

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Matthew 28:16-20

Matthew 28:16-20: 16 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."

The story is told about a barber who had just been gloriously saved in an old-fashioned revival meeting. The next morning at work, he wanted to share his new faith and witness to the lost. A customer came in, and the barber began to shave him. He was trying to muster up the right words to say. Finally, as he stood with his razor poised over the man's throat, he asked, "Are you prepared to meet God?"

I believe this guy gets As in talent, enthusiasm, and effort, but he may want to practice his timing.

Today's scripture reading takes place after the resurrection of Jesus. The eleven remaining disciples meet Jesus at a predetermined site on an unknown mountain. Some pretty important things always seem to happen on the mountaintop—the mountain in the temptation story, the sermon on the mount and the mountain of transfiguration.

Like those mountains, this one signifies Jesus' authority to gather and teach the people of God. Jesus' authority comes from God and is solidified by the act of God raising Jesus from the dead. With this authority, Jesus is in the position to deliver the charge or assignment that follows in this text.

Go! Go therefore and make disciples of all nations! The first thing that should grab our attention in this statement is Jesus' command to "Go!" Jesus didn't say that we should simply open up the front doors of our church buildings and roll out the welcome mat to invite people to come inside. He said "Go!"

Did you also notice that Jesus' command to the disciples was not to go to only a certain group of people? The Message translation of the bible says it this way: "Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near," Jesus didn't say, go only to the Jews, but go to all people; and all people would include the Gentiles. As Jesus' present-day disciples, we also are commanded to go to all people—not just people like us, not just people we feel comfortable around.

Several years ago, along with three other pastors, I participated in a denominational program that afforded me the opportunity to study missional ministry. We did a lot of reading after which we discussed what we read. We also traveled to New Zealand and Australia to meet with authors who lived there and who wrote some of the books we had read. I became very excited about missional ministry and was anxious to apply what I learned into my ministry

A few short years after that, I was called to serve as chaplain at Fahrney-Keedy. I was confused, even a bit frustrated with God for calling me to a ministry where I could not foresee using all that I learned about missional ministry. However, now reflecting on my ministry there, God has revealed a very important lesson to me related to our mission field.

I hear our churches longing for and committing to reaching out to our young people and bringing them into our churches. We say to ourselves, that if we do not do this, our churches will die because there will not be anyone to carry us into the future. This seems to make sense.

Yet, what I've discovered over the years of my service as chaplain at Fahrney-Keedy is that this thinking may be misguided motivation 5hq5 limits the scope of our ministry. I can't tell you how many times I visited people and asked them if they have a church affiliation, a church family they are connected to, only to hear them answer, no, or maybe, at one time a long time ago. As I think about that now, I realize that these are people who have been overlooked, people who do not know Jesus as their personal Savior. And it wasn't just a few people. How were they missed?

This got me to thinking that the church's mission field needs to be expanded. We cannot just go after the young people to make them disciples. We need to reach out to them, to the children, the teenager, AND, the middle aged and the older adults. Thinking more deeply about this, our motivation as a church should not be for our survival or even to grow our church. Our motivation, driven by our love of God, should be to invite and help all people know Christ. People fall through the cracks when our motivation limits the scope of who we try to reach with the Gospel. We should not feel good about that.

Jesus said to go to all nations, all people, red, yellow, black and white, young and old, rich and poor, straight and gay, people with piercings and tattoos or no piercings or tattoos—all people. Let me ask whom are we trying to reach for Jesus? I didn't ask, who are we comfortable reaching out to, or who are we reaching out to for our survival. I just asked, who are we going into the world to reach?

There's another thing about Jesus' command to go that may right away turn some people off because they may think it sounds like an order to do street corner evangelism, and that makes them feel uncomfortable. Well, maybe that is what it means for some people, people gifted and comfortable with addressing people they meet upfront about the Gospel, but not everyone is gifted for doing this. There's no shame in admitting that this is not one's talent.

I think of Moses whom God called to lead his people out of Egypt. Moses told God he felt he would not be good for this mission because he could not speak well; so, God called Aaron to be Moses' helper because Aaron could speak well.

We are commanded to be authentic Christians called to make disciples using the talents, gifted to us by God. Each and every one of us have received from God gifts and talents to use for the building of God's Kingdom. The Apostle Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, names some of these gifts (this is in chapter 12, beginning with verse 27): "You are Christ's body—that's who you are! You must never forget this. Only as you accept your part of that body does your "part" mean anything. You're familiar with some of the parts that God has formed in his church, which is his "body": apostles, prophets, teachers, miracle workers, healers, helpers, organizers, and those who pray in tongues."

All of us are gifted with talents to do the work of God. Maybe you are a miracle worker, maybe not in the sense that you can take a few fish and loaves of bread to feed a multitude, but maybe as the only person who has been able to reach someone to find value in their self-worth, even though many, maybe even your pastor has tried.

Imagine how a parent would feel if on Christmas Day when the gifts for their children were handed out, the children just took them, said, "Thank you," and laid them aside with no attempt to open the gifts, not even to find out what they were!

Imagine how the Lord must feel when he has given gifts to us that he intends for us to use, and we never take the trouble to find out what they are, never put them to work, and then excuse ourselves from serving the church by saying that we can't do anything!

Oh, and by the way, there's no age limit, no retirement age when you can stop using your gifts. Maybe what we have to share takes a different form than what it did when you were younger, like, maybe you don't ride rollercoasters with the youth in your church anymore, but you do talk to them, encourage them, even take the opportunity to mentor them.

I had many people ask me at the nursing home what value could they be to God anymore as they sat in their wheelchair or lay in their bed or could not even think straight anymore. My answer is that they indeed had value and purpose for God's work. They may not have realized the impact their perseverance, their kindness, their encouragement made on those who cared for them.

There were many times when staff would grieve heavily after a resident died because the resident's faith was evident and touched the staff's life. We all have work to do as long we take breath in this lifetime. But remember, Paul said, that it is only as we accept our role in the body of Christ that our gifts are discovered and used. Jesus commands us to use our God given talents and make disciples, teaching them and baptizing them—in other words, leading them to a relationship with Christ, and they too, will do God's work to help build the kingdom of God.

Jesus' command to go includes a promise that he will be with us always and forever as we are faithful and obedient disciples. Just as he promised the disciples as they pursued their mission, just as God made the same promise to Moses as he led the people out of exile, Jesus, who is God-With-Us, promises to be with us through the power of his Holy Spirit, in his community, the church and as we go out to do God's will.

What greater assurance do we need in order to be faithful to God's call on us to be his church, using our gifts and talents, as we go into all of the world to make disciples! Are you willing to accept this command to go? This command comes straight from God through his presence in Christ Jesus!

Today in your bulletin, you will find an insert asking you to consider how you might be able to use your gifts and talents through the work of the church. I'm asking that you do not throw it away but that you prayerfully consider how you might help. Fill out the form and turn it in to the church office. This is just one avenue through which you have an opportunity to use your gifts. Remember, too, that our work for Jesus continues even when we are not doing it through a church sponsored program.

Will you go and do God's work, motivated by your obedience and faithfulness to God, motivated by your love for God, motivated by your love and desire for others to know God and our Savior Jesus Christ? This is your mission. Will you choose to accept it?