

In the words for meditation this morning, I quote Michael Foss, a minister in the evangelical Lutheran church of America from his book *Power Surge*; six marks of discipleship for a changing church. This book changed forever my understanding of the purpose of the church, the role of people sitting in the pews, and the point of paid professional ministry.

When the North American mainline institutional church reached its pinnacle in the late 1950s, membership was a commitment. Joining, belonging, participating in the life of a United Church, or Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic church at that time was committing one's life to an institution of proud distinction – church life was community life.

“In today's cultural context,” writes Foss “membership has come to imply prerogatives.” In today's expression of the membership church, members are the focal point. The role of the clergy is to meet the spiritual needs of the members, keep them happy, and undertake ministry that makes as little waves as possible. Foss refers to this model of church as the maintenance model of ministry. “Maintaining the institution for the sake of its members is the primary goal – whether state or not – of the congregation.” And the biggest weakness is that this membership model incurs a great loss over time; and that is its vision for the mission and purpose of the church.

The text that Myrna read for us this morning is Jesus last commission to his disciples as recorded in the gospel of Matthew. In five short verses, we are given the clearest mandate of what the church ought to consider as its mission. Let's look at the verbs.

Go – go to the world, be in the world – in other words, don't make people come here...go to them

Make disciples – according to Foss disciple is about individual Christians – followers of Jesus – and the church as a community of Christianity – living to serve in mission.

Baptize – invite people onto a transforming path of spiritual direction and practice. There they will not only meet the risen one, they will likely meet him in the mirror.

Teach – dive deep into the tradition. Dive deep into the scriptures. Don't just listen to what the preacher says...find out for yourself how the tradition speaks to your own life.

Obey – this word comes from the Latin *oboedire* which means to listen, to pay attention, and then finally to integrate. One of the keys in discipleship then is to listen carefully, to be attentive.

And finally Remember – remember the story, remember the man, remember the invitation to a transformed life.

Six verbs coming from the risen one himself. Go, make disciples, baptize, teach, obey and remember.

I think that's all I want to offer this morning. I'd like you to do some thinking and some talking. For the next few minutes I invite you to think about those six verbs in the context of this community. I believe the greatest change that is emerging within this community is the change from being a membership church to becoming a discipleship church – where each of us is called into an active faith...no longer dependent on the likes of me to meet your spiritual needs...but equally giving and receiving in a community of compassion and justice making.

Think of those six verbs – go, make disciples, baptize, teach, obey and remember. Think about how you see those six verbs being played in our community life now. Turn to your neighbour and just share your reflections. What do you see happening now, as we make this shift from internal maintenance to external service? (they talk)

In his book Foss reminds us that the key to faithful discipleship is each person, on his or her own journey, contributing uniquely with their own gifts and their passionate learning, to the mission of the church. Think of those six verbs now...and turn to your neighbour and share with them the one verb that pinches you this morning; the verb that calls you beyond your own complacency into a place of vulnerability action.

Friends if we're not about being the church undertakes these six verbs, then we might just as well pack up and go home. The lovely, beautiful, inspiring news is that together we have heard a call to a new expression of ministry and we are responding in faith and in doubt. May this annual meeting reflect our faithfulness. Amen.