

Introduction

Several years ago, I went into a Wendy’s restaurant and noticed its mission statement on the wall. It declared that it seeks to give its customers quality food, comfortable dining experience, and affordable prices. That illustrates what a mission statement is. It’s a declaration that reveals what the primary work of a company, business, or group is.

Let me ask you a question in that regard. What should our mission statement be individually as disciples of Jesus and collectively as a local church, Bethel Friends? Matthew 28:16-20 tells us. It’s “Make disciples” and that’s what I’m going to preach about today.

The Great Commission

Verses 16-17 record the setting of what follows. For 40 days after His resurrection, Jesus met off and on with a host of His disciples to prepare them for two things – the life they would lead and the work they would do after He ascended into heaven. He did that by encouraging and instructing them about those things. As verse 16 makes clear, He then met with them for a final time. According to that verse, 11 of the original 12 disciples were there. The words “some were doubtful” in verse 17 indicate that other disciples were present as well. Having conversed with them, Jesus then gave them the very last instructions He would ever give them in verses 18-20. His purpose in doing so was to clarify their work in the world. It was to give them their mission statement individually as disciples and collectively as His church.

He began in verse 18 by saying that Father God gave Him all authority in heaven and on earth. He’s the boss, in other words, of the church and world. And as the boss, He had the right to tell His disciples and the church they formed what to do in the world.

So He did just that in verses 19-20. He told them and us to go and make disciples of all the nations. We call that the *Great Commission*. The *Great Commission* is our mission statement as individuals and as a

Church. Our mission is to go and make disciples of everyone we can.

Now that we know what our mission is, let's examine how we carry it out. We carry it out by doing three things.

Become Disciples

First, we ourselves become disciples. Notice to whom Jesus directs His *Great Commission* in verse 16. It's disciples. The fact is we need to be disciples in order to make disciples.

Don't get me wrong. There have been instances in which non-disciples have made disciples. I know two devoted followers of Jesus, for instance, who were led to Him by the same man, who was and still is a mediocre Christian at best. The words "*I am with you always*" in verse 20 help explain that. They indicate that making disciples is primarily the work of Jesus Himself. And we can never limit what He's capable of doing or will do. He can use non-disciples to make disciples and does. But that's exceptional not normal and not something we can count on.

Jesus' obvious method of choice is those who are disciples making other disciples. Notice that those to whom He spoke in verses 18-20 had been made disciples. And because they *had been made*, they *were able to make*. The same is true of us. To make disciples, we need to know what one is and how people become that. The best way to know that is by personal experience. Those who have been made disciples are able to make disciples. That's the plan that Jesus Himself developed.

So that's the first thing we do to carry out our mission, to make disciples. We ourselves become one.

Intend to Make Disciples

There's a second thing we do. We intend to make disciples.

You might think that's a "given" but it isn't. I read a church's mission statement, for instance, that said, "*Our purpose is to meet people's spiritual, psychological, and material needs in the name of Jesus.*" I asked an elder of a Friends church what the purpose of its

revival services was. ***"It's to get people to say the sinner's prayer,"*** he replied. The pastor of a church once told me: ***"I live to grow this church and I'll do anything that isn't illegal or immoral to do so."*** All of those things have their value and place. The problem is that not one of them or even all of them together constitutes making disciples.

My point is this. Most individual disciples and the churches they form don't intend to make disciples. They do intend to do those other things - meet people's needs, get people to say the sinner's prayer, grow a church - and so on. But they don't actually intend to make disciples.

I speak from experience. For most of my pastoral life, I didn't intend to make disciples. Why? It's because I, like most pastors and church leaders, got caught up in the established order of things instead. Henry Nouwen accurately describes what this established order of things is: ***"We simply go along with the many "musts" and "oughts" that have been handed down to us, and we live with them as if they were authentic translations of the Gospel of our Lord. People must be motivated to come to church, youth must be entertained, money must be raised, and above all everyone must be happy."***

Nouwen is right on target. The tradition of client or consumer Christianity now dominates the thought and practice of our local churches and denominations. Making converts, inducting members, raising money, instituting programs, constructing buildings, and more are now our primary concerns. Making disciples? We hope it happens and even pray it happens. But it isn't something to which we really give much effort or thought. It isn't something that we actually intend to do.

But we need to. That's inherent in the very command Jesus gives in verse 19. The words "Intend to" are implied before the word "Go." He was saying, ***"Intend to go therefore and make disciples of all nations."*** Study the Book of Acts, including the verse at the top of the bulletin, 6:7. You'll find that's exactly what the disciples to whom He was speaking did. They intended to make disciples.

And so should we. We intend that in a specific way. We consciously

and sincerely set the making of disciples as our only primary objective. We do have other objectives as individuals and a church. But we give making disciples priority over them all.

We ourselves have done that as a church. Our congregationally adopted mission statement is this, "***Bethel Friends exists to make disciples of Jesus by teaching and training people to do all that He says.***" That's our only primary objective as a church. We make every other objective we pursue subservient to it.

We should do the same as individuals. Stop for a moment and think of our families, friends, and neighbors. Our chief aim with regard to them should be to make disciples of them if they aren't. I have two grandsons, Malachi and Eli, 6 and 5 years old. I have numerous aims in my relationship with them – like help them become patriots who love America and baseball fans who love the Yankees. But I have one aim that's above the rest. It's help them become disciples of Jesus.

That then is the second thing that we do to carry out our mission. We actually intend to make disciples of Jesus.

Act to Make Disciples

There's a third thing we do. We act to make disciples. We act to make disciples by doing three things.

First, we ***proclaim*** Jesus and His kingdom at hand. To proclaim means to communicate or announce something to others. In this case, that something is Jesus and His kingdom at hand. People need to know about those two things in order to become disciples of His. Which means if they don't, they won't. So, we proclaim them.

To proclaim Jesus means to communicate first, who He is, and second, what He did, is doing, and will do. I talked last week about building a purposeful vision of those two things – based on the Bible and our experiences with Him. Once we've done so, we then communicate that vision to non-disciples as the person and the occasion dictate.

I once talked with an Ivy League graduate who valued intellect and

learning. So, I told him what Colossians 2:3 says about Jesus. In Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I also explained what it means. He's the smartest person who ever lived. He has a cognitive mastery over every phase of reality. He dwarfs the most brilliant physicists, biologists, chemists, and so on that live today

You can see what we're trying to do in proclaiming Jesus. We're trying to ravish non-disciples with a vision of Him. We're trying to get them to see that He's utterly lovely and competent, the greatest and best, the brightest spot on the human scene. Non-disciples will not apprentice themselves to Him until they're convinced He's worthy of it. Our part in that is to proclaim Him to them.

But we also proclaim His kingdom at hand. The kingdom at hand was the central message of Jesus and needs to be ours as well. I've explained it before and have a handout in the narthex that also does. We need to make known to non-disciples what the kingdom at hand is, what it does (transforms), and how it does that. They usually won't become disciples until they know something good will happen to them if they do. Proclaiming the kingdom at hand let's them know that.

We act to make disciples by doing a second thing. We *manifest* Jesus and His kingdom at hand.

We live in a post-modern world. That means the masses now believe in and long to experience spiritual realities. One new age website, for instance, www.infinitebeing.com, says this: "***With Infinite Being you can: make the deepest possible spiritual connection and consciously transform your reality.***" Notice that last line, "***transform your reality.***" That's what people are looking for, something that will transform reality. So we proclaim that Jesus and His kingdom at hand do.

But do they really? That's what non-disciples want to know. There's an old aphorism that says, "***The proof is in the pudding.***" That means results are what count. The test of something is reality. We proclaim that Jesus and His kingdom transform people and human life. But do they actually, in reality? That's what non-disciples want to know.

There's only one way to show them they do. It's by manifesting what we proclaim. They must see that *our* persons and *our* lives have been transformed. So we show them they have been. We do that by being and living like kingdom people. We manifest Jesus and His kingdom in other words. There's proof in the pudding when we do.

We act to make disciples by doing a third thing. We ***teach*** Jesus and His kingdom. As a result of our proclaiming and manifesting, some will decide to become disciples. We then intelligently and thoroughly teach them two things: how to relate to Jesus and how to access His kingdom at hand. We as a church are doing that in two ways.

First, we offer a core curriculum of studies. They are *The First Aim, The Power to Live, Out of the Heart, The Sermon on the Mount, Life after Life, and Biblesmiths*. This curriculum is designed specifically to teach disciples how to relate to Jesus and access His kingdom at hand.

Second, we're developing small groups called *Disciples of Jesus* groups. These groups are for those who have gone through or are going through the curriculum. Their express purpose isn't to teach disciples to relate to Jesus and access His kingdom. It's to train them to do that. They assist them in living out what they have learned and are learning.

Teaching, as I just defined it, is essential. We can't just tell brand new disciples to read the Bible and pray and let it go at that. They'll flounder if we do. They need to be taught. So we teach them ourselves one on one, using that core curriculum. Or we bring them here to our church so that it can teach them that.

That then is how we carry out our mission to make disciples. We proclaim, manifest, and teach Jesus and His kingdom at hand.

Conclusion

I close with a question. What is your mission statement as a disciple of Jesus? What is your primary ministry or work in the world? You all know the answer by now. It's "Make disciples!"