

Evergreen Presbyterian Church

Beaverton, Oregon

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Sermon Title: Beginning the Mission

Sermon Text: Matthew 28:16-20

Matt. 28:16 ¶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

Matt. 28:17 And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted.

Matt. 28:18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Matt. 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Matt. 28:20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Main Point: Jesus Christ intends for his disciples to seek out people, bring them into the church, build them up, and then send them back out again.

Outline:

1. The Call to Worship (v. 17)
2. The Call to Go (v. 18-19)
3. The Call to Disciple (v. 19-20)

Introduction

Why does the church of Jesus Christ exist? What are we even supposed to do? What are we supposed to care about? Why are we here?

If you look at many of the things that trouble the church today, part of those troubles, I am convinced can be traced back to a crisis of purpose. This isn't just true of the church, it's true of all kinds of things: work, manhood, womanhood, education... it goes on and on. When we do not know what we are, or what we are here for, or what our purpose is, we will inevitably find ourselves adrift and at the mercy of the culture, or the mood of the moment.

So how do you address a purpose crisis? Well if you're a man and you don't know what real masculinity is, or what men are even for, you go to the Scriptures. We saw that at our men's retreat not too long ago. If you're an educator and you find yourself wondering what you're really doing, or why you're even doing it, one of the best things you can do is go to the Scriptures and see just why it is that God wants us to teach truths to our children in the first place.

And the same is true of the church. And for the church in our own context in North America, I think it is especially important that in a moment where so many voices are out there telling us what the church should be... some say it's primarily a place to gather people together. Some say it's a place for community organizing. Some say it's a place for political change and activism... and on and on... there are all these voices telling us *their* vision of the church. And the answer on this subject is the same as the other subjects I mentioned before. If you want to know what the church is for, you don't look at the world around, because it's not the world's church. This is Jesus' church. And so you look at Jesus' own instruction to us in the Scripture.

And especially you look at really the inaugural text where Christ sends his church out and gives explicit instructions as to what they must do. That's our passage today. Because here Jesus is, he is on the cusp of ascending to his father's right hand, he's about to enter his heavenly session ruling over the church, and he gives these parting commands and promises.

What is the church for? Why does it exist? In the time we have, I want to draw your attention to three aspects of the mission of the church here as we wrap up our series on the Gospel of Matthew.

Three things before us today as we receive from Jesus the mission of the church:
The Call to Worship, the Call to Go, and the Call to Disciple.

1. The Call to Worship (v. 17)

First, Jesus presents us with the call to worship. Verse 17 tells us that the eleven disciples “worshiped him.”

For a disciple of Jesus, Jesus is not a means to some other end, he is not someone to be used. He is *the end* for whom we live and for whom we labor. One definition of worship is to make a thing the end and purpose of everything that we do. To live for something, in service of that thing is to worship. And that is our call. And our true call and purpose is to live for Jesus.

Now that he is risen, now that the disciples see and understand what he came to do and accomplish, he is the object of their worship. On the verge of sending them out into the world, the last thing they do as a gathered group is worship him.

Here’s a beautiful realistic element that Matthew includes, and it’s so basic that it almost gets by us as readers. I often think we’re so eager to get to the Great Commission that we move right past this.

But in verse 17 there is something that is worth focusing on. Verse 17 says, speaking of the eleven that “they worshiped him.” In other words, all of the disciples worshiped Jesus. And that’s beautiful. But even here it’s tinged with such realism. Because in the midst of their worshiping, some of them, it appears are worshiping *and* doubting.

John Chrysostom says that when we read this, we should admire the gospel writer’s truthfulness here. He says, “Even up to the last day, they were determined not to conceal even their own shortcomings.”

That’s the first thing I want to say: nothing in this account is sort of a “happily ever after,” where now suddenly the disciples become these instant superheroes of the church. No, they remain men with feet of clay and their own doubts and struggles that they had to grow through. The documents that the gospel writers have given

us do not gloss or sugar-coat. They tell us the truth, even uncomfortable truths about themselves.

Now, there's a second thing I want us to see here. Look closely: in the same moment, there is doubt and worship. While it is an incredible blessing to worship without doubt, it is also a reality, that sometimes sincere believers experience doubts. We have questions we don't know how to answer. Dilemmas that we haven't considered, and they blindside us. Doubts happen. In fact, it's not unusual for God to grow us *through* our doubts.

Now, we don't know the nature of these specific doubts, we don't know exactly what struggles they were experiencing; maybe they wondered if this was a dream. Maybe they wondered if they'd all gone crazy. Who knows? But we know that *all* of them still worshiped. Even if they had their own heart issues that needed to be resolved, they still worshiped. They worshiped *through* the doubt.

Now, we should also note something else: that while they doubted at this time, eventually all of the disciples would give their lives up out of a commitment to the testimony that this was true and real and that it happened, and that Christ was really risen. And so I would also say that the model here is that *when* we doubt, we worship *through* our doubt, and we wait on the Lord to help *resolve* those doubts.

Here's my encouragement to you: some Christians seem so incredibly confident that you can't imagine them ever wavering or doubting or struggling. It can be very hard to share your own doubts with someone who seems like they just live in a fortress and have never had questions that needed answering. But not only in this text, but also in my experience, Christians do experience doubts and questions. Some church environments make it hard to express those questions for fear of seeming like you're not a "real Christian," or like you don't really belong or something because you want to understand. But you have to ask those questions in order to understand.

I've personally worked through tons of doubt. But those doubts, when answered, leave you as a Christian with a stronger faith, not a weaker faith. Generally

speaking, **God grows us through our doubts, not in spite of them.** Those doubts become the occasion for the growth, not an obstacle to them.

But look at this: if Matthew can say that the disciples themselves who were eyewitnesses of the risen Christ worshiped in the midst of their own doubts, then we should not pressure or guilt Christians who are going through a similar experience.

The book of Jude tells us that we should “have mercy on those who doubt” (Jude 22). How can we do that? Well when people have questions we don’t respond, “Oh you’re worried about that? What’s *wrong* with you? I settled that a long time ago!” or “Oh, you wonder about that? You probably shouldn’t be teaching Sunday School.” That sort of thing. Right? That is a bad response.

The church is a place for our questions to be expressed, but also answered, insofar as they can be.

As your pastor, I want those of you with questions to know that we have 2000 years of reflection that has taken place, dealing with the most difficult questions that might arise. I am always surprised in my studies to find that what seems like the most original question that surely nobody has ever thought of ends up being something that inevitably you can find some church father or commentator addressing.

There are very few intellectual struggles or questions or doubts that you can have... apparent contradictions in the text... that sort of thing... that *someone* before you has not already considered. So if you have doubts, know that you can come to me or an elder or another member that you trust and ask for help resolving them. We often won’t have the answer immediately, but we do have a lot of resources and will help you work to find the answers to your questions or doubts. That is part of what the church should be here for: to have mercy on those who doubt. If we won’t then we’re being disobedient to God’s word.

Now, the disciples worship Jesus. And this is not just some one-time thing that the disciples do. It is the beginning of a pattern for the church that continued into the book of Acts, it continued in the writings of the Apostles, and it continued into the early church, and it continues today.

Even the enemies of God's people knew this. Pliny, who was the Roman Governor of what is now modern day Turkey, and he wrote a letter to the Roman emperor Trajan in 112 AD (about 80 years after the events of today's reading) reporting on what Christians did when they gathered together. So here Pliny says this about Christians:

“On a fixed day [the Christians] used to meet before dawn and recite a hymn among themselves to Christ, as though he were a god.”

Pliny is testifying that this worship of Christ continued long after this moment in our text. Worshiping Jesus as God became the central persistent feature of the life of the church after the resurrection. And it continues to be the defining feature of Christian worship today.

Worship is at the heart of the church's life, the church's blood, the church's purpose. We worship, but we are also called to spread the name of Christ because we are inviting all the world to become worshipers of Christ as well.

John Piper has put it this way: “Missions exists because worship does not.”

Our friends and neighbors need to worship Christ. They were made for it, whether they see it or realize it or not. And until they do, they will spend their lives yearning and reaching and never really finding. We have the answer. We know the thing that they were made for. We have the only message that brings reconciliation between sinners and their Creator.

And they were made to be reconciled to the Lord because they were made to come into his presence unstained by sin, washed in the blood of the lamb, and worshiping the creator from a clean conscience.

Remember the Psalmist: “All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you” (Psalm 22:27). That is the call. It's why we were made. Here the disciples model this well, and they worship Christ.

That the first thing I want us to see today: the call to worship.

2. The Call to Go (v. 18-19)

Second, Jesus presents his church with the call to go.

Of all the things Jesus says here, this is probably the easiest to understand, the easiest to talk about, and the hardest to do. We are creatures of comfort. We like our homes, probably. We like the place we grew up. We like being around our families, perhaps. There are many reasons to stay.

There are so many reasons why we might not *want* to go. And yet Jesus says here, “Go therefore.” Go where? “All nations.” In all nations, all places, all languages, all people groups, Jesus says we should be going. And incredible progress has been made in this mission. The modern missions movement which took place in the 19th and 20th century has been an incredible story, but it isn’t finished yet.

Here is the thing: Even if the Lord doesn’t call you or me personally to leave our homes or the place we grew up, we need to have hearts that are *willing* to go; *willing* to leave; ready to depart at a moment’s notice.

Remember that saying I mentioned from Piper earlier: “Missions exists because worship does not.” This is the call of Scripture, that the word of God would go to the ends of the earth. Those who aren’t worshipping Yahweh yet need to hear this! The world should be called to worship; that is Jesus’ parting word, and a continual drumbeat throughout the Bible.

“Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!” (Psalm 96:3).

“Make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted” (Isaiah 12:4).

Paul tells us that God sends Jesus on his mission “in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.” (Romans 15:9).

He does his mighty works in history “that [his] name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” (Romans 9:17)

And never forget Paul's own example from Romans 15:20: "I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, where Christ has not already been named."

What I would love for this church is for the Lord to be raising up people here in this congregation even now, who have such a love for the lost that they begin sharing the gospel here at home with our friends and neighbors. Many of us think of evangelism as being something formal, involving titles and funding... something that has to take us outside the borders of this country.

But there are missionaries from other countries who have been coming *here*. Our presbytery supports such a man named Sagar Mekwan right now up in Washington. He is a missionary *to* the United States. And he is not a native of this country. We need to realize that this place is now a foreign mission field, and nobody knows this mission field better than those of us who already live here right now. So my hope is that we would start there. Start modestly. We already live among a very unreached people group.

Some people want to become missionaries and go overseas, but they won't even start here at home. I am very wary about someone who says, "I want to be a foreign missionary," but they are not already sharing the gospel where they live.

Let me encourage you to evangelize now. Don't wait until you're on foreign soil. We've tried to make this a focus of our church this year. I think I could have done better. I think we will continue banging that drum into next year. In a few months I plan to start a new adult Sunday School series on the subject of evangelism. But the session's continued desire is that we be impressing upon all of us the need to be faithful in sharing Christ locally, making friends who aren't already believers. Getting to know co-workers who are unchurched and inviting them to hear and believe the gospel.

Let's be willing to "go," as Jesus says. But let's start by "going" across the street first and being faithful where the Lord has already placed us.

That's the second thing that Jesus calls his church to do. He calls us to "go."

3. The Call to Disciple (v. 19-20)

Third, Jesus presents his church with the call to Disciple. We are meant to make disciples.

Hence in verse 19 Jesus says, “Go therefore and *make disciples* of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

I want to focus on discipleship here. But notice the content of that discipleship. The content is meant to encompass the teachings of Jesus. “All that I have commanded.”

I was talking to someone the other day about discipleship. And I realized in that conversation that we can have a very narrow view of what it means to make disciples. We can also have an overly broad view of discipleship.

Sometimes we think of discipleship as exclusively this intensive one-on-one thing. And it *can* absolutely be that. But here’s a question: Jesus was a great disciple-maker. How often is he one-on-one with his disciples, as far as we know? Not very often. Nearly everything we know of his teaching and discipleship was done in a large group or crowd. There were hundreds of disciples, probably very few of whom were one-on-one with him. They were disciples of Jesus because they listened to his preaching and practiced it and followed him. Even his inner circle was composed not of one man, but of many men.

Discipleship in Scripture, from what we can tell, primarily takes place in a group context where the word is preached and taught to large numbers of people, and those people help one another to internalize, delight in, and put it into practice. There are definitely times when individuals engage with each other and press one another directly apart from groups, like when Priscila and Aquila minister to Apollos, or when Jesus speaks one-on-one with Peter. But the vast majority of the discipleship we see in the Bible is done in group contexts.

What does that mean? I think part of what it means is that the primary, bedrock work of building someone up in the faith – in other words, making them a disciple – is done in an efficient and effective way when it is primarily focused on the corporate preaching of the word of God. When the preaching ministry of the church reaches the congregation, it hits everybody, and it hits differently

depending on the person and depending on how the Spirit ministers to them. The preaching ministry is undoubtedly the most effective method of making disciples that the church has.

Preaching is meant to touch the mind *and* the heart. It's not supposed to just be a lesson. As Lloyd-Jones puts it, preaching is meant to be "logic on fire." There is supposed to be truth and passion evident and combined together when preaching takes place.

And this is why preaching is such a focus for me, above all else that I do here as your pastor. I really believe that the pulpit, by God's design, is the place from which discipleship in the church emanates out from. It is the furnace around which we all gather and then take that heat back to our homes and friends and neighbors.

This doesn't mean Christians don't do small group Bible studies. It doesn't mean that we don't have Sunday School. It doesn't mean that Christians can't meet one on one and talk about specifics of their lives or ways to grow. But it does mean that if a church is not faithfully, joyfully, and passionately setting forth the word of God in its preaching ministry, then it is failing in this third area of the mission of the church. How can you grow disciples if they are not getting the primary food that Jesus has for his church?

Also, just in terms of bang for your buck, think of this: if your family all hears the same sermon on the same day, and leaves and then carries that message home, you have an entire week to meditate upon what you've heard, to discuss it together, and to reinforce what was already heard. And so what starts in the gathered church often feeds in a healthy way into individual and family discipleship. I think that is part of the reason why preaching was the central focus of Jesus' work of disciple making. Because the word disseminates in the same way to all his people, but it lands in different ways.

I know of Christians who don't go to church for the most part, but they spend time one on one with other Christians and think that is what it is to be the church, or that they still consider themselves disciples of Jesus. They live among a self-selected group of favorite people, but don't give themselves to other Christians: they give themselves to their favorites. But "discipleship" apart from the church is

an oxymoron. If you could have discipleship apart from the church, why did Jesus even give these commands to his church in the first place?

The truth is, none of us is meant to be an island. None of us is meant to carry the weight of God's ministry on our shoulders. No one person is meant to disciple: the church has been given the mission to make disciples. The church is God's answer to that exact issue. And so I want us to see that the work of discipleship is primarily a church-wide work, not merely an individual project.

Remember this also: the command to "go" in verse 19 isn't just for those who were *already* disciples. It's meant to be a self-perpetuating command, so that we are bringing people in, raising people up, and then sending people out. It's not like, "well this first group of Jesus' followers was supposed to go. Now everyone else stays put wherever they are." Instead the idea is that *every* generation of Christians is meant to go. There should be something of a revolving door around here.

So we are meant to be brought into the church, raised up in the church, built up in the church, and then sent out from the church to do it all again. This is one of those beautiful and challenging things for churches: often we will see young men raised up in our midst and they may leave us and never come back.

Taylor Bradley was here at Evergreen for a season; now he is a PCA pastor in Pennsylvania.

Isaiah Spivey not only was raised up at St. Stephen's and graduated, but was sent out from Evergreen on a scholarship to Greenville seminary. Who knows where he ends up serving God's people and in what way he will serve.

It is hard to see people leave us to go into the world. But it is good when this happens. It is normal, not abnormal. It's healthy, not unhealthy. It's right.

As strange as it sounds, we should be eager to see people in the church go out and leave us. We don't want them to leave the church, but we do want them to "go" in obedience to Jesus' command here.

A fellow PCA Pastor, Jason Helopoulos, was talking about his own congregation and it's focus on the great commission. He said that he has an elder, whose philosophy is that the church is meant to "bring them in, build them up, and send them out." Bring them in build them up send them out. I think that's a beautiful way of expressing exactly what Jesus says here in the great commission Jesus is saying to bring them in, build them up, and send them back out into the world.

Back in 2010, I was a part of a PCA church in Wichita, KS. That church sent me to seminary. They helped me pay for seminary. They supported my family while we lived on beans and rice, rice and beans. And you know what? We didn't return. Instead, we went to Mississippi, ministered in a church there, and now here we are in Oregon. That church was a sending church, a church that obeyed the great commission by sending me and my family out. But that required sacrifice. They lost our family, but hopefully you feel like other churches gained. And so in that sense, that church in Wichita ended up ministering to Christians in Mississippi and Oregon.

We should be eagerly doing the same: who will the Lord raise up among us to minister to other churches or people groups? We should be praying for the Lord to take people from us to serve the church, as counterintuitive as that seems.

Conclusion: (The Promise of v. 20)

Can Jesus do this? Will Jesus do this? Will he accomplish this mission? Will the church go and make disciples of all nations?

Well look: Christ tells us that his mission will not fail, because the whole mission and its success is based in him and what he has done: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go, make disciples" (Matthew 28:18).

While we are meant to be workers for the Lord, it doesn't depend on us. It is based in him, in his work, and in what he has done. He has all authority; therefore go. What an incredible thing: we work, but it doesn't depend on us. We serve, but we aren't the reason the gospel succeeds. We're faithful, but only because he is faithful. You see, for Jesus, it all goes back to him.

I can actually see that faithfulness of God at work, even in how this series is ending and the next one is beginning.

So for the past year I have been asking the question: once we eventually finish Matthew's Gospel, then what? What is a suitable place for us to go next? And I toyed with Exodus and Leviticus. I even outlined what a sermon series on either book would look like. But eventually I settled on the book of Daniel. I settled on it for lots of reasons: for one, I liked the length. Unlike the years we have spent in Matthew, Daniel won't be as long. Another reason is, I wanted us to hear from God in the Old Testament. For another reason, I think that while the first half of Daniel is familiar to most Christians, the second half is not, and I'm eager to open up something that we might find challenging but which speaks to us in our own moment.

After I settled on Daniel, I realized something else as I was also wrapping up this conclusion to Matthew: Jesus sends his people out. Right here, he sends them out. And he doesn't send them out into a paradise, or into a place that feels like a home away from home. He doesn't send them out to home at all: he sends them out into a place of difficulty, of hostility... a place full of opposition... a place full of spiritual resistance. And yet he sends them out without a hint of hesitation, fear, or paranoia. Instead he's like, "I have all authority... therefore go."

Where do they go? They go out into exile. They're exiled from Jerusalem. Exiled from what the Jews believed to be their paradise. Exiled into a place of darkness and opposition. Gentile lands. The four corners of the world. And yet when they go... guess what? He goes with them.

And that's why next we're turning our attention to Daniel. Because Daniel and his friends are God's people who are also living in exile. And they are faithful. And they are witnesses. And they show us what that faithfulness in exile looks like lived out in a hostile context. What does it look like to evangelize in exile? What does it look like to please God and live out the great commission in a place that is not truly your home? These are the questions we'll be turning our attention to as we begin this next series, but it's one that Matthew's gospel has absolutely set us up and prepared us for.

All authority has been given to him. Are you ready to obey? Are you ready to go?
Both across the street, and around the world.

Let's pray.