

Sharing the Faith

Matthew 28:16-20
June 4, 2023

First Presbyterian Church
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In his forward to the book “Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples,”¹ David Platt says, “From the beginning of Christianity, the natural overflow of being a disciple of Jesus has always been to make disciples of Jesus.... Somewhere along the way we have subtly and tragically taken the costly command of Christ to go, baptize and teach all nations and mutated it into a comfortable call for Christians to come, be baptized and listen in one location.”

In today’s New Testament lesson, Jesus’ last words to us are, “Go ... and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit....”

One of the hardest things for us to do as Christians these days is to lead others along the path of discipleship, of following Jesus. And yet, there is a lot of encouragement and support to be found in this description of Jesus’ final words.

First, we have the disciples arriving in Galilee. Why did they go to Galilee? Well, don’t you remember the first words of the Risen Lord, when he was at the tomb talking with Mary Magdalene and the other Mary? After his greeting and reassurance, he says to them, “... Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.” And that’s exactly what the two Marys do; they go and tell others about the Risen Lord.

That’s how discipleship happens. We hear what Jesus has said and done, we take it in and let it guide us forward, and then we share that experience with others. That’s what it is to be a follower of Jesus, going all the way back to the earliest disciples. That’s how you came to be who you are.

And yet, most people struggle in this. They may take in what Jesus said and did, but maybe they don’t let it guide them day-by-day. Or if they are guided by it, still, many people are reluctant to share their experience with others.

Some are too shy, while for other’s, it’s “been there, done that.” They feel that nobody they know is interested in hearing about their faith, the difference it makes in their life, the opportunity to come alongside a community of faith.

¹ Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples Paperback – November 1, 2012
by Francis Chan (Author), David Platt (Foreword), Mark Beuving (Collaborator).

As it says right here: “When (the 11 disciples) saw (the Risen Lord), they worshipped him; but some doubted.” Reluctance and doubt are always going to be a part of who we are. It’s part of the human condition. So don’t let that stop you from sharing the faith, not if you want to see more people at church and more people who know and follow Jesus outside of the church.

Next, we read about how Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”

It’s interesting to note that Matthew says Jesus came to them, he approached them. The Greek word used for approach is *proselthōn*. While Matthew uses that word 52 times, this is only the second time that he says Jesus approaches or comes to them. All the other times, it’s people approaching Jesus. And both times that Jesus approaches them, it’s as the Risen Lord, not the earthly Jesus.

We don’t have the earthly Jesus here alongside us, and neither did they; not at that time. That’s why some doubted. And yet, here we have the assurance that the Risen Lord does come alongside us. Trust in that. Share that experience, those God moments, with others.

And when Jesus says, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” – Jesus is the only one to make such a declaration. No other king or messiah or prophet ever claimed authority in both heaven and earth.

The Lord we worship and serve is the greatest ever known – a healer, friend, trusted guide, someone to talk with who will never lead you astray, always show you the way. People need that in their lives. And we can be that for them, in the spirit and manner of Jesus Christ.

That’s a great place to start in sharing with others what we love so much about this community of faith – just being there for others in a way that no one else is.

Another way of introducing folks to the community of faith is to invite them to come with you. We are having that Pet Blessing Service coming up on Saturday, June 24, 11 a.m. in Hiram

Young Park at Lexington and Noland. What a great thing to share with family and friends! Even if you don't have a pet, you can still invite others and offer to go with them. Look it up on our church Facebook page or website and share that event posing with your Facebook friends.

And the Summer Forum looks good. It's off to a great start, with a video study by Tim Tebow on facing life's struggles without getting "Shaken;" that's the name of the study – "Shaken." If you haven't been to the Summer Forum lately, or haven't invited a friend, this year really looks good. I highly recommend it. All of this is part of making "disciples of all nations," all people, even those we think might not be interested. Don't make that decision for them. Leave room for the Spirit to work in your life, even if it is a stretch for you.

I mean, just think what it was like for his earliest followers to hear Jesus say, "... Go and make disciples of all nations..." This is a group of ordinary men and women just like you and me, and the future of the church of Christianity depends on them?!?.

As the Bible tells us, they lived at a time when traveling even to a nearby territory took days. And then there was this underlying distrust of foreigners, people who were different, had different beliefs and customs. Not to mention that their lives were hard. They were the minority group. The people they knew were either already a follower or they had little interest in hearing about Jesus and his community of faith.

We can relate to all of that – distrust, busy lives, people not interested. And yet, despite all these barriers to sharing our faith with others, that is our calling as followers of Jesus. It's how we live out our baptism.

For all Christians from any time and place, the calling and power of their baptism, their acceptance and reliance upon the Holy Spirit– that's what makes it possible to overcome any barriers or any reluctance to embracing and sharing the faith.

People ask me how I came to be a preacher and I tell them it all started with my baptism. That's because there wasn't much else to account for it between my baptism as a baby and when I joined my first church as an adult.

And yet, throughout it all, I had a spirit of faith and desire to know God and to follow Jesus, even though my family didn't go to church at the time. And later, when I returned to church, that spirit ignited within me. I wanted to be a part of the community of faith. Thank God there was someone who invited me to come alongside them at church.

The point is, baptism changes who you are. It puts you on a new path, whether or not you fully realize then or now. Baptism means being willing to go through life alongside Jesus, and it means inviting others to do the same, by inviting them to come alongside you.

We all have to work at living out our faith, our baptism, and showing others what that means for us, what it could mean for them. None of this is easy.

But remember, you're not in it alone. Not only do you have this community of faith, but you have Jesus, the Risen Lord – Jesus whose last earthly words were, "Remember, I am with you always, (now and always) to the end of the age." Don't you want to share that comfort with others? Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Let us pray:

O Lord our God and Savior, you sent the disciples and apostles to the very ends of the earth to teach and proclaim your message, to heal all illnesses and to share the comfort and joy of faith. Send us, we pray, as instruments of your blessing and power, that the fruit of the gospel may be increased in us and throughout the world.

We pray your comfort upon those grieving the loss of loved ones. We pray your healing touch upon those suffering illness and disease. We pray this and all our prayers in the powerful name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ, using the words that he taught us, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.