

April 28, 2019

## Lesson 9: Call and Commissioning

Scripture: Matthew 28: 16-20; Acts 1: 6-8

### Context:

Happy Easter! As we continue into the Easter season of the liturgical year, we remember that we continue to celebrate that Jesus has risen from the dead and is on the go. Our lesson today reminds us as much as we look at the post-resurrection narratives of Jesus. From both the gospel of Matthew and the book of Acts we read of the disciples encountering Jesus and being given an invitation to accept Jesus's call and commission to make disciples.

The main focus of accepting Jesus's call and commission to make disciples comes from the end of the gospel of Matthew. The eleven disciples go to Galilee where Jesus's ministry first began. It is here that we note the importance of mountains in Jesus's ministry. Mountains have a significant role as we see so many important points in Jesus's ministry: the final temptation (4:8), the transfiguration (17:1), and the beatitudes (5:1).<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that this final meeting place is "the mountain." It is possible that the gospel writer wants us to see these last words of Jesus as a conclusion of sorts to the Lord's inaugural address.<sup>2</sup> Jesus's ministry is coming full circle.

When the disciples arrive at whatever mountain in Galilee, there is worship, but there is also doubt. One of the common themes in all of the post-resurrection accounts is doubt. It is a common motif as we see in journey with the two on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:16) and of course Thomas (John 20).<sup>3</sup> It is as if the early church needed the affirmation to know that doubt was part of the journey of faith and even these apostles experienced it until moments of encountering the Lord.

When Jesus gets them to the mountain he gives his final address. It is not a lengthy list of demands or rules to follow. Instead Jesus gives what we know today as "The Great Commission." With all authority given unto him, Jesus gives the disciples their final set of instructions before he ascends to the heavens. The target of the commission is "all the Gentiles," per the translation of the word "ethne."<sup>4</sup> Greek speaking Jews used the term "ethnos" in the plural as a way of speaking of non-Jewish individuals.<sup>5</sup> Matthew has moved from the earlier mission of going to only the house of Israel to now continue to take Jesus's ministry to others.

The apostles' roles will now be to nurture a community and building up others.

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas R.A. Hare, "Matthew," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press; Louisville, KY, 1990), 332.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 332.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 332.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 333.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 333.

They will baptize others and teach them to grow indefinitely. And as the book of Acts indicates, they will be witnesses to the Lord from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

### **Application**

It is appropriate that the first lesson after the Sunday of Easter focus upon the great commission. It is so easy to isolate our Easter celebration as a chance for new spring clothes, Cadbury eggs, and the traditional Easter egg hunt. We are reminded that after we celebrate in the resurrection of our Lord that we are given a commission to share that good news with others.

The focus of this passage in Matthew usually comes to the phrase: “make disciples of all nations.” The focus in the Acts passage today is upon: “you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” In both of these phrases, we are reminded that mission is not restricted to going to the other end of the earth to do the Lord’s work. The Lord has called us to work wherever we find ourselves whether that is the large, bustling port city or a small town in a very rural county. The Lord sends us to those places to do God’s work.

In each place we live, we are called to be disciples. Disciples are those who not only obey our Lord, they are also those who teach others. When I say the word teach, I do not just mean the typical connotation. Often when we think of teachers, we imagine those white boards, expo markers, and those who hold lots of wonderful facts and knowledge. We think of Sunday school classrooms and a formal structure.

But “teaching” and “making disciples” holds other forms. Sometimes teaching is having a conversation with someone when they have deep questions where they struggle to understand what they’re feeling or what they believe. While Jesus spent a lot of time teaching to crowds on mountains like we just read, Jesus also spent a lot of time one on one with people on roads between places, homes, and even places like the community well. Those are some of the places that Jesus did his most fruitful ministry, simply being with people. He was exhibiting a ministry of presence, in which what a person needed was simply someone to be there with them.

Teaching thought can also hold differently in other settings. For example, ministries like Alcoholics Anonymous and Celebrate Recovery have meetings where people gather together to be held accountable. The key to their success and success though is that each person who goes to those groups has a sponsor, someone who holds them responsible and encourages them on each step of their journey, which come from Jesus’s Beatitudes. There is someone who sponsors and mentors someone else. The hope is that person will then be able to nurture and sponsor someone else who comes along.

In our church contexts, we are all to be sponsors and mentors. What I have discovered in my own walk with Christ is that I need someone to mentor me, and then for me to be passing on something to someone else as well. It becomes a cycle in which all parties grow and learn about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

As you think about this Easter season and the risen Christ who visits us all, there are some great questions to consider. Where do you have moments to have a “ministry of presence?” Where are places in your community that your church could have a “ministry of presence?” Who is the disciple that mentors you? Who are you mentoring and helping to encourage on their walk with Christ? Who are the “Gentiles” in your community who

God may be calling you to be in ministry beside?

Rev. E. Hunter Pugh  
Associate Pastor  
First United Methodist Church  
1380 W. Main St.  
Dothan, AL 36301  
E-mail: [hunter@fumcdothan.org](mailto:hunter@fumcdothan.org)

