

Date: July 19, 2026 (Pentecost 8)

1. Texts: Genesis 28:10-19a; Ps. 139:1-11, 22-23; Romans 8:12-25; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43.
2. Subject: discipleship.
3. Topic: the divine mandate to evangelize effectively.
4. Aim: encourage, empower, guide.
5. Proposition: "The circumstances of the modern Church demand that we speak and behave as genuine disciples of Christ."

IT'S WHO DISCIPLES ARE

We've heard often enough—and some might think too often—about the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. We've learned that it is the Body of Christ and the Whole People of God. We've heard about worship as one of the central tasks of the faith community. We know that the Body of Christ was created through God's self-sacrificing love. We even know for certain that our primary ministry is to *re*-present Jesus in our words and actions so that others might see him in us. We know all this.

It's been a lot to learn, which is why frequent and consistent worship in Church is mandatory. It is in our worship that we best learn who we really are as disciples and as members of that Body of Christ. This is significant.

Frequent and consistent worship is not one option amongst other leisure activities. Worship is not parallel to hockey or yard work. Worship is on a different level than leisure activities.

We all know this, but our society does not. Our society distrusts nearly all institutions and especially the Christian Church. Our society places worship near the bottom of optional activities. Worship certainly ranks lower than yard work or lounging for twenty minutes in an easy chair. The Church is viewed as a greedy organization that manipulates people for the sake of its continued existence. The Church and its worship are frequently despised and trivialized.

There are three means of addressing this sad situation.

1. Be clear about and unashamed of our identity as disciples of Jesus.

Post on screen or on flipchart.
--

2. Engage with society on significant issues such as human rights, peace and social justice for all.
3. Make disciples everywhere and at every opportunity.

Our Identity

Much of North America sees Christians as superstitious, narrow-minded and bigoted. We are frequently laughed at for believing in miracles and in a divine creator who actually wants to be involved in our lives. But many people out beyond the walls of our churches are mis-informed about who disciples of Jesus really are.

Christians do believe that God exists as three divine Persons but one God. We can't explain or define it very well. But it is how God has revealed himself. God is Creator, Saviour and Spirit Guide.

God has so revealed himself in authoritative ways through the Old and New Testaments of the Christian Bible. The Bible was not dictated to people. It was not revealed to the authors word-for-word. The Bible is a library of God's dealings with his chosen people, the Jews. It was written down over time in two languages, Hebrew and Greek. This library has different literary forms, such as histories, poetry, Gospels and letters. Each book in this library was written by different authors with different perspectives and understandings. The writing was inspired by the Holy Spirit working through the community of the faithful and the faithfulness of the authors.

In the authoritative Bible, the life and ministries of the disciples are outlined. We see them displayed in the life of Jesus of Nazareth and the New Testament Church. We have to work out just how we are to re-present Jesus in our time and space, but the outlines are given.

While our history has not always been reflective of our faith, our faith is not to be blamed. There is nothing in our identity about which we are to be ashamed. We are to refuse to be silenced by the misinformation of others.

What questions would you like to ask about our identity?

Post on screen
or on flipchart.

Engage with Society

Because of the disdain of society, the Christian Church often retreats into the background. In addition, the un-Christian behaviour of groups such as the American Christian nationalists has encouraged us to keep our mouths shut, lest we be equated with this political movement.

But God's command to love others with a sacrificial love demands that we be involved in the significant social issues of our time. We are to fight for human rights and peace using whatever rightful and peaceful means we have. Prejudice, bigotry and racism must be issues of deep concern in the Church and so drive us to action outside the Church. Immigration and citizenship issues must fuel our reflection and our actions. Access to assistance programs, affordable housing and addiction services must be a part of our interactions with society. Christian voices should ring loud and long on conflicts such as the war in Ukraine and in the Middle East.

Oh, we have all heard people say that there is a rightful separation between Church and State. But there is no separation between our Christian faith and the circumstances of injustice and violence in our world. Sure, the Church as an institution must be kept separate from the government, particularly in a multi-faith world. But our faith demands that we be heavily involved in issues of justice and righteousness.

What questions would you like to ask about engaging with society?

Post on screen or on flipchart.

Make Disciples

The Christian Church is strongly discouraged from making disciples. Our society thinks that faith should be kept private. Making new Christians is often compared with brainwashing.

According to Jesus, making new disciples is part of what it means to be a Christian. Making disciples is not an optional activity. It belongs to our core

identity. The only real question for us is *how*. How do we so present the gospel of Jesus to someone else that they are encouraged to respond positively to it?

Did you notice? I didn't say anything about making people believe what I believe. Making disciples does not involve coercion or pressure or threat of damnation. Guilt plays no good role in the Christian faith and is not to be a part of making disciples.

In making disciples, we present our experience of Jesus in ways that encourage others to ask questions and to consider the faith for themselves. So, we look for opportunities to say

- I found...
- In my experience, God usually...
- Jesus never actually said that...
- I'm still trying to work out the love of God bit...

Post on screen
or on flipchart.

We remember that faith is a journey marked by ups and downs, successes and failures. Rather than point fingers or ladle out blame, we look for opportunities to encourage questions, to explore one's own understandings in light of the gospel.

We also remember that we don't actually make disciples—they make themselves. People have to choose the relationship with God themselves. We have to support their journey, but they have to do the walking.

This makes the whole process so much easier. It's not up to you to convert anybody, ever. You simply share your experience of Jesus with another person in a way that is not coercive or manipulative. Then you let them ask their questions and support them as they look for answers.

What questions would you like to ask about making disciples?

Post on screen
or on flipchart.

With such questions we return to knowing who we are so that we might effectively engage with society and so look to open the door to salvation for

others. That means, with such questions we return to being the Body of Christ in the world for which we were created in the image of God. We are the Whole People of God through whom God is working to bring the whole world to himself.

AMEN.