



Matthew 28:19-20
The Church Is...
"...Sent By Jesus"

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This morning we begin a new series of messages that will take us through the end of June. We'll then enter into a 10-week series that will take us through summer. For the next five weeks, however, we'll be looking at what it means to be the Church. "The Church is...." And then each Sunday will finish that phrase to make a complete sentence. So, what I'd like you to do right now, is turn to your neighbor and tell them how you'd finish that statement. **"The Church is...." What?** There are a number of ways it could be finished. And I don't mean Rose Hill Church specifically, I mean the global church. How would you end this sentence? So, turn to your neighbor and finish this off: The Church is....

Ok...so there are potentially a lot of facets to this, and finishing this phrase off with just a couple of words is certainly incomplete. But here's how I would finish it in one sentence that isn't too long or convoluted: **The Church is Jesus' disciples sent into the world, representing Jesus and the values of God's kingdom so others would also become disciples.** I'm not saying that's even a complete or perfect answer, but that's my one-sentence shot at what the Church is. And so, in this series, I hope we will flesh this out and see what it means for any one of us to be a part of the Church.

But, let's not just go off of what *I* think the Church is. Let's turn to Scripture to see what the Bible tells us about the Church. And in today's passage we are looking at Jesus' final words in the Gospel According to Matthew, oftentimes labeled as "The Great Commission." It is Jesus commissioning his disciples to carry on the message and the ministry of Jesus that they have been a part of for the previous three years. Let's turn to **Matthew 28:16-20**. This is God's word to his disciples then, and now to you and me this morning...

I was at our Presbytery meeting a little over a month ago with Elder Linda Holbrook. Jim Singleton, our guest speaker, spoke on this passage some. For those who don't know, in our denomination we group churches together in geographic regions that we call "Presbyteries" for the purpose of training and

equipping of pastors and other church leaders, sharing of best practices, accountability, fellowship and encouragement, and more. Jim Singleton is a retired pastor in our denomination – in fact, he was one of the 7 guys who basically got our denomination going 8 years ago or so. The last 10 years or so he’s been a professor at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, but has now returned to the Northwest and is living in Spokane. So, he is part of our Presbytery of the Northwest, and an incredible blessing to have right here in our region.

And he shared two insights about this passage that I want to pass along in my own words. **First of all, notice that there are 11 disciples.** Judas is the one who’s missing, as most of you know. And 11 really is not a Biblical number. It’s incomplete – it’s missing one. 12 is the Biblical number (others, too). It symbolized completion and even perfection. For most of Jesus’ ministry there were 12 disciples; there are the 12 tribes of Israel coming from the 12 sons of Jacob; Jerusalem had 12 gates. So, 12 is important. 11 is not. It’s one short. Hold onto that thought for a moment.

Second of all, Matthew tells us that they worshipped Jesus, “but some doubted” (verse 17). The “doubting” could very well refer to Thomas. We looked at “doubting Thomas” a few weeks ago as we were nearing the end of our journey through the entire Gospel According to John. And that might be who Matthew is pointing to here – though the Greek is clearly plural, so it indicates more than just one. What Jim pointed out, however, is that it could be that there was both belief and doubt mixed together in several, perhaps even all, of the 11 disciples there. So, not just that it was an either/or situation depending on each person, as if some worshipped, and others doubted: but each of them, or at least a few of them, may have had both belief and doubt.

And there’s something here that is a good reminder for us, perhaps especially as we hear the news this morning that Paul is taking this huge step forward in his ministry, to become the pastor of Community Presbyterian Church in Vacaville, CA. Because: **We may feel like an “eleven-ish” church for a bit, and we may even have some doubts/questions about what the future holds, even as we believe God can and will provide.**¹ Any time a staff person moves on – and in this case, it’s two staff people, plus all the musical

talent, the relationships between us and them – it’s always tough when this kind of transition happens. Now, the eleven disciples later brought on a 12th to replace Judas...and we’ll find someone to fill Paul’s and Yam’s shoes – maybe it’s someone who’s already here, maybe it’s not. But I have no doubt that God will provide for us, just as God provided when Lexi moved on, and other youth staff moved on, and Paul replaced them a few months later. God is faithful. And I would invite you to lean into God in this time as well, and trust him to provide for us. But for a bit, we may feel a little off-kilter, like something is missing, and we may doubt, or at least wonder, what God is doing in our midst. And that’s ok.

What’s *not* ok, is to let the sense of “we’re not complete, and I have doubts” keep us from moving forward. Jesus makes that clear, because to the 11 disciples, who have doubt in their midst: Jesus tells them not to put ministry plans on hold...not to huddle together and wait for another person to join their ranks...Rather, Jesus tells them to “go.” The disciples functioned for a time with 11 disciples just fine. Jesus still addresses them and commissions them to carry on. Clearly, Jesus sends his Church, even with its imperfections and doubts. To complete our phrase today: *The Church is sent by Jesus*. The Church *is* disciples of Jesus who are sent by him to baptize others and teach others to obey what he commanded. Notice the order: baptize and then teach. Baptism is not the end of the faith journey once you feel like you know everything. Rather, it marks the start. There’s a certain degree of knowledge and teaching that happens to get there, but the bulk of it really comes after baptism. We’re baptized, and then we’re taught...and this is what it means to make disciples.

And then also notice Jesus doesn’t tell them just to teach people what he commanded...but: **He told them to teach others to obey what he commanded.** Obviously, our own obedience is the starting point. The charge of hypocrisy against Christians is at least partly rooted in our insistence that people obey Jesus, but then we fail to do so ourselves. And oftentimes, we are asking people to obey Jesus’ commands who *haven’t* been baptized; they *haven’t* come to a place of faith in Him. In short, they aren’t disciples. It’s like we expect the world to be obedient to Jesus before they acknowledge him as Lord and Savior. That’s backwards. Faith, marked by baptism, comes

first; then teaching and obedience. That is Christian discipleship. And we Christians get this out of order all the time, expecting Christian obedience from people who are not disciples of Jesus.

Now, when I think of obeying commands, and teaching people to do that, I'll admit that one thing I think of is teaching our dog, Waverly. We've taught Waverly all about Jesus. ☺ Ok...actually, we've taught her usual dog things to learn – sit, stay, drop, fetch, and so forth. And not only have we taught her what those things are, but we've taught her to obey them. That's the key, right? To do what we command. Let me show you **this video** to show you what I mean....

Ok...so is there obedience there? Clearly not. It's a poor example of what Jesus says here, to teach them to obey what he has commanded. And when it comes to doing that here at Rose Hill, it starts with me as pastor, teaching you not just what Jesus said, but teaching you (and me!) and exhorting you (and me!) to obey it...to live it out. I hope and pray I do a better job of that with you all than I have with the dog!

But then it falls to each of us to do the same thing: to obey what Jesus teaches us, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching them how to live in obedience to his teachings and his commands. It might take some time to get to that place with any one person because so many people today are just completely unfamiliar with Jesus...but that's the command for each of us. Jesus wasn't at a pastor's conference here in this passage as if pastors are the only ones to do this "go and make disciples" stuff; he's speaking to the church...to this imperfect group of 11 disciples with a mixture of faith and doubt. So, Jesus sends his disciples, all of them, not just the ones with seminary training and ordination exams completed: He sends the church to do what he says here.

This is not the only time we see this "Go" message given by Jesus. We see it in Luke 9 when Jesus sends them out on what we might call a training exercise to practice what Jesus had taught them up until then; in Luke 10 Jesus sends out a larger group – 72; we see Jesus praying in John 17 for the church that will later be sent out; We see the expectation of them going out

into to the world in Acts 1 where the resurrected Jesus tells them to be his witnesses in “Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). And the message has its roots in the Old Testament where God’s people were to be a light to the nations around them about who God is and what it means to trust him and be in relationship with him. Clearly, this is important, because it keeps being repeated throughout Scripture.

So, Jesus sends his disciples, including us today. Like the disciples in today’s passage, we are an “eleven-ish” church with room for more to join in the mission, and I imagine that like those first disciples we have a mixture of faith and some doubt or at least questions maybe on the edges of our faith. And as he does with them, he does with us as well: he gives us our mission to make disciples, teaching people to obey everything that Jesus has commanded. He also gives us our mission field, the people to whom we are sent: the world. No small task, is it? The good news is that he doesn’t expect you or me to reach the whole world on our own. There are two things to note about this...two resources he gives. **First, this is the mission for *the Church*, and the Church exists wherever there are people who are disciples of Jesus.** It is not only on us here at Rose Hill; it is not only on our sister churches in our denomination. It’s a global church command to live out. So, we’re in this together with other Christians.

Second of all, Jesus gives us his presence, as he says in this passage. “And I will be with you always, to the very end of the age.” On this Pentecost Sunday, the presence of Jesus is especially appropriate to remember, because the Holy Spirit is the vehicle through which Jesus gives us his presence. He dwells in us by the presence of the Spirit. The Spirit leads us and empowers us, and convicts us of what to do so we would obey all that Jesus has taught and commanded. The Spirit gives us gifts which is how we’re equipped to carry out this mission Jesus gives. So, Jesus sends us with other believers, and he sends us with his presence through the Holy Spirit.

So, one final thought that just kind of summarizes this, and then we’ll draw things to a close here. When we think about this teaching to “go and makes disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” it can be a bit daunting. I mean, “all nations” is pretty broad. It’s

intimidating, even. There's a lot of people to reach and lead toward discipleship to Jesus. Don't let that deter you. Just start with the people in your immediate sphere of relationship and influence. We've talked before about having 5 people or 5 households, whom each of us are praying for, building relationships with, and seeking to ultimately lead toward Jesus...to bring to a place of discipleship; It breaks things down from "the nations" to a few one-on-one relationships. **For most of us, the best way to impact the world for Jesus is one relationship and person at a time.** One household at a time. But we might wonder what kind of a dent that makes as we seek to reach the nations – one person at a time in a world of a few billion might not feel like much of an impact.

There's a story that probably many of us have heard that encourages us in this, however, and it never hurts to hear it again. It goes like this: One day a man was walking along the beach when he noticed a boy picking something up and gently throwing it into the ocean. Approaching the boy, he asked, "What are you doing?" The boy replied, "Throwing starfish back into the ocean. The day is hot, the surf is up, and the tide is going out. If I don't throw them back, they'll die." "Son," the man said, "don't you realize there are miles and miles of beach and hundreds of starfish? You can't make a difference!"

After listening politely, the boy bent down, picked up another starfish, and threw it back into the surf. Then, smiling at the man, he said, "I made a difference for that one."

That's what Jesus asks of us. That's what he sends us to do. He's sent you, and he's sent me, to the people who are in our lives right now, so that we might introduce them to Jesus, make disciples of them, have that faith be marked by baptism, and teach them to know him and obey him as you and I do. And doing that one person at a time is all he asks. So, let's live "sent lives" as his disciples, as imperfect as we are, powered by the presence of Jesus through the Holy Spirit, so that the people around us would also come to a place of faith, and worship, and obedience to Jesus. Let's pray...Amen.

¹ After the first service, someone jokingly asked if I was suggesting that our Paul was equivalent to Judas! Lol. No! That's not what I was intending to say at all.