

Text:

Matthew 28.16-20

Big Picture:

We have reached the end of the Gospel of Matthew, but not before Jesus encourages his disciples to make disciples as they go throughout the world. That making disciples would be a part of following Jesus should not be a surprise—Matthew has spent his gospel preparing people by showing them: “This is what a disciple looks like.”

Preparing for the Lesson:

We know that the passage for today comes on the heels of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. This is a *risen* Lord we are talking about here. That changes everything! Think for just a second about how Jesus’ instructions to his disciples to make disciples would have looked had Jesus spoken these words prior to his death, or if there had been no resurrection? Filtered through this reality, we read this passage differently.

Notice that Matthew is intentional to tell his readers that the *eleven* gathered. Peter, although not mentioned directly, is a part of this group. For Matthew’s readers, I believe this would have been a great source of comfort. If he can make that kind of mistake yet be forgiven, surely there is hope for me, as well.

It is also interesting to me that Jesus had previously given instructions to his disciples of what to do when he rose again. (Although it seems they had to be reminded of these things once Jesus actually did.)

As if Matthew’s repeated pointing to the fact that Jesus was on a level of authority similar to God did not convince of that fact, all doubt is removed with Jesus’ last words: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me...” When we go out to share the message of Jesus, we are going not only in his name, but also with his authority.

We often focus on Jesus’ “command” to go as if it is an imperative. GO!!, we read. A better translation would be: “as you are going,” make disciples. I think this is an important distinction. While being sent as a missionary to a foreign land is certainly commendable, Jesus’ words do not single out this to the exclusion of disciple making as we go through the moments of our everyday life. I would say it like this: everything we do ought to be a part of disciple making. And disciple making is the emphasis. The point is not how many we baptize or how much we teach, but rather, how well we are at helping people be full followers of Jesus who then do the same for others.

The take-away for this week’s lesson needs to be a focus on sharing the good news with others. One cannot read this passage and not be convicted of the need to make disciples. Be sure to encourage your group this week to be about sharing the good news of Jesus with others.

Possible Lesson Outline:

Given the expectations of many of the Jewish people ... and Jesus’ disciples, what sort of events do you think you would have thought to happen on the Sunday following the crucifixion? What do you think the disciples were thinking come Sunday morning?

Ask discussion questions.

Close with a time of prayer.

For the Kids:

I think it is appropriate to ask your children to share ways they think they can share the stories of Jesus with their peers. We might find that their solutions may actually encourage us to do a better job of sharing with our own friends.

Discussion Questions:

1. What important fact has Matthew told us without directly mentioning it by saying “the eleven disciples...”? How would this have been important for Matthew’s original readers? Why is it important to us?
2. Why is Jesus’ authority an important aspect of moving forward? How does your idea of sharing the story of Jesus change based on knowing you go with the authority of Jesus?
3. How is your understanding changed even further knowing we go with “all authority in heaven and on earth?”
4. We often read verse 19 as a imperative, focusing on the aspect of needing to GO! In reality, that passage is better translated “As you are going...” How does making disciples look different if we are doing this as we are going rather than as a result of focusing on go?
5. As we are going, what are we supposed to be doing? How does this happen? What does it mean to “make disciples?”
6. Jesus says we are to teach others to follow everything he has commanded. If you are going to summarize what Jesus commanded us, what would you include on this list?
7. How does the knowledge of Jesus being with you change how you think about your life of faith?

This Week:

Spend a couple of minutes in your group sharing with one another ways you can better share the story of Jesus “as you are going.” Try to come up with some specific concrete ways to do this, not just general “be better people” type of things. Then spend some time trying to think of ways to encourage each other this week to follow through with the things you listed. Encourage people to actually go out and do these things. Close with a time in prayer that you will be diligent in sharing with others.