

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Jesus - for the Other
(Studies of Jesus)

Next

(Matthew 28:16-20)

Study #8

Introduction: For want of a next...

When Alexander the Great led the Greek armies that defeated the Persians and the Egyptians, he established an empire that spread from the Mediterranean Sea to India - all of this accomplished roughly by the time he was thirty years old.

The historian, Plutarch, writes, *"When Alexander saw the breadth of his domain, he wept for there were no more worlds to conquer."*

There was no "next" and Alexander was devastated. His case isn't unique. Generally speaking, people don't do well without a "next."

When Tom Brady wins another Super Bowl ring, or when LeBron James - with whatever team he plays - wins another NBA Championship, will they get depressed that there's not another football or basketball world to conquer? No "next."

For lack of a "next", it's not unusual for a roaring success to be followed by a season of feeling off-balance, uncertain, sad.

And speaking of "next", what do we at church do on the Sunday after Easter weekend?

Easter weekend...

Nine days ago, we remembered and gave thanks for Jesus' Good Friday death on the cross for our sins. Jesus was crucified for us. He bore the price for our sins, and we are now and will forever be grateful.

Jesus was buried late on Friday afternoon in the borrowed tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. That led to an interminably long Friday night, Saturday, and Saturday night, filled with grief and fear.

And then came Sunday morning. That first post-crucifixion Sunday morning ushered in a whole new reality, a brand new "next."

Some women saw an empty tomb. They saw angels. And then they saw a very alive-again Jesus. We celebrated all of that last Sunday.

Last weekend, we focused on these two events: the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus. Together, these form the historical heart of our faith.

Every person's story ends with their death - with the exception of the story of Jesus. For Him, after death, there was a "next." He was raised to a new life by God's power. But even that wasn't the end of Jesus' story, and the four Gospels fill in details about His next "next."

Jesus' next...

The women raced to tell the men what they had seen and heard. Peter and John ran to the tomb to see for themselves, and came back believing.

On that Sunday, after trudging the seven miles from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus with Jesus - not even recognizing that it was Jesus! - two disciples' eyes were opened to the resurrection when He broke bread with them. They believed, and RAN back to Jerusalem!

Late on that Sunday evening, Jesus appeared in an upper room where the disciples had gathered. He ate with them. They believed. Eight days later, He appeared again and convinced even Thomas.

All these first encounters happened in and around Jerusalem. Jesus then told His followers that He would meet with them in Galilee. So, they went north to await His arrival.

He surprised them early one morning by the Sea of Galilee. He rescued them from getting skunked after a night of hard fishing by sending one hundred and fifty-three large fish (yes, they counted) into their fishing nets.

Later that morning on the beach, after breakfast, Jesus rescued a broken Simon Peter, and restored him.

We are told that there were other post-resurrection appearances in Galilee. The Apostle Paul mentions a time when Jesus appeared to more than five hundred people at once.¹

Then, after some weeks in Galilee, Jesus and His disciples made their way south again, to Jerusalem. It was from the Mount of Olives, not far from the city, that He ascended to heaven.²

However, before they left for Jerusalem, Jesus let the apostles in on a little secret. Not only was there a “next” for Him. There was also a “next” for them.

That “next” was revealed on top of a Galilean mountain, and this scene ends Matthew’s account of the life and times of Jesus.

Up on the Mountain with Jesus (vv. 16-17)

Those on the Mountain (v. 16)

[16] But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated.

There had been twelve. Now there are eleven apostles. Judas Iscariot was no more. He killed himself due to remorse for having betrayed Jesus to the authorities.

All the other apostles are there on the mountain. The ones we know well - Simon Peter and his brother, Andrew, the brothers James and John, Philip, Mathew the tax-collector, doubting Thomas.

The other less well-known apostles were there, too: Bartholomew, James the Lesser, Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot.

All these had followed Jesus for the better part of three years, had been there when He was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, and had seen Jesus AFTER the resurrection in Jerusalem. They have now spent some weeks with Him in Galilee.

On the appointed day, they climbed the mountain Jesus told them to climb. We don’t know which mountain it was, but they did. Galilee was their home stomping grounds. This is familiar territory.³

When they got to the top, they found Jesus, already there, waiting for them. Their first move was predictable.

Worshipping Disciples (v. 17a)

[17a] When they saw Him, they worshipped Him...

I mean, who wouldn’t? You’re standing on top of a mountain with the resurrected Lord. If worship is fitting anywhere, it’s fitting here.

So, hats off to these guys. They worshipped Jesus in an upper room in Jerusalem after the resurrection and they worshiped Him here, up on top of the mountain.

It’s a great scene. But then Matthew tells us that in addition to worship, something else was going on.

¹ 1 Corinthians 15:6.

² Acts 1.

³ We believe that Judas had been the lone Judean among the apostles, hailing from Kerioth, a city in the south. (Iscariot = “ish” + “Kerioth” = “a man from Kerioth”)

Doubting Disciples (v. 17b)

[17b When they saw Him...some⁴ were doubtful.

And what do we do with this?

Some...

Some Bible scholars say⁵ that the “**some**” who doubted were not the apostles, but others who climbed the mountain with them. These others - maybe newer disciples - were the ones who doubted.

I disagree.

The Bible says that the eleven apostles made up the group that climbed the mountain to meet Jesus. It doesn't say anything at all about anybody else being on the mountain. The only “**some**” who could have doubted would have been “**some**” from the pool of the apostolic band.

Initially... (?)

The possibility is also sometimes raised that the doubts were temporary. Whoever the “**some**” were who doubted only initially doubted. And then, in the presence of Jesus, their doubts washed away.

That's pure fabrication. The text doesn't say “*initially.*”

I think we want to believe that the eleven apostles of Jesus wouldn't doubt.

But, there's really not much of a way to read this other than to say that some of the apostles, while on the mountain-top with the resurrected Jesus, in the middle of a worship service, doubted.

But that still begs a question, WHAT did they doubt?

Doubtful of what?

Doubting their senses

Did they doubt their senses? Were they pinching themselves to see if what they were experiencing was real? Is Matthew telling us that after weeks of interacting with Jesus, post-resurrection, they still didn't believe that what they were living through was actually happening?

I doubt it. And I also doubt that they were doubting Jesus.

Doubting Jesus

I think that, for these guys, if nothing else was real, Jesus was real. They had certainly doubted before the cross that He knew what He was talking about when He predicted death and resurrection.

They clearly doubted after Friday's crucifixion. And Thomas doubted even after all the others told him that Jesus was alive.

But by the time they got to Galilee, they were all on board. They believed that Jesus did what He said He would do and that He was who He said He was.

So, what did they doubt?

Doubting Themselves

I think they doubted themselves.

The idea behind the Greek word for “doubt” is to be of two minds. And given their recent personal histories, they had every reason to be divided as to what they thought they would do, now.

Throughout their years of following Jesus, they had grown in faith and in obedience. But there had been some spectacular failures, even late in the game.

⁴ The translation “**some**” is pretty universally adopted here. A portion of the group that was on the mountain was “*in two minds*” (i.e. - in doubt) about something.

⁵ A.T. Robertson and Henry Alford, two well-respected Bible scholars held to this opinion.

They had all promised that they would stand with Jesus, no matter what. When the first opportunity came to stand with Him, they wilted. They all fled into the night when He was arrested in the Garden. Simon Peter even denied knowing Jesus three times.

There on the mountain, they were convinced of the truth that Jesus was alive. They were confident that He was the Son of God. But they lacked any confidence that they were now “up” to the task of carrying the torch of the faith forward.⁶

Maybe you can put yourself in the disciples’ sandals. Maybe you have had - or have now - doubts about yourself. Like them, you are...

- ...convinced of people’s need for His Gospel.
- ...sold on the idea that Jesus was and is the God/man.

And,

- ...at the same time, doubtful that you have what it takes (faith? courage?) to follow wherever He leads. You are, personally, less than confident that you are “up” to what following Jesus requires, knowing that following Him might lead into deep waters, even to a cross?

I don’t think the apostles were doubting Christ’s truth claims or His resurrection. I think they doubted the actions they were going to take in light of who they were convinced He was!

There is a big club of Christ-followers who experience similar doubts. From the first to the twenty-first century, we know what it is to be “in two minds.” Convinced, but not confident. Believing, but doubting.

To those first century mountaintop doubters - and to you and me - the Lord Jesus spoke the words we find at the end of Matthew’s Gospel.

Paying no attention to their doubts, He charged right ahead and gave marching orders for their “next.”

⁶ To cast their lot with Him now, virtually assured them of a similar fate. It’s fine to be resurrected, but crucifixion is a steep price to pay for it.

Sent from the Mountain by Jesus (vv. 18-20)

Jesus is the Sovereign Lord (v. 18)

[18] And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”

Matthew’s Gospel began with a genealogy that showed Jesus as the rightful king of Israel. He was a direct, legal descendant of David and Solomon and all the rest of the kings. The Gospel ends, here, with Him claiming to be the One who reigns as king over all creation.

Throughout His life, there had been times when He was offered a crown. The devil tried to get Him to take a crown in the wilderness. Crowds offered it to Him more than once. Jesus refused kingship until His Father offered it.

And now, having died for our sins and having conquered death, Jesus wears a crown. He was, on that mountaintop in Galilee, and He is, right now, KING of Kings and LORD of Lords.

Every disciple’s “next” follows, and we’ll consider King Jesus’ “next” now, phrase by phrase.

Jesus Commissions His Disciples (vv. 19-20a)

While going (v. 19)

[19] “GO therefore...”

You may be surprised to hear me say that this is not, precisely, a command to “Go.” This is not a command for every disciple to leave home and serve as a cross-cultural missionary.

The word “Go” is in the grammatical form of a participle. A wooden translation would yield, “*having gone*” or even “*as you are going*.”

It’s not a command that all of us need to change our address, but it’s as good as a command. It is Jesus saying, “*Wherever you are, wherever your travels take you, wherever you go...*”

Jesus' Great Commission assumes that you are on the go for Him. Moving to Thailand, going to help those in need, or walking across a room. It assumes movement on your part to serve Him.

And now, the verb. Now, the command.

Make disciples (v. 19)

[19] Go therefore and MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL THE NATIONS...

Every generation of Christ-followers from that day to this has received this command, personally. It was theirs. It is ours.

Jesus was speaking to all those who follow Him: As you have become a disciple, so make disciples.

The first commission God gave to the human race was, ***[Genesis 1:28] "Be fruitful and multiply."***

The first couple was to reproduce after their own kind. We disciples of Jesus are to reproduce after our kind. Make disciples.

And what does that mean? Here's how I'd put it in 2017 shorthand. Wherever you are in your Jesus-following life - just starting out or a lifetime in - help others take a spiritual "next step."

A disciple of Jesus is someone who is learning about Jesus.

And, spiritually speaking, everybody is somewhere on the "learning about Jesus" scale. Everybody you can think of can take a "next step" in learning about and in following Jesus.

- Some have just started to find out about Jesus. They haven't yet believed. They're learning. Help them learn more.
- Some have learned enough to believe. They are ready to believe, but they need someone to tell them the simple Gospel: That faith alone in Christ alone saves forevermore. Tell them.

- Some disciples have recently believed and need to learn more about Jesus and His ways. That's where you come in. Help form that disciple into the shape of Jesus.

One of the most beautiful things about Christianity is that there is not a special class of Christian who are to make disciples, while others aren't.

The "next" that Jesus gave the apostles applies to everyone who follows Jesus. We are all commissioned. We who have learned anything about following Jesus are to take what we have learned and pass it on.

To clarify what "disciple-making" looks like, Jesus adds two phrases.⁷ These two phrases let us see what He's got in mind when He says, ***"Make disciples."***

First, making disciples involves baptism.

Baptizing...

[19] Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND THE SON AND THE HOLY SPIRIT...

Christian baptism is the fine art of taking someone who is thoroughly dry and dunking them so that they are thoroughly wet.

But baptism is a symbolic act, and it symbolizes so much.

It symbolizes a full immersion into the life of Jesus. It symbolizes a full identification with everyone else in the world who has life in Jesus. It symbolizes a full commitment to follow Jesus into whatever waters He might lead.

⁷ The words "*teaching*" and "*baptizing*" are not commands. Grammatically, they are, like "*Go*" - participles. They describe the component parts of the disciple-making process.

We baptized a dozen or so people two Sundays ago, on Palm Sunday, and heard their testimonies of faith and devotion. We saw them all come up out of the water, grinning from ear to ear. We cheered them on as they took this important plunge into discipleship.

Making disciples involves leading people who have believed to a clear testimony of faith in Jesus and to a solid declaration of commitment to Jesus. These are perfectly achieved by water baptism.

And, by the way, we'll be holding another baptism in early to mid-summer, so if you've placed your faith in Jesus and have not yet been baptized, you'll have another great opportunity to do so, soon.

Second, Jesus wants us to know that disciple-making is not a "one-and-dunk" thing. Making disciples involves teaching and learning. But it's a certain kind of teaching and learning.

Teaching to obey...

[19] Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, [20a] TEACHING THEM TO OBSERVE ALL THAT I COMMANDED YOU..."

Disciples continue on the path of discipleship as they learn more about Jesus, His ways, and His teaching. But the kind of teaching and learning Jesus is describing is the kind that leads to obedience.⁸

Filling minds with the words of Jesus *without* taking them seriously, without DOING what He says, doesn't count as disciple-making.

Applying what He says changes everything. Loving as He says to love breaks down barriers. Serving builds bridges. And San Antonio needs more disciples who are generous and courageous, holy and prayerful, loving servants.

Disciple-making is not programmatic. It is organic. It is intensely relational. And it is your commission. He commands you to give your life to helping people you know take a spiritual next step.

So, are you excited and eager to get going? Nervous? Doubtful? Scared? Are you hopeful and unsure AND motivated and uncertain?

If you're tracking with me on what is involved in the Great Commission and the command to make disciples, I'd be surprised if that mix of emotions isn't present.

It was present in the hearts of at least "**some**" of the eleven apostles of Jesus on that mountaintop in Galilee when He gave them their "next."

That's why He ended His commission the way He did. With a promise of His presence.

Jesus Promises His Presence (v. 20b)

[20b]... "and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

People who doubt their ability to carry out Jesus' disciple-making commission, who doubt that they are "up" to it, are greatly encouraged to hear that they are never alone.

The sovereign Lord Jesus assured eleven doubting apostles that they would never be alone.

Same for you. Same for me. This One who has received ALL power and authority is with us now and will be with us forever.

Conclusion:

The Great Commission isn't complicated. It is straightforward. It's simple. Which is not to say it's easy.

And it is to be every disciples' priority.

⁸ The Greek is "tereo", which means to keep, or to obey.

Now. Think with me about this scene in which the risen Lord Jesus gave what we call The Great Commission.

Without money, army, influence, or state, without printers or planes, cell phones or social media, He charged eleven men - *who had only recently fled in fear in the face of possible arrest* - to take the Gospel all over the world and to make disciples of all the nations.

I think that one of the overlooked features of the Great Commission is that Jesus gave it with a straight face.

He gave **THESE GUYS** the task of world-wide evangelization. He commissioned **THESE GUYS** to make disciples wherever they went, and to reach out to all the peoples of the world with the Gospel.

But, give it to them with a straight face He did. He is the sovereign king and He gave His subjects their marching orders.

And, He doesn't have to work to suppress a giggle when He speaks the same words to us, this morning.

I don't believe that we are in any way more spiritual than that group up on the mountaintop in Galilee. We have feared and we have failed. We are not more noble than Peter and Andrew, James and John.

And, if it seems audacious - even unreasonable - that Jesus gave the Great Commission to **THEM** back then, it is no less so that He gives the same Commission to **US**, today. And He does. With a straight face.

He doesn't tell us to be in favor of the Great Commission or to be positive toward disciple-making or even to be committed to the Great Commission. He tells us to get it done.

Perspectives...

As some of you know, for the last three months or so, Kathy and I have been taking a class called "Perspectives on the World Christian Movement." It is a very good class, extremely inspiring and profoundly convicting. (By the way, I'll be cheer for you to sign up when it is offered next year.)

It would be hard for me to briefly sum up what Perspectives is all about or about how it has impacted us. Suffice it to say that the class has prompted a lot of thinking about our roles in fulfilling Jesus' Great Commission.

Speaking personally, it's taken me back to some of my roots, spiritually speaking.

First steps...

As a young teenager, I had drifted into a belief in no-God (atheism) and was lovingly evangelized by the mother of my friends next door in Dallas.

One night in the middle of May 1971, I knelt by my bed, and in my first-ever prayer, told God that if He was there, I needed His forgiveness and grace, and that I believed that Jesus died and rose again for me. I was, at that moment, wonderfully saved - and then proceeded to have the worst eighteen months of my life.

I knew that I belonged to God, but I drifted, morally, personally. I had no direction in life.

Things started to change, though, when I began attending a church where the Bible was taught and Jesus was worshiped.

And one more thing.

The leaders of the youth group I was a part of took me and a few other guys and gals under their wings, and they taught us to observe all things that Jesus had commanded.

What made all the different in the world for me was a few Christians who were farther along than I was, helping me to take spiritual "next steps." Just like Jesus said to do.

Now, Jesus speaks to us. Today.

Next steps...

We are up there with the eleven on top of a mountain.

We are worshipping Jesus. Right now. He is worthy of all our worship. And we are tempted to doubt. Not Him, but ourselves. We're not so sure we're up to this Commission.

But, we believe that He is who He said He is: The Sovereign Lord. And we believe that His promise is true: He is with us.

And we hear Him say, *"As you go, wherever you go - crossing cultural barriers or crossing a street or crossing a room - make disciples. Bring people to a crisis of commitment (baptism) and teach them to enter the life I command. Help the people you know take a 'next step' of faith and obedience."*

That's His commission. So, how will you respond to this commission from your Sovereign Lord? Here are two things as we wrap up.

Number one - and this is crucial - first and foremost, self-define as a disciple. You, follow Jesus. Do what He commands. Just like the flight attendant says before the plane takes off, *"In the event of an emergency, put your own oxygen mask on first."* If you want to make impact for Jesus, see to your own spiritual health, first.

Number two, Jesus had a post-resurrection "next." The apostles were given a mountaintop "next." You have been given a "next" - be and make disciples.

Now, don't hog the "next." Invest your time and energy and treasure to help others see that they also have an exciting "next" in front of them.

That's what it means to begin taking the Great Commission seriously. That means change, and change can be kinda scary. But there's the adventure!

When you begin to order your life on the basis of the Great Commission, who knows what will happen? There might be danger and

joy and love and threats, temptations and spiritual warfare, suffering and triumph. Only God knows.

When you commit to being a disciple and to making disciples, you don't really know what life will bring your way.

- You might end up serving ESL students who will grasp the beauty of the Gospel and begin living for Jesus. (Some of them may return to other countries from which they will reach the nations for Jesus)
- You might teach kids on Sunday morning and get to watch God turn that one-hour a week investment into a changed life.
- You might start volunteering at a Crisis Pregnancy Center and help someone take a next step there.

The sky's the limit. But know this. You weren't saved so as to become *"a really nice guy"* or *"a really well-behaved woman."* You were saved to become a force, a change agent that pushes forward what God wants to do in the world.

Again, consider how you will help others take a spiritual next step. And then:

- Tell a friend - you'll find great strength in sharing with a brother or a sister what is on your heart to do for someone else in Jesus' Name.
- Tell me - I'm easy to reach (phone, text, email) - and I want to pray for you.
- **"Go"**