain in Galilee...and they *waited*.

And Jesus appears to them—as their resurrected Lord and friend, but still it says that some of them *doubted*!
Isn't that *reassuring*—that they worshiped, but some doubted?
What if that's just a reminder—
that *doubt is a part of faith*, not a sign that we don't believe!
I find it comforting to know that even though Jesus was standing right before them, they still had their doubts!
Doubt is ok—Jesus *comes to those who wait, and those who doubt!*

So Jesus appears to the 11, and gives them this mission—most people call this passage the *Great Commission*.
And it's a tall order, isn't it?
*Go therefore and **make disciples** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you*

In other words, Jesus is telling them to do what he did, *and more*!
What would you think, if Jesus *asked this of you*, today?
And yet— isn't that what's happening?
Isn't he asking us to *continue his ministry*—here and now?

Which begs the question—what does he mean "*make disciples*"?
Well, in Greek it means to teach.

And a disciple is a *student or learner*.

In fact, in Jesus' day, a disciple would *give up their daily life*, to travel and learn from their teacher!

Disciples had a very *close relationship* with the teacher.

Jesus is saying *go and teach—go and make students* for me—people who want to learn about me, and have a relationship with me.

Which makes me wonder—*are WE really disciples?*

Don't we need to be TRUE disciples, before we can make any more?

So that's the question for us today---

Are we *true students* of Jesus Christ?

Do we have a *close relationship* with Him?

Do we?

If not, how can find that?

A few years ago, there was a great article entitled, "*Faking Cultural Literacy*," by Karl Greenfield. He argued that social media lets us pretend to know something about almost everything—even if our "knowledge" is deplorably shallow.

We tend to *pick and choose* little bits of information, share it with others, and think we know what's going on in the world.

Six in 10 Americans say they really just *read the news headlines*, and yet we feel like we can tweet and post and comment about any news online.

Karl Taro Greenfield, "Faking Cultural Literacy," The New York Times (5-25-14)

I think we do this all the time with things that are *political hot-topics*,

Or code words---we hear it, and we think we understand it.

But we don't take the time to learn the history, the meaning, the context of what we're talking about.

It's kind of like talking about the *LGBTQ community*—do we really know what we're saying?

Do we know the people behind the terminology?

Or what about *race and politics*?

Like, do we know what Juneteenth means? It's history and meaning, or do we just think it's a holiday for African Americans?

We need to *LEARN--to learn*.

And when it comes to Jesus, we **REALLY do need to learn**.
 We **don't want to PRETEND** to know Jesus, do we?
 Even though that's easier—and that's what we often do.
 It's easier to just scan the Bible, and show up to worship,
 And be a little bit involved with church, and call it good.

But is that all that's needed?
 Doesn't Jesus **wants us to be true disciples**, students?
 Aren't we invited to be lifelong learners---following our Teacher, Jesus Christ?

Of course, this **doesn't mean** we have all the **answers about Jesus**, not at all!
 Sometimes I think it means we have a lot more **QUESTIONS!**

Writer Ralph B. Smith once made an observation that
children ask roughly **125 questions per day**
 and adults ask about **6 questions** per day,
 so somewhere between childhood and adulthood, we lose 119 questions per day!
 Mark Batterson, *A Trip Around the Sun*, (Baker Books, 2015), pg. 163

Have you lost some questions along the way?
 What if we became **more curious, more interested** in Jesus?
 What if we asked more and more questions ---of sermons--
 Of the Bible, of worship, of conversations with other believers?
 What if we were just more curious?

I believe if we read the Gospels,
 We see that **Jesus preached** by asking far more **questions than answers**.
He preached by telling more stories, than by telling people what to do.

So, what does that mean for us, today?
 What if it means we can and should **ask lots of questions?!**
 What if it means we should share stories, more than telling people what to do?

What if means we should be people who **spend the time** needed
 to truly know Jesus,
 and have a relationship **WITH** Him—
 not just some knowledge **ABOUT** Him!

Once we spend time getting to know Jesus—
 Once we start to become true disciples----
how then do we MAKE new disciples?

First we need to make a distinction between making disciples
 And making *church members*.
 They are not necessarily *the same thing, right?*
 I mean, you can be a church member and not have a relationship with Jesus!

The goal is to have that *relationship*.
 The goal is to be *a student, a learner*, a believer, on a faith journey—
 with our teacher Jesus!
 That's a lot more than membership in a church, isn't it?

So, how do we *make disciples*, and teach them to obey Jesus?
 We make disciples by *teaching—and modeling* the life we want for others.
 We need to *speak* the good news.
 We need to *live out* the good news.
 We *can't just assume* people will *absorb* faith by being in church!
 Or that they learn it all by hearing some good words in worship.

We want to teach others about Jesus,
 so that they *want to follow Him and learn for themselves!*

But, this is where I wonder—is making disciples an *impossible task?*
 Is this mission too much for us ordinary people?
 Is it like asking us to cure cancer?

Well, what if IS impossible?
 And what if that's the POINT—*what if that is good news?*
 Because our *God is in the business* of doing the impossible!

So--- what if Jesus gave us this mission,
 knowing that we would have to *completely rely* upon His power—
 the power of the Holy Spirit---to do it!
 What if that's why he says,
And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

I don't know that we can make disciples on our own,
 I think we need the ***Holy Spirit to work through us***,
 Then we can reach out into the world to make more disciples of Jesus!

Sharing our faith is part of being a disciple.
 And for Presbyterians, that sounds pretty ***scary***, doesn't it?
 We are not known for knocking on doors, or speaking publicly about our faith.

In fact, studies show that MOST people avoid talking about religion,
 even within their own families.
 The Pew Research Center reports, "*religion [seems] to be a subject many people avoid. About half of U.S. adults tell us they seldom (33%) or never (16%) talk about religion with people outside their family. And roughly four-in-ten say they seldom (26%) or never (13%) discuss religion even with members of their immediate family.*" Alan Cooperman, "Many Americans don't argue about religion—or even talk about it," Pew Research Center (4-14-16)

But what if the ***Holy Spirit*** can give us just the right ***words and opportunities*** to share our faith?

I don't know how many times I pray silently this simple prayer:
Lord just give me the words.
 And you know what? That prayer really works!
 God does give us the words—just when we need them!

And what if we ***don't have to share 'religion'?***
 what if we just share ***what we know about God and faith***—
 like ***what God has done in your OWN life.***
 What if just shared our ***God-sightings?***
 What if we shared our ***hope?***
 What if we shared how ***God got us through*** the worst times of our lives?
 Or how the church family ***IS our true family?***

What if we invite folks to be part of the church,
 By inviting them to worship and study and community?
 By telling them what effect faith has had on our lives?
 What if we're just ***REAL and down to earth*** about our faith?

And what if we do this as a ***CHURCH?***
 What if we have programs that encourage people to grow in faith?

Like more Bible studies, and service groups,
and worship that challenges us to grow and learn?

I've always been fascinated by how **ACTORS take their job so seriously**
as they prepare for new movie roles.

It makes me wonder—are we doing as much for our “jobs” as disciples?
Are we **taking our faith as seriously** as actors take their jobs?

For her role in **Black Swan**, **Natalie Portman** trained with New York City Ballet
for eight hours a day, six days a week for 12 months!

For his role in **My Left Foot**, **Daniel Day-Lewis** interacted with disabled patients
in Ireland. Between takes during filming, he remained in a wheelchair and was
spoon-fed and carried around by the crew.

For his role in **The Revenant**, **Leonardo DiCaprio** plunged in and out of icy rivers,
ate raw buffalo meat.

To better imitate **Ray Charles**, **Jamie Foxx** wore prosthetic eyelids, leaving him
blind for most of each day. Occasionally, he was inadvertently left alone on a set,
the crew forgetting he was blind.

He also learned all the piano parts and lost 30 pounds in one week for the role.

Emily Zemler, "15 Actors Who Went to Seriously Extreme Measures for a Role," February 5, 2016;
<http://www.elle.com/culture/movies-tv/a33861/extreme-role-prep/>;

It's pretty humbling to think about, isn't it?

What are WE doing to grow our faith?

What are WE doing to be TRUE DISCIPLES of Jesus,
and encourage others to do the same?

I think we receive the **Holy Spirit power that we need**—

when we **take the time for our own faith** to grow---

when we join Bible study and really dive into God's Word,

when we participate in worship---regularly,

when we take the time to pray, and pray, and pray some more....

When we take time to serve, and give generously, and enjoy Christian fellowship!

Kind of like actors studying their subjects!

And as **we grow** in faith---and **receive the Holy Spirit's power**—

We can share that with others!

There are days that God helps me grow by just getting me outside to pray.
 I take my little dog Jack for a walk around our neighborhood and spend the whole
 time praying and thanking God for my blessings.
 It brings a total change of attitude. I come back home with such joy,
 And then I can share that.

There are times when we are all studying the Bible together,
 Like during Lent this year, learning about Sabbath,
 And I see things I've never seen before,
 And hear things I've never heard in God's Word—
 And I can share that—I want to share that.

So, what about you?

***How and where and when do you grow in your faith?
 Are you growing through Study? Prayer? Worship? Fellowship?***

How are WE ***growing*** our faith, together?
 How are we ***avoiding the temptation*** to just be “people in pews”?
 How are we becoming ***DISCIPLES***?

Friends hear the ***Good News*** of the Gospel today:
 As disciples of Jesus Christ, we have a ***mission***—the Great Commission.
 We are to make disciples.

And this mission is made possible by the Holy Spirit, working in us.
May we have the courage to BE true disciples,
 So we can help others do the same.
 For the gift of discipleship, all God's people can say together, Amen.