

**SCRIPTURE TEXT:** Matthew 28:16-20

**SERMON TITLE:** “Go!”

Well, we’re not on a mountain in Galilee, but we are foolish enough to believe that the risen Christ is here with us in this place as a spiritual reality not seen or heard through our physical senses—but here nonetheless. And so we worship him. We lay ourselves before him in awe and wonder. We adore him and honor him. And yes, some of us doubt. And that’s okay because we learn from Matthew’s gospel that following Christ is always a matter of “little faith.” It’s not necessarily an abundant faith or even a perfect faith. And it’s not just intellectual skepticism that marks us; it’s also hesitation—a risky wavering when we’re not exactly sure what to think or to do next. But we worship nonetheless.

And it’s in worship that the risen Christ comes to us and speaks to us: *All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me.* To put it another way, Jesus Christ is Lord and he claims our undivided allegiance. And then what does he do? He give us a mission: *Go therefore and make disciples.* Now he doesn’t say *Stay therefore and make disciples* as if we’re to wait for people to come to us. The word is *Go!* The Greek literally means *as you go*—so wherever we go, wherever we are, whatever we’re doing we’re to live in ways that help people follow Jesus—that help people become learners of the way of Jesus.

And we’re to *make disciples of all nations.* Does this mean that we all have to become foreign missionaries? I don’t think so. But it does imply that our outreach is to people who are different than we are. You’ve heard the old expression *Birds of a feather flock together.* Well, not so for the followers of Jesus Christ. We’re to be a diverse group—not a homogenous group. We’re commanded to reach out to all people—not just to those who are like us.

And how are we to *make disciples?* We’re to baptize them *in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.* Baptism marks us as disciples of Jesus Christ and

baptism is a sign that we are immersed in the very nature and character of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

And we are to teach the disciples of Jesus Christ to obey all that Jesus commanded—not just some of what he commanded—but all that he commanded—the easy parts and the hard parts alike. This is not a pick and choose sort of discipleship. The teachings of Jesus are far too important for that. In fact, Matthew portrays Jesus as the New Moses—the authoritative teacher and interpreter of Torah. And it’s noteworthy that it’s only at the end of his gospel that Matthew finally has Jesus authorize his followers to teach. Prior to this point, the disciples are called to preach, to heal and to cast out demons—but it is only here at the end of the gospel after the resurrection that they are commissioned to teach. Teaching is this important to the life of the church! It’s critical to who we are and to our mission in the world. And yes, we need teachers!

And then the risen Christ says: *And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.* Thanks be to God, we are not alone in fulfilling our mission. Christ is with us. Christ is with us.

So what are we to do with all of this? Worship will come to end this morning—and we will go from this place—so what are we to do? Well, there are many things to do, but let me give but one example. Bill Hybels tells this story in his book *Just Walk Across the Room*. Pastor Hybels once attended a luncheon at which he met an African-American man with a Muslim name from the south. As you might imagine, this man’s circumstances often made for an uncomfortable existence. He had quite a story:

“It hasn’t been an easy go,” he said. “As you might imagine, I’ve had a lot of struggles in social settings. And in my profession we have a lot of cocktail parties and other evening events. The natural pattern for me is to show up fashionably late, graciously accept a drink and

something to eat, and throw my efforts into trying to make some business connections.

Inevitably, I wind up standing alone, stuck against a wall or isolated in a corner....

“One night, I was at this party. As usual, I noticed several small circles of people forming to chat about this or that. I wasn’t included, but again, I’ve become accustomed to the scenario.

“At one point, I saw a man on the other side of the room engrossed in discussion with a few people of his own kind, if you will. Suddenly, he looked away from that particular group and noticed me standing alone by the far wall....He extricated himself from his conversational clique, walked clear across the room, stuck out his hand to me, and introduced himself....

“In the moments that followed, we talked about our mutual profession, about our families and business and sports. Eventually our conversation found its way to issues of faith. I took a risk in telling him that I was a Muslim....He told me that he was a Christ-follower but that, truth be told, he knew almost nothing about Islam. You can imagine my surprise when he asked if I would do him the *courtesy* of explaining the basics of Islam over a cup of coffee sometime....He said he was a curious type and genuinely wanted to understand my faith....

“The next time we met, whatever doubts I had about him truly wanting to hear my beliefs were quickly dispelled. He *really* sought to understand my life and faith. We began meeting almost weekly, and each time I sat across from him, I was stunned by what an engaged and compassionate listener he was.

“One week, I even took the opportunity to ask him about his beliefs....When the tables were turned and I was on the receiving end of *his* faith story, he patiently described why he’d given his whole life to this person named Jesus Christ. I couldn’t believe how easily the

conversations evolved—and how respectfully and sensitively he conveyed his love of God.

Despite our deep-seated religious differences, we were becoming fast friends.

It went on this way for some time as we'd meet to hash through nuances of our faith experiences. Sometimes he would ask for a couple of days to find answers to my questions; other times, he knew exactly where I was struggling and seemed to have the perfect words to untangle my confusion. There finally came a day—I remember being home alone when this happened—that I felt totally compelled to pray to God. I kneeled beside my bed, told God everything I was feeling, and in the end gave my life to Christ. And in the space of about a week, that single decision changed *everything* in my world! Every single thing.” (Hybels, Bill. *Just Walk Across the Room*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006, pages 20-22.)

Now did baptism follow? Pastor Hybels doesn't say, but it would be a natural next step. I also suspect that this new disciple moved beyond the informal teaching that his friend had done, to continue the process of learning how to obey all that Christ commanded.

But isn't it amazing what can happen when we take the time to walk across a room to engage another in the Spirit of Christ? You don't have to be a missionary in a foreign country to fulfill the mission Christ has given us

Now is this the only way to make disciples? Absolutely not; it's but one illustration. The question is: As we go from this place, how will we make disciples?