

Our family recently enjoyed some vacation time in Southern Ontario. We got to see the Toronto Blue Jays play a baseball game in downtown Toronto. Now when my brother in law first booked the tickets back in May, we were both pretty lukewarm about the Blue Jays. They were a middle of the road team showing no promise of anything great. But then their management made some moves and brought different players in. Pitcher David Price has turned out as one of their best additions.

Well the day of our game turned out to be David Price's first game pitching for the Blue Jays. A sellout crowd filled Rogers Center on a hot holiday Monday. The crowd buzzed with excitement and stood to applaud when Price came out for his warm ups.

Then the game started against the Minnesota Twins. The crowd roared with every hit, strikeout, put outs and home runs. The Twins got a home run in the top of the second and the crowd groaned. But the Jays roared back with 2 home runs and a sparkling performance by their newly acquired pitcher. Toronto won 5-1 and we shared a memorable experience.

But during the game, I sat back and observed it from a different perspective. Over 45000 people had come from all different areas of the Greater Toronto Region to sit and watch between 18 and 25 baseball professionals play a game. Our emotions depended on what happened in the game. People clapped and cheered. Sometimes people laughed depending on what was on the scoreboard. And when the game was over most people went home happy because Toronto won.

Yet I thought about how this event revealed a very common approach to life in our world today. The players were the only ones playing the game. Yet I suspect many of those in attendance felt that just because they came and watched, they too participated in the game. We had participated in a way. Yet there is a major difference between watching a game and actually getting in there to play. We live in a spectating society. We watch others do a lot. We decide whether we approve or disapprove; like or dislike; thumbs up or thumbs down. We can convince ourselves that we're actually doing something when in fact we're not doing much more than watching.

We can transfer this spectator mentality to the Christian life. Just like Blue Jay fans love their team, we can have affection for Christ. Just like Blue Jay fans, we can go and watch Christ and His servants perform. We can come to a

church and watch the worship team and decide if we like or don't like the worship. We can watch the pastor and decide if we like or don't like the message. We can do the same with a church's ministries or people. We watch and see if we like it. If we don't, we can just move on.

But Jesus nowhere approves of the Christian life as a spectator sport. Nowhere do we see him command His followers to build massive stadiums where they can go and watch Him perform. Jesus calls His disciples to come onto the field and participate out of our seats to get in the game. The Christian life is not supposed to be a spectator sport where the few go out and perform while the rest of us clap, criticize, cheer or moan.

We will see this in our passage from the Bible today. **God commands ordinary disciples (Christians) to freely give the Gospel to others.** We continue in the Gospel of Matthew today. Up to this point, there has been a fair amount of spectating going on. We and the disciples have watched Jesus fulfill the prophecies of the Old Testament through His birth. We watched Him get baptized and resist the devil's temptations. We watched him teach the marvelous Sermon on the Mount. There is a lot in there about following Christ in everyday life. But it's still possible to be amazed at Jesus' teaching yet do nothing with it. Then we watched Jesus heal and demonstrate authority over illness, demons, winds, waves and even death. The last verses of chapter 9 alert us to the reality that there are many more that need to be brought into God's kingdom.

So we might expect that Jesus would just go out and get to work. We can all sit down and watch how He's going to do it. But chapter 9 ended with these words of Jesus; "The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. " So we reach a turning point in this Gospel. Jesus will now call, equip, teach and train His ordinary disciples to be active participants in His work. Today's text brings answers to two questions. Who are ordinary disciples? What work does Jesus call them and us to? My prayer for today is that God will use His Word to move us from spectators to participants in His work.

Matthew 10:1-15 (ESV)

10 And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction.²The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother;³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

⁵These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, ⁶but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷And proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ ⁸Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay. ⁹Acquire no gold or silver or copper for your belts, ¹⁰no bag for your journey, or two tunics or sandals or a staff, for the laborer deserves his food. ¹¹And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart. ¹²As you enter the house, greet it. ¹³And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. ¹⁴And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. ¹⁵Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.

God commands ordinary disciples to freely give the Gospel to others. This is the work that Jesus will get His disciples involved in. **Who are the ordinary disciples?** Well a disciple was a term for a follower of Jesus Christ. So a Christian is automatically a disciple of Christ according to the New Testament. Who were the disciples that Jesus called? Well we meet them in the first verses of Matthew 10 where Jesus calls 12 disciples.

Twelve was no random number in 1st century Jewish culture. The Jews had come from 12 tribes back in the Old Testament. Each ethnic Jew descended from one of the 12 sons of Jacob. These sons developed clans that eventually grew into larger population sub groups in the tens of thousands. The twelve tribes became the people of God in the Old Testament.

But now Jesus calls 12 disciples. This seems to be a very deliberate move on Jesus’ part. It’s almost like he’s saying – you had the 12 tribes in the past. Now you will have the 12 disciples. Just as the 12 sons were the start of the people of God in the past. These 12 now are the true people of God in the future.

To these 12, Jesus gives His authority to carry on the ministry He did. Over unclean spirits to cast them out and to heal every disease and every affliction. What had Jesus been doing in Matthew 4:23 and 9:35? He had been healing every disease and affliction and casting out unclean spirits. So he is transferring His authority, power and ministry to these 12. That’s pretty important work.

Surely Jesus would recruit the 12 most influential people in Israel at that time. He probably got a couple of rulers and politicians. Maybe he got some famous entertainer. Surely he would select some of the wealthiest citizens and war heroes and the most prominent rabbis.

So who did he get? Peter – a fisherman and Andrew his brother. James, another fisherman and John his brother. Philip and Bartholemew. Who were they? We don’t much about them. Thomas and Matthew the tax collector. Well

later we will find out that Thomas was a skeptic and didn't believe things until he actually saw them. And if you want to get in good with the Jewish masses, you don't call a tax collector to be part of your inner circle. James son of Alphaeus and Thaddeus. Who are they? We don't know much about them either. You don't see many cathedrals to Thaddeus in Europe and the church in Rome is not called St. Thaddeus' Basilica. Simon the Zealot? A zealot was either someone who was ultra-concerned about the Jewish law or he was a political revolutionary. The zealots became known as a group of Jewish extremists who wanted to overthrow the Romans by force. And finally Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus.

Well, I don't mean to be critical Jesus, after all you are the Son of God but this is not a very impressive group of people. Couldn't you have gotten some people that were a little more prominent and accomplished?

He certainly could have done that. But it seems like he was more concerned with using ordinary people. He seems to have selected mainly Galileans or people who lived in Galilee away from Jerusalem. So no one would conclude these guys were from the power circles in the capital and trying to strong arm them. In that time, some of the wealthiest and most influential people were part of the religious elite. They came from powerful families who were often disconnected from every day people. But these guys were not from those families. They came without any religious or social superiority to the people they would encounter.

Of the ones we know a little more about, there was some diversity. A tax collector and a zealot were polar opposites politically. The tax collector basically worked for the Romans. The zealots wanted to overthrow the Romans. Its like Jesus took Conservatives, Liberals & NDP in the 12. We know Thomas didn't have a problem doubting some of Jesus' claims. Peter was known to speak a lot and sometimes too much. Yet Jesus calls these relatively ordinary people to carry on His mission.

These 12 are not to be idealized or worshipped. They were ordinary people called by an extraordinary God. Some of them we never hear about again apart from this list. Yet they likely carried out their calling faithfully in whatever obscure place God called them too. Jesus will send out these 12 ordinary men to carry on His mission.

So who else does Jesus call as His ordinary disciples today? The answer is **you and me**. We can't excuse ourselves from Jesus' call because we're ordinary. God has used ordinary people to accomplish His purposes for

centuries. But they were not allowed to sit in the stands and watch. They had to come onto the field and get in the game.

Now it is true that these 12 ordinary became somewhat extraordinary in what Jesus gave them. They were given the authority of Christ; they were empowered to do what He did. They were part of the 12 that would replace the 12 tribes of Israel – the new people of God. They were the first apostles of the church. They did see the risen Christ or at least 11 of them did. They did perform signs and wonders by the power of Christ. So they were unique and became extraordinary in this way.

Yet, they demonstrate God’s heart to spread the good news of the kingdom around the world and to all walks of life. They show us God’s call upon our lives. After all, if you’re a Christian, you likely came to Christ through some ordinary person - maybe your parents; a brother or sister; a pastor; a camp counselor; a grandparent; a friend. Now Jesus calls us to live among and share Him with other ordinary people in our lives. Christians, the disciples of Jesus, are commanded to participate in the mission activity of God. This is a vital part of our discipleship. Following Jesus is not a spectator sport. Jesus expects His disciples to not only grow as every day disciples but as missionary disciples.

What’s involved in freely giving the Gospel to others? (Missionary Discipleship) 10:5-15

First - Going – 10:5-6 To move from spectator to participant, the disciples couldn’t stay where they were, watching Jesus do it all. They had to go out to people. The text tells us Jesus “sent them out.” It’s like he commissioned or appointed them to go out as his representative to deliver the message He had for the people.

But this initial going came with restrictions. “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.” Why such a restriction? There are several possibilities. Maybe Jesus followed the salvation pattern that His Father followed in the Old Testament. God first called out to Abraham. Through him God would create the Israelites. They were the first God saved. From them salvation would spread to all nations. Maybe Jesus wanted to reveal clearly how desperately Israelites needed to return to God. He says “go to the lost sheep of Israel.” Well some Israelites thought they were already in with God just because of their ethnicity. But salvation has always been by faith. Jesus sends the disciples to the Israelites exposing their need to turn to God. But this initial restriction on the mission may have come from very practical reasons. The disciples had little or no cross cultural experience. Jews often kept themselves separate from Gentiles. They may even have had their prejudices to

get over when it came to the Gentiles. We don't know the ultimate reason for this initial restriction. And it's not really the critical point for soon this command will be extended to the whole world. But it is critical to note they did have to go somewhere. They couldn't stay in their seats watching. For you and I, going might mean ministering in some foreign country God calls us to. Or going might mean a walk across the street or some time in a coffee shop with deep concern for another person's life and eternity.

The next piece of freely giving the Gospel involves **proclaiming** it. Jesus tells them in verse 7 "And proclaim as you go saying "the kingdom of heaven is at hand." But wait a minute Tom, you might be thinking." You've written "God commands ordinary disciples to freely give the Gospel to others. Why didn't you say the give them "the kingdom of heaven?" Well I don't think we can really give people the kingdom of heaven. The disciples announced the kingdom of heaven which is the reign of God over the universe, our world and our individual lives.

But the Gospel is the good news that God has made a way to safely come under His reign in the kingdom of heaven. Earlier in this Gospel, both John the Baptist and Jesus call the crowds to "repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." So there is the announcement about the kingdom of heaven and the appropriate response to the kingdom of heaven. The Gospel includes both. That's what we give to others today. If you want a quick Scriptural summary of the Gospel, I would direct you to three passages.

In Romans 1:16-17, Paul says " For I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. Then Romans 3:23-25 – NLT – For all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet now God in his gracious kindness declares us not guilty. He has done this through Christ Jesus, who has freed us by taking away our sins. For God sent Jesus to take the punishment for our sins and to satisfy God's anger against us. We are made right with God when we believe that Jesus shed his blood, sacrificing his life for us." You can also go to 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 for the things of first importance with respect to the Gospel.

As a missionary disciple goes to the people, he or she is ready to proclaim or share the Gospel with those in need.

But they also **show or demonstrate the reality of the Gospel**. Jesus gave the disciples authority to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers and cast out demons. It was one thing to say the kingdom of heaven is at hand. It was another to show it. Such signs would clearly demonstrate the arrival of the kingdom of heaven.

Of course the question today is how do we show or demonstrate the arrival of the kingdom of heaven in our lives today? Well one way is to simply tell our stories – our testimony of what God has done in our lives. This can have a very powerful impact.

I'm currently reading about John Newton. He's most well-known for writing the most famous hymn in the English speaking world – Amazing Grace. But where did such a hymn come from? Newton used to be the captain of a slave trading ship in the 1700's. He was a foul mouthed, despicable and depraved human being. But God showed Him amazing grace. Newton became a pastor for 40 years. His testimony of God's work in His life served as a living demonstration of the power of God unto salvation. We might not have a testimony like John Newton's. But everyone who has come to Christ and grown in Him can tell of how God has changed and grown us.

We can also show the Gospel in our prayers for the healing of others; in our concern for the wellbeing of others and in acts of mercy.

After Jesus commands the disciples to go, proclaim and show this Gospel, He reminds them of how much they paid for it at the end of verse 8. "You received without paying; give without pay." The disciples paid nothing to receive the Gospel. They were to charge nothing for it. They needed to give it freely and abundantly.

Then Jesus instructs the disciples to make some unusual decisions in preparation for this mission. These instructions will force them into **trusting God for provision**. Now when you or I get ready for a trip, what do we do prior to leaving? We pack. We anticipate what we might need. We maybe look at the weather forecast and determine appropriate clothing. We get money together to pay for our expenses. We arrange lodging or book campsites or motels where we can sleep. That was common practice in the first century. You took gold and silver for expenses. You carried a bag maybe with food and extra provision. You took an extra tunic or inner garment to change into during your time away. You would take an extra pair of sandals in case the other ones wore out.

What does Jesus instruct the disciples to do? "Acquire no gold or silver or copper for your belts. Take no bag for your journey or two tunics or sandals or staff, for the laborer deserves his food." Did Jesus not understand what was required to go on a journey? Of course he did. He had journeyed all over Galilee in the early part of His ministry. But these instructions will keep the disciples free from the distraction of many preparations. And it will force the disciples to trust the Lord to provide food, lodging and other provisions.

Jesus called these disciples out of the seats onto the playing field. And trust Him. It would be on his terms and not theirs. Sometimes we might conclude that we'd be willing to do what God wants us to do and get into the game as long as it's on our terms. We want to dictate the position we play and the timing of our involvement. We want to ensure that we've got ourselves covered in case things go sideways. But it doesn't work that way. We're not in charge of God's call on our lives. We don't get to dictate to God. Sometimes, God calls us into tough situations as His disciples. It's there He wants us to live out our everyday and missionary discipleship. We're forced to depend on God like we've never depended on Him before which ultimately turns out to be the safest place we can be.

So, missionary discipleship involves going, proclaiming, showing, trusting and finally **discerning**. Jesus instructs the disciples to go to villages and find worthy people. By this, He means they show interest in the disciple's message. Then they invite the disciples to stay in their home. To us it seems strange and bold to expect free hospitality. But in that culture, hospitality was one of the number one values. A guest who even might be a complete stranger had unquestioned rights to provision and protection. Upon entering the home, it was customary to exchange formal greetings. These included a blessing upon the home and family by the guest. You expressed "Shalom" or "Peace" or a wish of well-being to the entire household. Jesus says this peace should remain on the home if the residents accept the message.

But if the people rejected the disciples and the message, they reject Him. So Jesus commands them to take back their blessing of peace. They must leave the house and the town and shake the dust of their feet. This was a gesture that symbolized leaving something behind. It was like they were saying "we leave behind this land or town we've come from. We won't even go another step without shaking off the dust from our shoes because we want the dust from this place to continue on with us." Jesus then utters a very serious warning to those who reject this message. Those towns or people will face a judgment more severe than the one coming for Sodom and Gomorrah. Those 2 Old Testament cities were widely known as the most wicked in all the Old Testament. God destroyed them for their wickedness. Yet rejecting Christ was more serious because He was the ultimate revelation of God Himself.

These last verses alert the disciples and missionary disciples everywhere of the need for discernment in continuing to give the message where it is not welcome. It also hints at the opposition disciples face in following this call. Next week, we will see Jesus describe the persecution disciples can expect for following Him. But before any of

that happens, ordinary disciples and ordinary Christians like you and me must get out of our seat and into the game by going, proclaiming, showing, trusting and discerning.

That's what Martin and Gracia Burnham did. They began serving as missionaries with New Tribes Mission in the Philippines in 1986 where they raised their 3 children. Martin grew up in the Philippines with his missionary parents. He wanted to be a mission aviation pilot his entire life. He and Gracia were examples of grace and servanthood to other missionaries and Filipinos.

But while celebrating their 18th anniversary at Dos Palmas Resort off Palawan Island, they were kidnapped by the Abu Sayyaf Group of terrorist Filipino rebels. They were held hostage for 376 days in the jungles of Basilan and Mindanao. When a Filipino military group attempted to rescue them, Gracia was wounded and Martin was killed. Surely, Gracia would become a spectator, embittered by these tragic events.

After Gracia was reunited with her family and children in Rose Hill, Kansas, she said, "we want everyone to know that God was good to us every single day of our captivity. Martin was also a source of strength to other hostages. He was a good man and died well." During their captivity they shared with their captors the food that was sent to them and they also shared the gospel with them, challenging the rebels Muslim beliefs. They had decided to get into the game and it cost them dearly. Martin once said "I'm not called to the Philippines or to be a missionary. I'm called to serve Christ." And he did – and so shall we with God's grace.

God so loved the world that He sent out 12 ordinary men to begin the spread of the good news of the kingdom. That news continued to spread from 1st century Palestine to other parts of the world until it reached you in your country or town or village or church or home. God reached out to you in that way to show His love and care for you. God saved you and has given you the gift of eternal life, forgiveness and walking closely with Him. Now God calls you to share His message with others in your life. He will equip you to do it and give you the power. Ordinariness is no excuse.

Who has God brought into your world that is questioning about spiritual things or is searching for a home? Who needs hope and encouragement? Who needs your help? Who can you touch or visit with Christ's love? One practical way you can respond to this message is to write out your testimony to clearly get into your mind what God has been doing in your life since He first saved you up to this day.

Perhaps this is the day God has reached into your life to bring this message to you. He is reaching out to you now and calling you home to Him. Will you come? Will you see His call upon your life? Will you turn to Him and put your trust in Him and begin the journey of finding the deepest satisfaction possible in Him?