

The Big Picture: Being Jesus' People

Matthew 28:16-20; Luke 14:25-30

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If you've been with us over the last six weeks you know that we are approaching the end of our "The Big Picture" series.

And this series has been about refocusing our attention on the big picture values that our church set out for ourselves a few years back because we don't just want to have these values, we want to do them.

So we've said at Lighthouse/Fort George we seek to glorify God by being conformed to the image of Christ. That's what we value.

And we act this out by seeking to be people who preach God's word with conviction whether that is here at church or in the workplace. We are the messengers Christ has endowed with His message.

And we participate with His mission both globally and locally. This means we know God's the one who gets stuff done, our job is just to participate with what He's doing.

So when I was two my dad build a six-foot-high grandfather clock. And I was in there like a dirty shirt twisting screws and losing bolts. And I grew up with the story that we built that clock together in spite of the fact I was no help.

And that's like it is with God. He created us because He wants to be in community with us. And so He loves to let us in on the projects He's up to. But He's not looking for help. He's not short on cash. He's not begging for volunteers. He simply isn't served by human hands because He doesn't need anything. But He wants us, to throw ourselves into the things we see Him doing. And we value that opportunity here.

And we worship passionately and pray whole heartedly and put the people around us first. And we value these things because we want to bring glory to God with our church and our lives, and we know that the way to do that is by being conformed to the image of Christ.

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Now the tools we've been using to move towards this have been Jesus' Great Commandment – Love God and love your neighbour as yourself – and His Great Commission – Go make disciples. And we are in the second half of this now.

So last week we looked at the position of authority Jesus claims which acts as the foundation for Him being allowed to give us a Great Commission. And He says "I've got all the authority so I can give all the commission. And His commission is "go make disciples."

Now discipleship is one of those church words that everyone talks a lot about but it's a little tricky to nail down. So I've had conversations with people who requested to be discipled, and I've asked them "What do you mean by that?" And they've responded with all sorts of different ideas. We should have a discipleship class. Or we should read a book together. Or we should meet once a month to talk about our personal struggles. And all these are great ideas and I've done some of them with people, but the question remains, has a person actually been discipled when these things are over?

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So with that in mind turn back around to the people you were facing when you came in and go over the questions on the screen.

- 1.) What is your name?
- 2.) How would you define "disciple"? And how would you make one?
- 3.) What aspects of our culture make discipleship difficult today?

Alright, we are in Matthew 28 again today so go ahead and open the Bible on your phone or your paper one if that's what you've got. And as you find Matthew 28 would you stand with me for the reading of God's word. We are going to pick it up in verse 16. Hear now the word of the Lord.¹

[Read Matthew 28:16-20]

This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

"All the authority in the universe belongs to Me, so go make disciples." This is what Jesus says to the 11 men standing in front of Him.

So Judas has walked, and these are the guys who are left. 11 men who witnessed more of Jesus' miracles and heard more of His teaching than anyone else. 11 dudes who left lives as fishermen and tax collectors and zealots to follow Jesus full time. These are the guys Jesus hand picked to be disciples and make disciples. And now here they are standing in front of the risen Saviour and some of them are doubting.

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Now last week we talked about how incredible it is that Jesus is so comfortable with doubt. Instead of being offended at their pathetic response to His life; instead of reminding them about all the evidence that points to His divinity; instead of trying to prove to them who He was in order to remove their doubt, Jesus simply moves towards them. And He comes not with proof, but with His presence and with another truth claim for them to weigh – I've got all the authority in the universe.

And from here He commissions – go make disciples. But what exactly is a disciple?

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This is surprisingly more complicated than it should be. But here's the reality: the Western evangelicalism that we all swim in has created its own idea about what a disciple is. And we've boiled it down to the things our culture values.

¹ Outline based off Matt Chandler <https://www.tvresources.net/resource-library/sermons/the-identity-of-gods-people/> (Accessed October 28, 2020)

So churches thrive here when our programs are full, our dollars are up and we've got more butts in the seats. And so we've pushed for growth in these areas more than for actual transformation in people's lives.

I mean aren't there millions of people in North America who claim to be Christians but don't know the Bible, aren't emboldened by the Spirit's power, rarely tell the good news of the gospel to anyone and are generally prayerless? Is it unfair to say that?

And this has all happened in spite of the fact that no church has these things listed in their values – we certainly don't. But what we say we value and what we actually value don't always line up. And so that's what this series is about – calling us to continually refocus ourselves on what Christ calls us to value. And being a disciple is incredibly high on that list.

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Now here is the part in the sermon where I tell you some stuff about the first century and how the advanced, adult education system then involved people following a teacher around and not just learning what He was teaching but actually seeking to emulate every aspect of his life. And the people who would do this were disciples.

The problem is the vast majority of us in this room have heard this before. We know this. It's just that everything in our world has conditioned us in a way that this kind of life isn't valued.

So we value efficiency. We value productivity. We value speed. And all of these things are in complete opposition to the world of discipleship Jesus lived in.

So our education system is way more efficient than His was. And it has to be. In 2018 57% of high school graduated 18 to 21-year-olds were enrolled in college or university. This means Gen-Z is on track to surpass Millennials as the highest educated generation of all time. 52% of Millennials have a college degree of some sort. And Millennials obliterated Gen-Xers in this who stand at 43%. And Gen X almost doubled the Baby Boomers who have a post secondary education rate of just 26% though this was leagues above their parents.²

This means education is a commodity that has experienced exponential growth in demand. So our systems have to be efficient. Teachers can't have 12 students they have to have hundreds.

And we value productivity. The economy simply isn't going to flourish if fishermen become fishers of men, we need to produce stuff. And discipleship doesn't produce stuff, it grows people.

² <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/essay/on-the-cusp-of-adulthood-and-facing-an-uncertain-future-what-we-know-about-gen-z-so-far/#:~:text=Gen%20Z%20on%20track%20to%20be%20the%20best%20Deducated%20generation%20yet&text=Among%2018%2D%20to%2021%2Dyear,of%20Gen%20X%20in%201987>. (Accessed October 30, 2020)

Now some of this productivity thing is good. I mean globally poverty is at an all time low and more people have access to fresh water and food than ever before. Diseases like Polio and Tetanus don't hardly exist anymore all because of productivity in the world of medicine. And the hope for a COVID vaccine is built on this. Productivity is good.

On top of all this I think it's awesome that I can plan to order heartfelt Christmas gifts for my family from my office on December 23rd and they will show up wrapped. Our world of productivity means I can love my family while still getting stuff done! How come you are all looking at me like I'm a sinner?

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We value efficiency and productivity and we value speed. I mean we valued speed in the 90's, but we didn't know nothing. If you were watching TV in the 90's you knew that when the commercials came on you had time to measure out a quarter cup of popcorn and dump it into your air popper and in only 2 minutes you could have flavorless white poofs all over your floor and still have time to throw butter and salt on them and be back at your seat before Friends returned. And we slapped ourselves on the back for how fast we were.

Now there is no air popper, no measuring kernels, no adding butter. You throw the bag into the microwave and hit "popcorn" because hitting 1 minute and 45 seconds would take forever. Or more than likely you just pull your Costco pre-popped out of the closet.

And we have to be fast because there are no commercials. I mean Netflix and Amazon Prime give you a whole 3 seconds between episodes. Life is on speed.

But discipleship doesn't flourish in a world of efficiency, productivity and speed. It's slow. It's not a seminar you can get through on a weekend. And it doesn't give you a paper you can hang on the wall.

Discipleship, Jesus style, is a lifelong process of surrendering and being obedient as we grow to look more and more like Him. So it's not about believing the right things, it's about living the way Jesus lived. And I don't mean wearing a toga and sandals. I mean bringing glory to God.

So you are probably aware that Jesus followers weren't called Christians right away, instead they were called people who followed "the way."

So in Acts 9 we read:

Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord's followers. So he went to the high priest. He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains. (Acts 9:1-2)

You see there was a way about these people who were following Jesus that set them apart. And this was so obvious that Emperor Hadrian, in the early 100's, sent a guy named Aristides to spy on the Christians and find out what they were all about.

And Aristides wrote a letter back to the emperor about what he found:

[These Christians] love one another, and he, who has, gives to him who has not, without boasting. And when they see a stranger, they take him in to their homes and rejoice over him as a very brother. And if there is among them any that is poor and needy, and if they have no spare food, they fast two or three days in order to supply to the needy their lack of food. Such, O King, is their manner of life, and verily, this is a new people, and there is something divine in the midst of them.”³

Rome was so disoriented by this new people. They didn't know what to do. These followers of the Way of Jesus were turning the world upside down. That's a pretty awesome testimony, and a pretty big challenge to us today. Do you feel it? I do.

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Now hear this, the call to be a disciple of Jesus isn't a call to be perfect. We know this because the 11 were the first disciples and they were a mess right to the end. They simply never got on being perfect. Years after Jesus had ascended back to heaven Peter was still getting his theology wrong and being corrected. And Paul says of himself:

I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. (Philippians 3:12)

So don't be one of those people who hates on the church because there are people here who talk about looking like Jesus but haven't arrived yet. Hello! Of course! And so likewise don't get depressed and give up when even after following Jesus for a year or a decade or a bunch of decades you still haven't arrived.

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Friends, the standard is Jesus which means everyone has room to grow. So don't beat yourself up. But also don't be content with where you are. Instead foster your holy discontent. Examine yourself, and us as a body, and make the choice to move towards the perfection of Christ. Disciples of Jesus are people who follow His way.

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Now I want to leave us with Jesus' description of what a disciple is so if you've still got your Bible open flip over to Luke 14. And I want to do this because we need to come away from a call to follow Jesus feeling a little uncomfortable. That's the way Jesus left people feeling.

You see Jesus never lowered the bar to get more people in when He called people to follow Him. Instead He was constantly preaching space-maker sermons. That's kind of what I'm trying to do here.

³ http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/aristides_05_trans.htm (Accessed October 30, 2020)

So just as soon as there were a few people walking towards Him He would turn around and say something like “If you want to follow Me then you need to drink My blood and eat My flesh.” And people were like – “What?! When I signed up for the free food this wasn’t what I had in mind! And they left.”

Jesus was brutally honest about what He expects from His followers, and we need to hear this. So let’s pick it up in Luke 14 verse 25:

[Read Luke 14:25-26]

The point is if you are going to follow Jesus He has to be your number 1 love. He simply won’t share His spot in your heart with another.

So a few weeks ago I talked about the problem of getting more passionate about hockey, or whatever, than about Jesus. And someone asked me whether this means we need to feel guilty when we get excited – like if we rejoice when the Canucks get a goal or revel in the joy of a child opening a Christmas gift or celebrate when the person we love returns from a trip then should we feel guilty. But that’s not what Jesus says.

Jesus had friends and family that He loved. Jesus celebrated at weddings. But there was no question what was most important to Jesus. The glory of God was His focus. And Jesus says His disciples share this focus. So examine yourself; are you a disciple of Jesus? Do you love Him first?

Now look at verse 27

[Read Luke 14:27]

Friends, when Jesus calls us it’s not an invitation for a coffee at Starbucks. The call to follow Jesus is a call to come and die.

And it’s possible that physical death may be part of that – but that’s the easy part for us because it’s so unlikely. It’s the daily death that poses the challenge. The call is to look at what we care most about. Whether that is getting ahead in life or spending time with family or gaining people’s respect or buying the bigger house and the faster car. When Jesus says “follow Me” He’s not headed to Hawaii, He’s headed to Golgotha. The call is to come and die. And lest there be any question look at verse 28:

[Read Luke 14:28-30]

Jesus says “You heard Me right. Do the math on this before you jump in, because what I’m asking is to be God in your life. Not a friend you can go to for advice when you get in a pickle. Not a means to your success. Not a source for your inspiration.

I will be your God. I will be your Saviour. I will be Lord in your life, or I won't have anything to do with you at all. That's the call to discipleship, and it's a big one. So don't set out to build the tower of faith unless you are ready to complete it.

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Now again, discipleship is the bumpy journey of faith towards Christlikeness. So don't beat yourself up if you aren't there yet. The 11 are standing in front of the risen Jesus doubting when He gives them this commission and they hadn't finished messing up yet. So discipleship isn't about being perfect – none of us are – but it is about looking at our imperfection and refusing to give ourselves a pass. We must keep growing.

So friends, if you are someone who has received Jesus' grace of salvation then He has to be Lord in your life. So ask Him are there things in my life that I have fallen into loving more than You? Disciples care about that. Ask Him, how can I pick up my cross and take a step closer to You today? How can I keep building the tower of faith in response to Your infinite authority and the incredible gift of Your salvation? These are the questions disciples of Jesus ask Him. And as He answers we respond in obedience.

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Now here's the offer on the other side, and we've talked about this throughout this series: when Jesus calls us to die to ourselves and make Him God He isn't calling us to be miserable, He is actually calling us out of death and into abundant, untouchable life.

You see all the things that our sinful selves love and that we think are bringing us life are actually keeping us from it. When we make these things gods in our lives they always disappoint and leave us wanting. And so Jesus knows it is only when we make Him our God that we will find the joyful life He created us for. And so the call to die to ourselves is the call to begin living the life we all crave. And if you've come to Jesus for that you're a disciple.

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So just one practical word in conclusion. In Matthew 28 Jesus says "Go, make disciples of all nations baptizing them." Baptism has always been the first step of following Jesus. It's a picture of dying to ourselves and rising again to the new life He offers us.

And so if you are someone who wants the abundant life Jesus wants for you, then you need to do what Jesus says. Following Jesus but just not doing what He says isn't a thing. And the first thing Jesus says is get baptized. So we are doing this next week. There's going to be water in the tub. And if you are someone who wants to make your life about following Jesus and you haven't been baptized yet then come talk with me or Spencer and we will make this happen this week.

Friends, all the authority in heaven and on earth belongs to Jesus and being disciples, being Jesus' people, means doing what He says.