

“Go and Make Disciples”

Matthew 28:16-20

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South Church is very familiar with the act of commissioning. Most years, in June, we commission our youth and their advisors, sending them out on mission trips. We send them out into the world to be a Christ light, to build a house with Habitat for Humanity, to prepare meals for people down on their luck, to listen to the stories of homeless people as they produce artwork near Boston Common. We are a church that takes these commissioning rituals seriously. To be commissioned is to be blessed with a sacred mission. It is to have the support of your congregation. It is to be on a mission from God.

The closing words of Matthew’s Gospel are commissioning words! Jesus doesn’t miss the opportunity to commission his disciples, to send them out with a sacred assignment, a mission. Though the commissioning was for those disciples who had persevered with him, it is also for everyone in every generation who self-identifies as a disciple of Jesus Christ. So, these words in Matthew 28 are as much for us as they were for Peter and James and John and the others.

“Make disciples in all the world.” What this says to me is that there is something about the teachings of Jesus that are universally relevant. The work of making disciples begins right here at South Church. Making disciples of each new generation is what our mission is all about.

Had this been a normal year, we would be confirming today 17 young adults in their faith as Christian disciples. Their Confirmation ritual will take place soon enough, but they are already disciples in their heart of hearts. Their faith statements reveal their passion for loving their neighbors, for not judging but accepting neighbors who are different from themselves. They have wrestled with the purpose of life and have found that being agents of transformation is a high priority. The Confirmation teachers and the sponsors and the parents all take Jesus' admonish to heart: 'Go and make disciples in all the world.'

To make a disciple is to invite someone to put on the way of Christ. I use the word 'invite' intentionally. No one can be forced to be a Christian disciple. It's always a matter of invitation. When I joined a Little League team, I put on the uniform of the Exchange Club. When I became a Cub Scout, I put on the blue uniform with the yellow bandana. When I went to my high school prom, I put on a tuxedo. **When I became a disciple of Jesus Christ, I put on the Way of Christ.**

To me, that means, putting on an attitude of forgiveness. One of our Confirmation students wrote about forgiveness as the essential teaching in the Bible. To me, putting on the Way of Christ means I will dismantle any remnant of a judgmental attitude that may persist in my heart. Again, one of our students has written eloquently about the freedom that comes when we surrender the weapon of judgement. To me, putting on the Way of Christ means confronting abuses of power. We read about such abuses all the time. Jesus got into a lot of hot water because he consistently challenged abuses of power wherever he encountered them.

Love is the power that makes the world go around. To put on the Way of Christ is embrace this truth in word and deed. One of our Confirmation students has written about the difference it makes in his life when he knows he's loved. It's the difference between life and death.

Sometimes putting on the Way of Christ means turning over the tables of the money changers. Sometimes it means feeding 5000 people. Sometimes it means being at a bedside and holding a patient's hand. Sometimes it means inviting a neighbor to be more childlike. Sometimes it means challenging those in a crowd who are without sin to cast the first stone. Sometimes it means listening to a person's whole life story such that she feels somebody cares. Sometimes it means inviting a stranger to show mercy. And sometimes it means inviting a friend to live by faith.

I am excited to be a minister in a church that takes this Great Commission seriously. Go! Make disciples in all the world. Put on the Way of Christ! It's when we live into this Great Commission that we know we're living in the greatest of hope. Amen.