

Community Church of Issaquah  
Sunday, April 14, 2024

## We Have Our Marching Orders

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If we were being religious about following the Liturgical Calendar for this year, I would be out of line by even using part of the Scripture passages today. Any passages that refer to the time before Jesus ascended into heaven are supposed to only be referred to on Ascension Sunday which doesn't happen until May 9<sup>th</sup>. I do promise that on that Sunday I will come back and focus on the time when Jesus left this earth to join His Heavenly Father. But today I wanted to talk about these final words that Matthew shares in his gospel. So please pardon me for stepping out of bounds for just one Sunday.

Let me tell you a little secret about ministers and our tenures at a church and what we have as a personal goal or desire. Each one of us who has accepted the call to ministry goes to serve in a church with one hope – that our time in the church will instill in the congregation our understanding of God, Jesus Christ, and the message of the Bible. Inside that hope is the strong desire that we can help those who hear us build a deeper relationship with the Lord. For me, I accept any pulpit position with one mission – to help others understand what we are called to do by loving God and loving others. I personally just want you and those who hear me to find a message of the importance of being good Christians and doing the work of the Lord. At the core of every sermon a minister preaches is the

personal mission of how to convey the message we seek to share. My primary message is that if we truly follow the teachings of Jesus, we don't focus on doctrine or theology, but on the gift of love and how we are to live with that gift from Christ. Before religion made it all about what we believe, Jesus was all about how we love.

In our Scripture passage today, we find a very heart-warming situation. After three years of having disciples and teaching them about how he simply wanted to show and grant love to others. (By the way, the data says that 3 years is the usual time of service for most ministers before they move on.) As we've talked about many times before, this was the message Jesus repeated over and over in parables and in his actions. Now, after the end of his three-year earthly ministry is coming to an end, his final admonition to his followers is very direct and purposeful. Jesus isn't just saying his good-byes but reminding them of the reason he came to earth and the reason he died and was brought back to life. His words to his disciples then are just as relevant to them as they are to us.

*Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

There are several things for us as current Christians to pay attention to today. First, Jesus reasserted that as God's Son, he was granted the authority to begin the actions that would create a new religion with a new awareness of the presence of God. The disciples didn't need the permission or authority from the Pharisees or anyone else for them to engage in spreading the message of truth – the Promised Messiah came fulfilling all prophecies exactly as they were given. The Son of God came, was sacrificed, was crucified and arose from the dead and you now have seen him and heard him giving you instruction of what you are to do to honor his life. The person in authority is the Risen Christ. End of discussion. Now, go and do what I tell you.

The work orders given to the disciples haven't changed one small bit since they were given. "Make disciples of all nations." But what does that mean? Basically, it means that once we ourselves are disciples, like the chosen original disciples, as faithful followers of Jesus, we are to witness to and offer salvation through Christ to others, making them little Christs or, as we are called today, Christians. There are two actions that follow this acceptance of Jesus as Savior. The first is to be baptized. I won't go into the complicated world of baptism – immersion baptism, sprinkling baptism, infant baptism and several more. We'll leave that for another day. But as Jesus was baptized by his cousin, John, in the River Jordan, this was the example we are to follow and be baptized.

The second even bigger instruction was and is perhaps the hardest of Jesus's directions for us. "Teaching them to

obey everything I have commanded you.” Do you get the complexity of that order? Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded. Everything? That is a huge order to tackle. I don’t think I have obeyed everything that Jesus taught me from the Scriptures, so I don’t know that I, even as a minister, could teach Christians how to obey everything Jesus taught or commanded. How does anyone do that? That, however, is the work of the church and the reason why we serve as learners all our Christian lives. I will add one personal note here: Jesus instructs us to teach others to obey what he commanded us, and there is no instruction to follow the teachings of apostles, preachers, theologians or anyone else’s self-proclaimed teachings. Only Jesus’s.

I am struck by the phrase, “make disciples of all nations.” For a very long time, I thought that meant we had to send millions of people as missionaries to every corner of the earth. My mind has changed a great deal in these modern days. When I was 25 and in my second year of seminary, I grew weary of education, classes, exams, readings and all that business. I heard about a two-year mission program and immediately signed up for it. My honest reason for doing so wasn’t necessarily that I wanted to convert the world to become Southern Baptists, but I thought I would love to travel somewhere outside my own country. On the application form, we were asked to select three choices of countries we would like to service. My first choice was Rome, Italy. My second choice was Paris, France. And my third choice was Buenos Aires, Argentina. Imagine my surprise when I was accepted for the program and assigned to Nairobi, Kenya, East Africa.

During my time of service, I learned quickly that I was not there to enlarge my own denomination but to offer a new life in Christ to those to whom I ministered. My assignment didn't take me to preach revivals or anything like that. I was a teacher in high schools teaching Catholic and Muslim girls basic religion in preparation for their taking their Cambridge Exam to secure credit for all of their high school work. Yet, for me, it was a chance to be an example of what a Christian is and to witness to them about the love of Christ. It wasn't "all nations" but it was one. Just like some of you have done in your ministries to Mexico and Haiti. We go where we are sent and where there is opportunity. We teach others what Jesus asked us to do and we obey as He commanded us.

The reality today is that times have changed so dramatically that travelling to other nations isn't essential or necessary. Other nations have come to us, not only physically but now also on the internet. I never cease to be amazed when I go into any kind of store these days and see the variety of nationalities. When I go to Costco or Fred Meyer to am curious to pay attention to the people walking the aisles or going through the registers to pay. In Lynnwood where I live and shop, my venture to Costco never ceases to surprise me. Often, I become aware that as a White individual, I am in the minority of customers. It reminds me that "all nations" are no longer overseas, but here in our own cities.

So, what are our marching orders if we don't have to board a plane to go somewhere? It's simple. As individuals and

as a church, we are to teach others to obey the teachings we believe and work diligently to practice. Often, our teaching comes in such small ways that we don't recognize it. We donate to mission projects without seeing the work or the results of it. We donate to charities in our city without knowing which child got tools for school or what person got the clothing donated to the unhoused. We do many things because we want to obey the teachings of Jesus that urges us to love one another and to care for those in need.

Jesus gave us our marching orders through the words he gave to the disciples. They took them seriously and began preaching to the world they knew. That one experience of hearing and obeying Christ was what has led to what we call Christianity. And it has spread in some way to every nation in the world. Isn't that amazing? How would the disciples have known what following the words of Jesus on that mountain in Galilee would do to change the world forever? My guess is they are still in shock as they glance down at the world today. Perhaps one of the things you and I should do as a product of their work is to thank them for our lives in Christ and tell them simply, "Nice work, gentlemen." They followed **their** marching orders, now let us do the same.