

OPEN OUR EYES: SEE ALL THE PEOPLE

SLIDE 1: READ: During a recent program committee discussion, Greg Ellis shared a study done by the UMC. It will engage us in a challenge. A challenge to our faith in our God and in our beliefs and in our willingness to be active. Over a series of Sundays we will look at ways to open our eyes to the mission statement that is our reason for being. The general church has asked us to be engaged with All the People. The United Methodist Church teaches us that our Christian mission is make disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

SLIDE 2: GO, THEREFORE: OUR MISSION STATEMENT

READ: Through scripture, music and art we will endeavor to understand what Jesus commanded his disciples to do following Pentecost. This time in the church year is known as Ordinary Times, which with what our world is currently experiencing, it is anything but ordinary. Let us think and pray about what our commission as Christians means.

SLIDE 3:

1 **READ:** The painting I chose to share with you is The Inspiration of Saint Matthew, by the Baroque painter Caravaggio. It is a portrayal of an angel of God provoking Saint Matthew to do the work that is needed to share the Good News. Like other paintings by Caravaggio it uses chiaroscuro, the usage of light and dark, to place emphasis on the subject matter. Like Matthew, we must at times be prodded to do the work God wants us to do.

2 **READ:** A couple of Sundays ago, Rita shared a scripture from Matthew 5, which recounts the Sermon on the Mount. As part of that sermon Jesus said, "I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; 45 that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. Later in Matthew 28, following the crucifixion and resurrection, Matthew wrote that after Mary Magdalene and the Other Mary found the empty tomb, they encountered Jesus: [who] said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." They did this. What I have always found profoundly reassuring about this incident is that Matthew does not say that the Marys doubted who they encountered. They listened and then they RAN to tell the disciples.

Christ, whose ministry was not of great length, but his Godly authority was of great strength, called his followers together one more time. On the mountain near the Sea of Galilee, he gave them the Great Commission. It was to be their mission statement after his Transfiguration and it is our mission statement, OUR REASON FOR BEING! But to fulfill this CALLING, we must be willing to open our eyes to the people around us. So, in order to fulfill the Great Commission, we must love our neighbors, those who are friends and those who are enemies. We must see ALL THE PEOPLE!

Some theologians see Matthew's writing as being abrupt, without emotion. His accounting of the story of the Life of Jesus is to the point...writing of the essentials. Matthew's portrayal of Jesus' Great Commission may not need elaboration as its essential essence is evident.

3 READ MATTHEW 28:16-20 THE GREAT COMMISSION

16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.

17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.
18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
19 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."

SLIDE 4:

1 READ: Vida Jay, a Lutheran minister in Canada and the author of the web-column A Sparrow's Cry for Mercy and Compassion in an Unjust World, wrote that our commission is to widen our circle of care and concern. She wrote, "The Christian tradition teaches that God – in risk taking vulnerable love – spread wide the circle of peace and salvation through the coming of Christ into the World." In another of her columns entitled "Bearing Witness with the People of the Casteless God", Jay wrote of the Sikh belief "His Caste is Casteless". She made the connection to the idea of a casteless society to Galatians 3:28: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

In 2008, when Gordon Light, lyricist, and Mark Miller, composer, wrote DRAW THE CIRCLE WIDE (Abingdon Press) they expressed through their words and music the meaning found within the Great Commission.

2 PLAY DRAW THE CIRCLE WIDE

SLIDE 5:

1 READ: In Drawing the Circle wide, we must allow the light of Christ illuminate our hearts. The light of Christ allows us to hope.

(Duccio di Buoninsegna was the first great Siennese painter. He does not share the naturalism of the concurrent Florentine school. Rather, Duccio sums up the grave and austere beauty of centuries of Byzantine tradition and infuses it with a breath of the new humanity which was being spread by the new Orders of SS. Francis and Dominic.)

2 READ: Matthew wrote: "Then the eleven disciples"...Eleven...we have read over and over again in the gospel it was twelve...The twelve did this; the twelve did that; Jesus chose the twelve; Jesus went with the twelve...Now it is eleven – a sign and symbol of brokenness, of betrayal and failure. The remaining disciples went into a world that was mostly hostile to the beliefs they were sent to share. Most lost their lives in going out to baptize others in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Matthew's ELEVEN is a reminder that on our own, without the sustaining presence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we won't make it. We can't fulfill this Great Mission or any mission.

Yet, THERE IS HOPE. Matthew tells us the disciples were still following...Their following is the outward manifestation of HOPE. When we stumble, when we fail, when we are feeling broken, when we are weak...WE CAN STILL FOLLOW!

3 READ: Bernadette Farrell is a British hymnographer and composer of Catholic liturgical music. She wrote the poem...Christ Be Our Light to describe our striving to be the earthly voice of Christ. CHRIST, BE OUR LIGHT, which to me recognizes our weaknesses, yet embraces hope.

Longing for light, we wait in darkness.

Longing for truth, we turn to you.

Make us your own, your holy people,

Light for the world to see.

Longing for peace, our world is troubled.

Longing for hope, many despair.

Your word alone has pow'r to save us.

Make us your living voice.

SLIDE 6:

(William Hole created a book of 80 illustrations depicting the life of Christ. In this scene Jesus is appearing before the disciples following his resurrection. [William Brassey Hole RSA (7 November 1846 – 22 October 1917) was an English artist, illustrator, etcher and engraver])

1 READ SLIDE

3 READ: Seminarians tell us ALL OF THE ELEVEN WORSHIPPED! BUT, SOME DOUBTED...did this stop them from listening and going into the world to spread the Good News? Doubting is allowed as long as we follow the authority of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Bible recounts over and over again the stories of those chosen to be the leaders and followers of God who doubted. They doubted but they went forth to do the work of the Lord. They walked into a world that would leave them scarred and wounded and some of them dead from persecution. Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me," which makes the command "Go, therefore" an appropriate use of His Authority!

Doubting is part of finding faith, so you better believe that some doubted...but Jesus reminded them that all authority was with him...I WILL SEND YOU..."GO, THEREFORE."

OMIT FROM LESSON: In Exodus 3:6-8 we had another hesitant follower:

Exodus 3:6-8 New International Version (NIV)

6 Then he said, "I am the God of your father,[a] the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

7 The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. 8 So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey..."

SLIDE 7:

1 READ: Go, therefore: We aren't the church when we sit still. Sitting still is necessary but is only preparation for going and for being the church at work in the world!

2 READ SLIDE: OUR MISSION FROM GOD: Go, therefore, make disciples, baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit....

3 READ: MAKE DISCIPLES: In a nutshell...because this could be several lessons in itself...Hear the invitation to create relationships, to build up people, to engage with the world as it is so that we can help people see the world as it could be. This for the long haul. Jesus doesn't say, "Go win souls." He says "make disciples." The souls will be won in the process. We are not the soul winners; WE ARE THE DISCIPLE MAKERS!

BAPTIZE: This does not mean to “dunk” someone. It is to invite people into a community that nurtures a lifelong formation of self and soul. To baptize someone is to create symbols and rituals and joy. Let there be joy when anyone starts the journey of Christian faith. A PROMISE TO BE THE CHURCH TOGETHER!

SLIDE 8:

1 READ: We are to MAKE DISCIPLES AND BAPTIZE. We are also to TEACH...to REMEMBER...

2 READ SLIDE: OUR MISSION FROM GOD: Go, therefore...teach them and remember.

3 READ SLIDE: TEACH: “Love one another as I have loved you.” (John 23:33-35) We can only teach this by doing it!

4 READ: “Teaching them to KEEP everything I taught you.” Matthew 28:20 uses the word “obey”. But many theologians prefer the translation to read “keep” – as in keep his commandment in our hearts. Jesus says for us to keep his commandments and now, he wants us to give it away; to give it so that others can keep it. What is this he commands us? “Love one another as I have loved you.” This commandment appears 12 times in the New Testament. It is the command we teach others to keep. We can only teach this by doing it!

5 READ SLIDE: “Remember I am with you.” Because we remember, WE ARE NOT ALONE!

6 READ: But, where is the proof? You can’t explain it, yet it is true. We believe it is true. We sense it is true. We know that not half of what we have accomplished could have been done without this truth. Only His Presence allows us to give one more invitation, care for one more soul, one more neighbor. Because we remember, WE ARE NOT ALONE!

7 READ: I chose Velazquez’ *Christ Crucified* as the ultimate portrayal of loving others and the call to remember. Art critics note the Classicist painting’s sense of serenity, dignity and nobility. To me this painting symbolizes the work and love of Christ may bring us peace.

SLIDE 9

1 READ: Da Vinci’s *Salvator Mundi*, which sold for \$450 m in 2017, represents to me the fullness of Jesus’ love. The painting depicts Christ with his right hand raised giving his blessing of love and forgiveness to all. In his left hand is a crystal sphere, which represents the “celestial sphere”, which in iconography includes the Earth and all other heavenly bodies. The Savior of the World implies that Christ’s love and forgiveness is greater than the mind of man can imagine.

2 READ: Over the next few weeks we will look at the idea of the Great Commission and Open Our Eyes.

3 READ THE SLIDE: THINK ABOUT how to we as individuals and a church...

How do we Make Disciples, Baptize, Teach, and Remember?

How do we honor God, the Father; Jesus, the Son; and the Holy Spirit?

How do we endeavor to be successful in fulfilling the Great Commission?

3 READ: This process is an active one. Just as the Trinity is active in our lives we must be active in the world.

SLIDE 10:

1 READ: The work of the Great Commission is an active engagement...We cannot sit in our chairs and accomplish the commandment...

2 READ SLIDE: The mission is one of engagement.

At its heart, the doctrine of the Trinity is about engagement, somehow, someday.

We go forward because we worship a God who lives engaged in our lives.

GO, THEREFORE WITH OPEN HEARTS, OPEN MINDS, AND OPEN DOORS!

SLIDE 11: CLOSING PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father,

As we think about the Great Commission and your command for us to “Go, therefore”, let us remember that the doors of our hearts, minds, and church are two way. We want to invite others into our hearts, minds and church, but we must realize that we need to go out the doors into the world in order to find spiritual food for our hearts, minds and church and to meet the needs of others.

If we are to follow your most holy commandment, “Love one another as I have loved you,” then we must be willing to stretch our experiences beyond the obvious. We must exercise our creativity and our practical knowledge.

Heavenly Father, guide us as we move forward through the trials of this time so that we might reach the hearts and minds of our family, friends, neighbors, and strangers. We pray that we may give solace to those with concerns shared and those that are private.

We pray for grace and understanding to do Thy will and that it is done with love and joy.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.