

Go and Make Disciples of All Nations  
Matt. 28:16-20  
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I love offering hospitality here at Crestwood. We have a wonderful campus and a lot of space, so it's great when we can host meetings or classes or conferences. But there's always one big problem: which door should people use? You try to explain it, put up signs, draw maps, and yet inevitably I'll see people wandering around in the gardens or the sanctuary looking for their meeting in the mission center.

When I first visited Crestwood, I noticed right away that this church has a lot of doors. It almost has more doors than it does coat hooks, and that's saying something. For example, where's the main entrance to Crestwood? If you're taking your child to Sunday School, it might be the South entrance. But if you want to drop someone off, maybe it's the breezeway out here. Or if your kid is in the Glendover basketball league, you might come in through the Mission Center doors. By my count, there are half a dozen different entrances to this church. Where is the front door of Crestwood, anyway?

We need to know this, don't we, if we're going to invite someone to church. We could say, "I'll meet you at the main doors" and end up clear on the other side of the building from them! And symbolically, this church has more than just front doors. While the main entrance to the church may be our Sunday worship, people come to the church through side doors like working on mission projects or attending the Halloween Party or participating in fellowship events. Crestwood has a lot of side doors. And, like any church, we also have a back door, which people will use when they feel like Crestwood is no longer the place for them. So many doors!

In our passage today, I believe Jesus is talking to the disciples about the doors of the church, but not the kind that swing on hinges. This passage comes at the very end of Matthew's gospel, as Jesus calls together his disciples for one last charge to them. Other than the empty tomb, this is Jesus' only resurrection appearance in Matthew's gospel, his only words of guidance and direction for his faithful followers.

The group is now 11, since Judas betrayed Jesus. To be fair, if Jesus held grudges, none of the disciples should be there. Not too long ago they were too busy running for the exits to stand by him during his darkest hour, and yet here they are, gathered once again in his presence. So, it's appropriate that their group is incomplete because they are incomplete. The group that Jesus is about to send into the world to start the church is fallible, imperfect, "eleven-ish." In case we might miss the incompleteness of this group, Matthew tells us, "When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted." Disciples pastor Fred Craddock says a more literal translation of this verse reads, "They worshipped him and some doubted."

They worshipped and they doubted. The Greek word here is *distazo*, which carries a sense of standing in two places at the same time, one foot in one way of thinking and the other foot in another way of thinking. It's like when the university you graduated from plays the university you grew up rooting for. Which one do you choose? *Distazo!* Worship and doubt. That might seem like two antithetical ideas, right? If you are in worship, you shouldn't doubt, and if you are doubting, you shouldn't worship. And yet, I bet everyone single of us, me included, walked through the sanctuary doors with doubts.

We doubt God's goodness. We doubt God's love for us. We doubt God's protection or provision. Worship and doubt go together. Have you seen that bumper sticker that says, "God said it, I believe it, and that's that"? Boy, it'd be nice if faith were that easy. But it's not, is it? Unless Jesus is driving that car, the person behind the wheel can't live up to the message on the bumper. No one has that kind of faith. Realize that in our passage today, the resurrected Jesus is standing right in front of them! "And some doubted." Don't feel bad if you are doubting something today as you worship. Worship is an important part of faith, but so is doubt.

Jesus surely must have sensed their doubt. So why doesn't he withhold his command until this situation is remedied? He's about to give them his authority. He's about to ask them to change the world. Do you really want to entrust that power to a group of people who aren't sure if they even believe in the mission? Does he really want to send a group of doubters out to do this job? He knows their hearts like he knows ours, and yet he still gives them this charge. They've been with him since the beginning. "Come, follow me," he said, and they did. Then he put up with their power struggles and their thoughtless questions and their greed and their lack of faith and their selfishness and finally, most painfully, their abandoning him...and now, despite all of that, despite their doubt at this mountaintop moment, instead of slamming the door, he chooses them again. Is there any greater proof that there's hope for us? Jesus looks in the face of those who worship and those who doubt, and says, "I need you to be the front doors of the gospel."

The job description he gives is of the grandest scope. "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." Oh, well, is that all? The eleven had to be shocked. Those who were made disciples are now called to make disciples. This is one of the places in the Bible where we lose something in the translation. The phrase "to make disciples" is better rendered as "to disciplize." What's the difference? "To make disciples" sounds like something we would do to a passive object, like making cookies or making a necklace. But people aren't passive objects to be manipulated like cookie dough or beads and a string. So, another understanding of what it means to disciplize is needed.

Dallas Willard defines a disciple as a person who has decided to be with another person in order to become capable of doing what that person does or to become what that person is. A person who wants to learn carpentry or plumbing would become the disciple of a carpenter or a plumber, in order to learn what that person knows and become what that person is. So, Jesus is saying we are to disciplize people by showing them who Jesus is so that they can become like him.

The Message translates this slightly differently: "Go out and train everyone you meet." Richard Halverson, former chaplain to the U.S. Senate, translated Jesus' saying to read, "As you go, make learners everywhere." Train people. Make learners. That means this isn't about coercion or manipulation. It's not even about converting people. That's the mistake Christians have made down through the centuries. We thought that making disciples meant holding a sword to a Muslim's throat until they professed faith in Jesus or invading a foreign land and forcing their native tribes to worship the way we worship. This passage has been used to do a lot of damage down through the years, placing a thin veil of Christianity over a destructive policy of imperialism, colonialism, and racism.

But that's not what this passage says to do. "Train them." "Make learners." What does that look like? Well, what did Jesus teach us? Turn the other cheek when attacked.

Give a cup of cold water to someone who is thirsty. Welcome the children. Love the unlovable. Touch the lepers. Stand up to the unjust who misuse their power. Speak words of love and peace and grace. That's how you make disciples. You act like one and others can't help but watch.

That's what we're called to do, to take people who are curious, who are searching, who are yearning for God's presence in their lives, and to show them God's love in a tangible way, not through our words, but through our actions. The work of the church is not what we're doing while we're in church. We're here to be equipped, to be fitted with the tools, in order to be sent out and fulfill this Great Commission. Notice, Jesus doesn't say, "Go therefore and preach to people." He'd rather see a sermon than hear one.

That's a monumental task that Jesus places on our shoulders, especially when our shoulders are prone to slumping from doubt and discouragement. Maybe that's why Jesus adds that final line: I am with you always," echoing the beginning of the Gospel, where Jesus was called Emmanuel, meaning, "God with us." I like the way the Message puts it: "I'll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age."

The disciples needed that reminder because what Jesus was calling them to do was monumental. One writer said, "These disciples are not an army ordered to make all nations subject, and they aren't franchise owners sent out to increase market share for the brand. They are followers of the Crucified One, sent to welcome into their motley company (numbskulls, cowards, and squabblers that they are) all of the broken and beautiful people of the world."

Day after day after day. Even if you doubt it, that promise is still good. The disciples thought they were saying goodbye to Jesus, but to quote a country song, "How can I miss you if you won't go away?" Jesus has not gone away. He's right here with us, encouraging us to be apostles in his name. Those who were made disciples are now called to make disciples. In the beginning, Jesus said to them, "Come and follow me." Now he says, "Go, disciplize, show people who I am, invite them into my church, and remember I am with you." Do you hear that? He's calling you. I'm talking to you, the numbskulls and the cowards and the squabblers. I'm talking to you, the worshippers and the doubters. We all know how short we've fallen, don't we? We may not even feel worthy to walk through those doors this morning. We have doubted Jesus. We have chosen not to speak up when something needed to be said. We have abandoned our faith when we needed to live it out. We've kept to ourselves when we were called to reach out. We know worship and doubt, don't we?

And yet, Jesus says, "Go." He knows our hearts, he knows who we are, and yet, he still says, "Go." Even though the disciples had abandoned him, he chooses them again. And today, he's choosing you again. He's saying, "Go. Train them. Teach them. Show them who I am. Invite them in." So there IS a front door to Crestwood after all! It's you. Are you going to stay closed and keep people out or open up and let people in? Go and disciplize. And remember, Jesus is with you day after day after day.