

Embracing our Life's Mission

Matthew 28:16-20

Hook:

A quick bit of context for where we live.

- Let's examine the current state of Christianity in the world. All stats according to Operation World.
 - **India:** .8% of the population in 1971; 13% today claim Christ. (146.9 million people)
 - **Costa Rica:** 14% of the population are Protestant
 - **France:** 6% of the population are Protestant
 - **Egypt:** 1% of the population is Protestant, despite the fact that Christianity is illegal.
 - **China:** Despite communist oppression the church has grown to at least 7.2% of the population. (95.1 million people)
 - **Cuba:** Speaking of communist nations, our neighbor to the south has a 5% Protestant population.
 - **South Korea:** An exploding population of Protestants, including the largest church in the world boasting 800,000 members of Yoido Full Gospel Church. 36% of the population.
 - **United States:** Approximately 80% of the population identifies themselves as "Christian" while about 50% of the population is Protestant. (150.5 million people)
- **Next, let's examine the United States religious involvement.**
 - In this 2002 study asked religious organization throughout the country to report membership statistics. (As of 2000)
 - These are non-judgment numbers.
 - No judgment was made whether membership meant belief.
 - This was not limited to Christian churches, includes cults and non-Christian religions.
 - Then they took the numbers and divided the membership statistics by each counties population.
 - (look at image, hiding Michigan)
 - Observations...
 - *Remember this is about PERCENTAGE of the population and not numerically.*
 - The most religious state by membership seems to be Utah. (You'll see other hotbeds of Mormonism reflected in darker areas of Western states.)
 - The traditional "Bible Belt" (image) has shifted dramatically.
 - There is now a "new Bible belt" that stretches from Texas to north to Minnesota and the Dakotas.
 - There are some areas we would expect to be religiously sparse... Oregon, Alaska, Washington.

- There are some surprising areas that mess with our assumptions... New England, Florida, and even California has pockets of religious activity.
- I've been teasing you, haven't I?
 - Now let's look at Michigan.. (Show graphic of Michigan)
 - Some observations...
 - Our state looks a lot like some states we would label as "liberal" doesn't it? Florida, California, and Arizona look very similar to Michigan.
 - States we would label as "liberal" look religiously active compared to Michigan. (Illinois, Connecticut, New York, Massachusetts could label Michigan as "non-religious.")
 - Looking at it like this, we can all make the observation that Michigan is not as religiously active as we would assume it to be.
 - Let's take a closer look at Michigan.
 - Parts of the Upper Peninsula, Alpena, and the tip of the thumb seem to be doing very well.
 - According to this map, Macomb and Oakland Counties have 35-50% of their populations as members of a religious institution. Our county to the north, Lapeer County, is in that lower category with less than 35% of the population belonging to a religious institution.
- All of a sudden, when we start to contrast our community to the rest of the country and even the rest of our state, our church lands right in the middle of the mission field.
- I'm guessing at this point you'd like me to let you off the hook, eh?

Big Idea Stated:

Here's where I am going with this today: *"Since God has placed each of us on a mission field, we need to act like missionaries."*

Next, let's look at the state of student ministry in our community.

According to the Romeo Community Schools, in 2006-2007 there were 3272 sixth-twelfth grade students.

According to a University of North Carolina study published in 2005, 38% of 6-12 grade student report that they are "currently involved in a religious youth group." (This could be in a church or out of a church.)

If those numbers were to hold true among students in Romeo Community Schools, I should be able to count about 1243 students "currently involved in a religious youth group."

I did an informal study, asking all the churches that I was aware of how many students their churches have “currently involved in a youth group.”

- Even with their exaggerations, even in me rounding up, even in me exaggerating my own numbers, there approximately 200 students actively involved in a youth ministry in Romeo.
- 6%... let me remind you I’m rounding up! And let’s give this informal study a margin of error of 4%.

All of a sudden, we are all thinking to ourselves... *“I live on a mission field, don’t I?”* Then we have to deal with that reality, and in faith we say to ourselves... *“Since God has placed each of us on a mission field, we need to act like missionaries.”* Don’t we?

6%

Time out:

I know I’ve punished you with number here so far. So let me make this something really visible and easy to understand...

“If I lined up 10 students in 6-12th grades... only half of one of them would be involved in a youth group!”

Why are the numbers so low?

- I don’t have all the answers.
 - o I’ve only been here in Romeo for a little over 4 years and it’s not significantly changed.
- Here are some factors of what the church is doing. (Not just our church, “the church in Romeo”)
 - o Most churches have a YM of 10-20 students actively involved.
 - o The two largest congregations in town...
 - One just hired a new FT youth pastor, pray for him
 - The other has two volunteers
 - o There is one FT, degreed youth worker with a ministry specifically targeting Romeo Community Schools.
 - o The other full-time and part-time staff people doing youth ministry in our area lack formal education in student ministry.
 - o Staff summary: There are 2 FT youth workers, neither do 100% youth ministry and several part timers. (5 FTEs)
 - By contrast, RMS, PMS, RETC, and RHS have a faculty and administration of 302 FTEs)
 - o There is no local parachurch youth organization such as Young Life, Youth for Christ, or even a YMCA.
 - o There has never been a long-term plan, in recent history, for getting local youth ministries with limited resources to work together to reach this community.

- Instead we see many ministries with limited budgets and time focusing mostly on discipling the students in our own local churches.
 - There has never, in recent history, been a significant attempt to reach the 6-12 grade population for Christ.
- Within our own church, I bear some responsibility when I am confronted with these powerful numbers.
- While we are just looking at the student population because it is simple and easy to do the math...
 - Let's also widen our thoughts to realize that these numbers must bear some resemblance to the adult population we live in.
 - This morning is, I feel, a powerful call to action for the urgency of our children, youth, and young adult ministries.

Yet, just like any challenge... we are offered with 3 choices.

- Run away
- Stay and fight
- Ignore the problem and hope it will go away

I pray that as we open God's Word this morning that you will choose to stay and fight! I pray that you too will discover that since you are currently living on a mission field... you have much work to do.

Each week that I teach in Light Force we do a little pop quiz called "Light Force 101" where I ask our students a series of questions.

One question is: **"Where do you live?"**

This morning we've been confronted with the realities of their answer, **"We live in a world dead and dying without Christ."**

Book:

This morning we turn to a very familiar passage of the New Testament, Matthew 28:16-20.

Now, for those of us who have been in the church a long time our brains hear that reference and instantly come to a conclusion:

This is the Great Commission, I know what it says and what I'm supposed to do, I don't need to hear anything else. I wonder what song Jason is going to lead us in after the message?

Don't tune out. The song is "My Savior's Love." So, with distractions gone, let's focus on what the Holy Spirit is looking to reveal to you today. ☺

Context:

Let's not be in a hurry here, let's keep in mind Matthew's narrative before we jump ahead too quickly.

Matthew 28:16

Jesus told them "Meet me at the mountain."

- This was the mountain they always met at.
- The guys were in Jerusalem
- Jesus told them... meet me at the mountain we always meet at... in Galilee.
 - o A 60-80 mile walk depending on the route they chose.
- You can imagine the eleven of them bickering and arguing along the way... they always seemed to argue.
- Just a week or so ago they had walked down from Galilee to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover with Jesus.
- The past 7-10 had rocked their world...
 - o Jesus was heralded as the Messiah as he entered the city
 - o Jesus had caused some trouble at the Temple
 - o They had enjoyed a fantastic Passover meal...
 - o Then in the middle of the night Jesus had been arrested...
 - Put on trial
 - Beaten...
 - And lead to Golgotha to be put to death.
 - o In just a few days they had gone from a SUPER HIGH to a SUPER LOW
 - o And then Sunday came... and Jesus' was resurrected.
 - The impossible had happened.
- All of this had happened with the span of 10 days...
- And here they were on that same road they walked a week or so before...
- And Jesus told them "Meet me at the mountain."
- Church tradition tells us this was likely the same mountain Jesus delivered his greatest sermon, what Matthew called "The Sermon on the Mount"

Matt 28:17

- Matthew records simply that when the disciples saw Him, they worshipped him...
- And suddenly, just like that, there he was. They turned, and seeing him, they bowed down and worshipped him. When Jesus saw them, he said something to them. Something which would change the course of their lives forever. He said to them the words which have come down to us as the Magna Carta of the Christian church. For two thousand years the words that Jesus said to his disciples that day have been read and memorized and pondered and applied and obeyed and discussed by Christians of every group, sect, organization and denomination. Because what Jesus said to his disciples that day was perhaps the most important thing he ever said to them.

The story is told in Matthew 28:18-20. This is the story of the famous last words of Jesus Christ. If you're familiar with your Bible you know that the words are called the Great Commission. And justly so. Because the words that Jesus spoke that day were a charter and a foundation and a blueprint for the movement that his

followers were going to establish after he was gone. These words are important to us for three reasons.

3 Reasons why the Great Commission is So Important

1. They are the last words of Jesus, at least as recorded by Matthew. Last words of any great person are very important.
2. They tell us what to do in the long period of time between Jesus' first coming and His second coming.
3. These words are important because they apply without exception to all Christians at all times, in all places, in every possible situation. Four times he uses "all" or some form of the word "all." Notice verse 18, "All authority has been given to me." Verse 19, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations." Verse 20, "Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you and surely I will be with you always." That's very clear, isn't it? All authority, all nations, everything, always. The words of Jesus Christ have a permanent and enduring and universal validity for you and for me. That's why they were given and that's why they were recorded. We ought to pay special attention to what Jesus is saying here.

Look:

3 Claims in the Great Commission

1. A Great Claim

- a. v. 18 tells us that Jesus tells his disciples that "all authority" in heaven and on earth has been given to him
 - i. By whom?
 - ii. The Greek word here is "exousia." *It means delegated authority.*
 - iii. The authority was delegated to Jesus by God the Father.
 - iv. He doesn't just have all the power in the world, God gave Him all authority...
 1. Jesus holds all the authority on the planet
 2. We know that while he walked the earth as a man he had tremendous authority...
 - a. But as a result of the resurrection, he had no been given "all authority."

2. A Great Commission

- a. Read v. 19-20a
- b. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.
 - i. For as popular as these verses of the Bible are... and as much as it's been a rally cry of the church for millennia... it is always misunderstood widely.

1. While the Great Commission includes “foreign missions,” Foreign missions is not the **UNIVERSAL** command of the verse to be applied to everyone.
2. This passage is so familiar that we often miss it completely!
- ii. This is a passage where the original language matters greatly.
 1. When we read this passage in English we see 3, maybe 4 verbs...
 - a. “go”
 - b. “make disciples”
 - c. “baptizing”
 - d. “teach”
 2. But in the Greek there's only one verb here. Our job as Christians is wrapped up in one verb in the Greek: Make disciples.
 - a. The other three words are participles. What is translated as “go” is really “going.” Baptizing is a participle. Teaching is a participle.
 - b. They're all dependant on the action of the verb— make disciples.
 - c. Jesus in his last message to his followers, in his famous last words, as he was about to bid farewell to them forever, said, “Gentlemen, after I am gone I want you to do one thing and one thing above everything else. I want you to go and make disciples.”
 3. What does “disciple” mean? After all, if we are to make disciples... we need to know what one is.
 - a. A disciple is a student
 - b. To make disciples is to go out and convert someone from being a bystander to being an active follower of Christ.

What does this mean to me in real life?

Let's pretend that being a Christian is like being in a race. Jesus tells us... I don't want you to just finish the race alone... I want you to invite every single person you meet to join you in the race. Pull people off the streets into the race to run with you. The person taking pictures, grab them. The person who is too shy, grab them, on and on.

Let's be clear, if all you ever do is follow Jesus and you finish the race alone, **you've failed.** You may say... “Look at me Jesus, I ran a good race. I was efficient and I focused just on knowing you!” You failed to follow the command. **The command is to make disciples, to bring people with you on your race.**

We are each called to reach our mission field

Jesus says, “I want you to reach the nations!”

- What's the participle... “GO!”

- See, if we think that the 95% of students who aren't interested in Jesus are going to come to us, we're wrong.
- If we think that our neighbors are going to one day magically appear at our doorstep and say "Hey, I don't know you and you've never talked to me, but I can tell by the way you mow your lawn that you must have many great answers in life... can you please tell me how I may give my life to Jesus Christ?" If you think that... it's not going to happen!
- You have to go!

What are we to do with these converts?

- Baptize them
 - o Simply... bring them into the local church!
- Teach them
 - o We could spend hours talking about what to teach them... but simply put, we are to teach them how to follow Jesus so that they can make disciples of their own.

Bottom line: Jesus last words speak powerfully to us.

- When most of us think about the question... "*What is my mission in life?*"
 - o We get confused... we think "mission, Adam said mission... he means "missionaries." "Our mission is to embrace missionaries!"
 - o We think about family, career, ourselves, and our relationship with Christ.
 - o But Jesus last words to his disciples we not focused on those things...
 - They were focused on our job to bring as many people across the finish line with us as possible.
 - o We don't have to think of the mission field as India, or France, or Costa Rica, or Chicago, or some faraway place that we send people to go... that is important but it NEVER excuses us from our primary life's mission.
 - Even the Greek word here is so telling. We see the word "nation" in English and we think of a place far away.
 - The word is "ethne" and it simply means "people groups."
 - o Your primary life's mission, the last command Jesus gave His disciples, is to know Christ personally and to make him known to the people groups you encounter.
 - o Does the Great Commission call some to be missionaries in other nations? **ABSOLUTELY! But not at the cost of your local mission.**
 - **Two practical proofs:**
 - If the Great Commission were about foreign missionaries exclusively, *why did these 11 men wait 10 years to go to the nations?* (Preaching to Cornelius in Acts 10)
 - *Why was it about 13 years before the first Apostles were sent out from the church?*

3. A Great Promise

- a. Read v. 20a

- b. “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”
- c. The last great thing we see in the Great Commission is a great promise.
 - i. If we will embrace our mission to reach the mission field we live in, Jesus Christ will be present in our lives.

Took:

A Scary Reality

I started this morning by pointing a very scary picture for you. I showed you that while God’s people around the globe are bringing in the greatest harvest in the history of the church outside of our country we are watching our community get further and further from the church. Our tendency when we are failing is to give up! We must not give up and wait for the missionaries come to win the lost in our community. We have to first deal with realities that in many areas of we have failed to, so far, make a significant impact on this community, we cannot let our fears and our past failures dictate our future results.

We are the church, we are the people Jesus has chosen to reach this community.

“Since God has placed each of us on a mission field, we need to act like missionaries.”

3 Ways to Act Like a Missionary and Embrace Our Mission in Life

1. **Become a student of culture.** (Learn to speak the language, learn what is happening in the culture, discover ways to use things in culture for redemptive purposes.)
2. **Get involved.** (KidsTown, Light Force, Young Adults... the fields are white for the harvest, we need help!)
3. **Take ownership of our mission.** (The mission of the church belongs to all of us. We are each responsible for fulfilling the Great Commission.)