

Matthew 28:16-20

Why Are We Here?

The question I would like us to think through this morning is this: Why is there a Trinity Evangelical Free Church? Would Plainview be worse off if we weren't here? Do we have a sufficient reason for being here that merits the time and resources we expend? Why do we do the things we do as a church?

It is my conviction that the answer to these questions must lead us back to Jesus and the commission he gave to his first disciples. One statement of that commission is found in Matthew 28:16-20. This has been called the great commission. It is great in the sense that what it commands is most significant; it is the priority that the risen Christ placed on his disciples. Everything we do as a church must be evaluated on the basis of what it contributes to the fulfillment of the great commission. We must always be asking ourselves: How is what we are doing contribute to what Christ has called his church to do? **The great commission is not one aspect of the ministry of the church; it is the entire mission of the church.** Everything which does not contribute to this mission is unnecessary. It is important that we examine this commission carefully.

1. The Setting of the Commission. v. 16-17.

Christ's commission was given in particular setting, both physically and spiritually. Both the place and circumstances are significant.

1) To whom was the commission given? The eleven disciples. These were the eleven disciples Jesus had called to lead his future church. What is a disciple? A disciple is a follower who believes and trusts another. A disciple is an apprentice who learns from another. A disciple is an adherent who follows another and accepts his teaching and authority. The commission was not given just to the Eleven Apostles. The mandate was to be passed on to all disciples who would follow the Eleven. It includes everyone of us who are disciples.

2) Where was this commission given? We are told that it took place in Galilee. Why Galilee? Galilee was the place the public ministry of Jesus began and was mostly carried out. It was a secularized place. There were many Gentiles in Galilee. In Matthew 4:13-16 Matthew quotes Isaiah 9:1-2 in explaining the onset of Jesus' ministry. There is an implication, even by this location that the commission will be broader than these eleven Jews realized. It also took place on a mountain. What is significant about mountains in the Bible? A lot. Think of Moriah where Abraham took Isaac to sacrifice him and God provide a substitute. Then there is Sinai, where God gave the Law to Moses and entered into covenant with Israel. And Carmel with Elijah's contest with the prophets of Baal. In Matthew's account mountains are mentioned several times. Matthew 5 the Sermon is on the Mountain. In Matthew 17:1 there is the mountain of transfiguration. Matthew 24-25 is Jesus' discourse about the end times spoken on a mountain. Mountains were places from which God spoke and revealed himself, his truth and his will.

3) What was the spiritual stance of the recipients of the commission? [17].

The commission came to worshippers. The text may imply that some worshipped and some doubted. But an equally acceptable translation would be, “When they saw him they worshipped; yet they doubted. They may have all worshipped and doubted at the same time. They weren’t perfectly confident worshippers. Faith was mixed with doubt. Worship was mixed with hesitation. I think that pretty well describes most of us. We are like the disciple who said to Jesus. “Lord I believe; help me with my unbelief.” The commission is not given to perfect people with perfect faith but to imperfect disciples like us.

There is something else here. Please note that worship is the attitude from which commitment to his commission flows. Worship which does not lead to obedience to the risen Christ and witness to the risen Christ is flawed and perhaps insincere. Witness which is not derived from worship becomes a matter of human effort and wrong motivation.

2. The Compulsion of the Commission. v.18

Jesus claimed that he had total universal authority: the authority of God himself as the risen Lord. One thing you notice in this text is the implication about who Jesus is. He is one who is worshipped. He is one who has all authority over everything everywhere in heaven and on earth. He is one who is equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit. He is one who will be present till the end of the age. What compels disciples to do what Jesus says is understanding who he is. When we acknowledge and worship Jesus for who he is we will willingly and joyfully do what he says. We are under his authority. The Great Commission is not optional. It is not a suggestion; it is a command.

3. The Task of the Commission. v. 19-20a

The main verb of these verses is the verb “make disciples.” This verse does not tell us how that is accomplished. We should not read into this all the programs and initiatives we call “discipleship.” The New Testament makes it clear that disciples are made as the Gospel is proclaimed and accepted by faith. [Acts 14:21] When people respond in faith to the gospel they become disciples and enter the path of discipleship. That is what we are to be about: making disciples. Are we doing that? George Barna, a church researcher, recently said that over 50% of American churches did not see one adult come to faith in Jesus last year. When I was interviewing with Search Committees as a possible pastoral candidate I was always somewhat fearful they would ask me to tell them about someone, outside of preaching, that I had led to Christ or shared the Gospel within the last year? It is a lot easier to preach the Gospel to a congregation than it is to get to know your neighbors well enough to share Jesus with them. What if I were to bring a microphone down the aisle and ask you these questions? But making disciples is not the end of our responsibility. What are we to do with those who turn to Jesus and become disciples?

In verse 18 there are three dependent participles attached to the primary verb “make disciples”, each of which describes an accompanying responsibility showing us what we should do with those who turn of Christ as his disciples. We could translate, “As you are going out in to this world make disciples, baptizing and teaching them” Yet these participles would also seem to carry an imperative sense, a responsibility.

1) First, “As you are going out into the world” make disciples. If this participle has an imperative sense, this going out is intentional activity. What was shocking to the disciples was whom Jesus said should be made disciples. He said, “Make disciples of all the peoples. The word he used meant all people groups, all ethnic groups. This inclusive universal aspect of the commission informs us that Christ’s intention is that his church would be inclusive of all peoples. It took some time, but the disciples eventually got it. So, Paul says in Gal. 3:28. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” And in the heavenly scene of Rev. 5:9 we read: You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood purchased men for God from every tribe and language and nation.” What we must figure out as individuals and as a church is what does it mean for us to go out to make disciples of all peoples?

2) The next responsibility is baptize. Baptism was the initial act of a disciple. The three thousand who placed their trust in Jesus on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 were baptized on that very day. Baptism is the external witness by which the disciple publically identifies himself with Jesus Christ and the church. The new believer stands up before others and says, “I am a follower of Jesus. I identify myself with him in his atoning death and resurrection. I believe and trust in him and his atoning death”. Baptism is not optional. It is a part of the great commission. If you are a disciple of Jesus Christ you have an obligation to be baptized. Talk to Pastor Ty or one of the elders and let them know your desire. Let me be clear; baptism does not save you. I don’t want to be offensive, but I need to say this. Some of our friends who think they will be in heaven because they were baptized as little babies are misguided.

3) The last duty is teach. “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” Teaching is the ongoing process which follows conversion and baptism. What does Jesus say disciples are to be taught? It is not merely instruction in biblical facts and doctrine though those things are important. This is life-transforming teaching. It is the process involved in bringing disciples to maturity and Christlikeness. This is the process described in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and Ephesians 4:11-16.

This teaching is the process we call discipleship. It is the center of the mission in which we want our new associate pastor to guide us.

So, here is the commission of the risen Christ to his church: Go out and make disciples of all peoples. Then, baptize them and teach them everything I told you to do.

This is the question we must ask ourselves: Is this what we are doing at Trinity? It is not about you and me and our personal needs and problems. It is about Jesus Christ and his commission. It is not about leaving church feeling good or being successful or enjoying family and friends, it is about Jesus Christ and his commission. If Trinity is not driven by a passion to do what Jesus said in his commission we might as well close the doors. This is all quite intimidating isn’t it? This is a call to a task that goes far beyond anything we can accomplish. I wonder if the disciples felt this. From what Jesus said next I would guess they did.

4. The Assurance of the Commission. [20b]

This is a promise of the presence of Christ with his church to the end of the age when he returns. This is a promise paralleled many times in the Old Testament where Yahweh gave the same promise. (Joshua 1:9, Haggai 2:4) It is a promise of his divine enablement, provision and wisdom. This is a promise from the same one who said, "I will build my church, and gates of hell will not overcome it." The task is great, but our enabler is greater. Let's do it.