Being the Church in Our Community

Third in the 2014 summer series Heritage and Hope

# Scripture: Matthew 28:19, 20

# Key Thought: Making disciples always involves the interplay of both the Great Commission and Second Greatest Commandment.

# Intro idea:

## Three Stories:

Don and Rosie lived in a big house and were very comfortable having company, even though they had three children at home and Rosie kept elderly folks in a family care atmosphere for a living. Rosie and Don were faithful members in my first church. Soon after I moved there, Curt and Diana moved in with their two girls, one with Down’s syndrome, across the street from Don and Rosie. I remember Diana as a rather boisterous lady, very dedicated to her family, and Curt had an alcohol problem. They were not church attenders. Donna and Rosie befriended the family and invited them over. Soon they also invited them to church. Diana came with the children and soon became a follower of Jesus Christ. She blurted out one day, “You’ll never get my husband to come.” But Don and Rosie kept showing love and hospitality, and before long, Curt did come. After a time, he asked to speak with the pastor. He was converted and delivered from alcohol. Soon Diana had to confess that he was growing spiritually faster than she was. Over time, he became a teacher in the local church.

JoAnne Jones, while we were at Kirkville, felt led to participate in a drive-by prayer ministry. Her assignment was a street in Chittenango New York. Sometime later, she was talking to a new hairdresser, Laura, and discovered that Laura had previously lived on that street. JoAnne told Laura how she had prayed for the people in the house she had lived in without knowing who it was. JoAnne developed a special bond with this hairdresser. She took Laura a small gift when she had her hair cut. After some time Laura and her family began to attend the church. Pastor Kelvin visited them. Laura’s blind mother-in-law also attended and Pastor Kelvin visited her as well. When it came time for us to leave Kirkville, it was wonderful to hear Laura’s testimony about how her relationship with JoAnne had led to spiritual transformation in her life. Laura is a talented photographer. She works with young women and her goal is to make them feel good about themselves using fancy artful poses, not the provocative ones which are so much the norm in our culture. Her work is highly creative and gorgeous.

Randy was a child in one of those poor white families in the hills. In Northeast Pennsylvania, there were many of these rural poor. The homes were often shabby and ill-kept as was Randy’s. Often at least one parent was an alcohol abuser. Malcolm, a doubly retired veteran type at my first church decided to make it one of his ministries to transport children from the hill country to Bentley Creek Wesleyan church. He bought a van specifically for the purpose after the church ended its second bus route and began to faithfully pick up Randy and a few other children from the hilltop several miles away. On snowy winter mornings, or nice spring ones, Malcolm would head out early and bring back as many children as would ride from the families on his route. Randy grew up greatly influenced by the local church. Pastor Kelvin had a chance to have a special discipleship time with him and another young man during his teen years. When he left high school he felt called to ministry and left for Gordon College, the first in his family to go to college. While he did not complete that goal, he is still a disciple of Jesus Christ today and has raised his family as disciples of Jesus too. I am in contact with him through Facebook and saw on his Facebook page just the other day that he had done a special commissioning time with one of his sons as the son graduated from high school. How exciting for me to glimpse the generational difference that has been made by making one disciple!

There is no greater ministry than working with God to make disciples and transform lives. Note that in all three stories the key figures, the key disciple-makers were lay-persons. I share the stories because today’s sermon is about making disciples.

## Two components

Making disciples happens in all kinds of different ways. But it always involves the interplay of two specific instructions that Jesus gave us about being his church.

# Our Great Commission: Make disciples:

One of these instructions is the great commission. When we think of this one we think immediately most the time of the more direct and evangelistic outreaches of Christians -- proclaiming the good news of the gospel, giving testimony to what God has done in our lives, encouraging someone else to move closer to God, teaching the truths of Scripture.

## Source of this imperative- Jesus’ Great commission

**Jesus’ commission Mt 28:19-20 NIV**

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, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

**Jesus’ example** -- “The son of man came to seek and to save what was lost.” (Luke 19:10)

## One key verb in the text – make disciples:

Here are some key words from the UMC Discipline:

The mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Local churches provide the most significant arena through which disciple making occurs.

Part III The Ministry of All Christians, the Mission and Ministyr of the Church Para 120

We insist that personal salvation always involves Christian mission and service to the world. By joining heart and hand, we assert that personal religion, evangelical witness, and Christian social action are reciprocal and mutually reinforcing.

From Basic Affirmations -- The Book of Discipline UMC – Para 101 Section Mission and Service:

## 2 ways we begin to do obey this commission:

## Help people define reality by teaching God’s truth.

It is the Church’s responsibility to be a witness to the life and ministry of Jesus. It is up to us to get the story of his life out to others so they know about him. They cannot respond to his call to follow if they do not know about him. Here are some ways we do that today.

* Christmas and Easter music presentations
* Dramatic presentations at church both live and by video
* Distributing Bibles, Jesus videos, tracts
* Discipleship CLASSES and small groups
* Sunday School classes
* Website pages, online resources resources

## Provide the connection to God

Think about an electrical circuit in your house. One of the wires is considered the hot wire. Well, when it comes to connecting your neighbors and friends to God, you and I are the hot wire. The Holy Spirit moves through us to them.

At the Fall of Adam there was a great spiritual disconnect. Ever since, God’s Spirit has been at work in the world to reconnect humanity to God. Moses, all the prophets and then Jesus all were sent to help reconnect the human family to their Creator.

Here are some liturgical ways we help people to connect with God.

* Personal testimony
* Singing in Worship services
* Prayer times
* Sacraments
* Invitation to personally step closer to God

The second instruction from Jesus might be summarized from Jesus words in the upper room on the first Easter night.

# *Our Commission to be servants to others:*

**Jesus’ Commission:**

John 20:21 “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” NIV

In this simple instruction, Jesus tells us to continue his work – works of love and service. So our first instruction is about spreading the word and inviting others to follow. The second instruction is about serving others in love.

**Jesus’ example:**  “I am among you as one who serves”

When we think of this command, we think first of how Jesus loved those with whom he came in contact. He met the needs of the hungry. He healed the sick. He made the blind to see and the lame to walk. He understood those who were shoved aside in society. He crossed social barriers with his love. From Jesus we understand that we are commanded to carry out his works of love and justice and service to others that bring so much healing to our world.

## Two ways we do this:

## Bring the presence of Jesus - serve through who we are and what we stand for.

We are the body of Christ. The love of Jesus is shown through us first by the kind of character that God is developing in us. Our minds are being shaped after the mind of Christ. So the way we talk, the compassion we feel, the ethics we demonstrate, all are a witness to who Jesus is. Because of who Jesus is in us and through us we seek to:

* To bring justice where there is injustice
* Healing where there is sickness
* Wisdom where there is foolishness
* Love where there is hatred
* Forgiveness where there is vengeance
* Peacemaking where there is hostility

The presence of the Holy Spirit in you brings God’s presence into every situation into which you enter.

## Meet a need:

The second way that we seek to follow Jesus’ example and teaching about service is by meeting needs as we encounter them. We plan to serve others in intentional ways. Here are a few examples.

* Influencing society toward morality – salt idea
* Supporting the family unit
* Assisting in the teaching of children
* Support Groups
* Visiting the sick, lonely, etc.
* Working for justice in specific cases in society
* Fighting Poverty
* Disaster relief
* Caring for the earth

# Conclusion

# These are not opposites but work together

Often these two commands, making disciples and serving others in love, are set in opposition to each other. People think they are either evangelists or they are servants to others. Furthermore, we often caricature each type of gifting. We think of evangelists as inconsiderate and pushy. And we view service to other people as milquetoast types with no truth to uphold.

But the real account of Jesus tells a different story, the narrative that is repeated in each of the three true illustrations that I shared with you at the beginning. The command to make disciples and the concept of serving others in need are not opposites at all; rather they work together inseparably. Jesus always served the needs of the people, first of all, because he had compassion on them, but secondly, because he knew that by so doing, he would also open the way to teach them the truth they needed to know, which he then proceeded to do.

Donna and Rosie’s loving hospitality opened the way for Curt and Diana to discover who Jesus was and learn to follow him. JoAnne’s ministry of prayer and generosity reached out in love to Laura and opened the way for her to discover how to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Malcolm’s sacrifice of time and money to provide transportation made it possible for Randy to be in a place where he could become a disciple of Jesus Christ.

# What are Your Opportunities?

## What opportunities has God uniquely given us at this time in the church’s history?

1. God has given us a special time for children’s ministry. How do we maximize that? We have made a start this past year by adding many things to help children – children’s sermon, catechism class, winter picnic, summer picnic, children’s day. How do we continue this trend?
2. God has given us an excellent ability to work together to host dinners and tag sales and they are well attended by the community. Are there ways we can increase the relationship between our dinners and the work of the great commission?
3. This is a season of planning precipitated by the coming together of four unique circumstances. The generous Ken Seymour estate gift has given us resources for long-range planning that we never had before. The up-coming 200th anniversary of our church has given us an unprecedented opportunity for celebration, publicity and stepping forward. The separation from West Granby church has given us new independence. And the coming of a new pastor has provided experienced new leadership as well.