

## **Making Disciples Who Make a Difference: What is a Disciple?**

**Matthew 28:18-20**

**Argyle – 1/8/17 – Church Mission Statement Series**

### **Introduction to Scripture**

Some of us have been watching a lot of football lately. There was the end of the NFL season which went better for some of our teams than others. My congratulations to you Giant, Steeler, Patriot and Green Bay fans among others. We Philadelphia fans are focusing on the beginning of spring training. Pitchers and catchers report in just 36 days. In addition to the NFL games there have been a slew of the college bowl games to watch culminating in FBS Championship game tomorrow night between Alabama and Clemson. Among those of you who care, how many of you are rooting for Alabama? Clemson?

I've watched a lot of football over the past few weeks and one of the most frustrating things to me is when your team has a broken play. The quarterback goes one way to hand off the ball, but the running back goes left. Or, two defensive backs cover the same receiver leaving another receiver wide open for a touchdown. Or, when one of the offensive lineman gets confused about the snap count and jumps offside. In football, it's important that every member of the team be on the same page, running the same play at the same time.

That same principle is true in lots of situations. It is true for a business. It is true for a marching band. It is true for a military unit in the midst of a battle. And,

it is true for the church. For us to function correctly and to fulfill our purpose, we need to know what our mission is and to execute it. So what is the mission of the church? Why did God create the church? What is our purpose? A lot of people look to this morning's Scripture passage to answer that question. These are Jesus' final words right before he ascended to heaven. He said, "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 that I command you. And surely I am with you always to the end of the age."(Matthew 28:18-20) When the Session of our church was looking to update our mission statement a couple of years ago, we used this passage as the basis for our statement . We have defined the mission of the Argyle Presbyterian Church as "making disciples who are making a difference."

As we are beginning a new year, we want to review that statement and explore what it means for our lives and church. So today we are going to talk about "What is a disciple?" Next week we'll look at "How are disciples made?" And the week after that we'll talk about "What difference do disciples make?"  
(Pray)

### **Introduction**

If a group of us sat down to come up with a mission statement for the church we would likely come pretty quickly to something about making disciples based on Jesus' commission to "go and make disciples." But if we were to be tasked with

the question of defining what a “disciple” is, that would likely prove to be more difficult. How would you answer the question, “What is a disciple?”

We might first think of the 12 men who Jesus called to follow him - folks like Peter, James and Matthew. The Bible often refers to them as “the disciples.” But even in the Bible we see the word “disciple” being applied to others in addition to the 12. So the term is not limited to just 12 men who lived when Jesus lived. It is applied to other followers of Jesus. This is where we sometimes get into the two tiered idea of believing. Some of us think that there are two tiers of Christians - regular Christians and then the really committed Christians who we call “disciples.”

When my dad was in graduate school at the Drexel University he took a course where you could pick your grade you wanted to get in the class. The syllabus listed the requirements you would need to meet to get an A, a B or a C. Each level had a different set of requirements. For an A you would have to read 4 books and write 3 papers; for a B - 3 books and 2 papers and for a C - 2 books and 1 paper. Because my dad was working full time and had a young family, he chose to get a C. Some of us view discipleship that way. To be a regular Christian which gets my sins forgiven and gets me into heaven I’ll need to attend worship 26 times a year, give 5% of my money to the Lord’s work and be nice to the people I like. But to be a disciple I’ll need to be in worship 45 times a year, give 10% of

my money and love my enemies. I've heard it described as the difference between having Jesus as your Savior and having him as your Lord.

Even if we wouldn't articulate this idea, subconsciously many of us buy into this two tiered approach to the Christian faith. The problem is, it is not Biblical. In the Bible, the words "Christian," "believer," "follower" and "disciple" are used interchangeably. In an article entitled "What is a Disciple?" David Schrock writes, "Disciples, therefore, are believers; believers are disciples. No tiers! ...Discipleship is not an optional extra for interested Christians. . . it is at the center of what it means to be a follower of Christ."

So that brings us back to our question, "What is a disciple?" What did Jesus mean when he said, "Go and make disciples of all nations...?" He gives us some important clues right in this command.

### **A Disciple is Someone Who Believes in Jesus Christ Alone for Their Salvation**

First of all, a disciple is someone who believes in Jesus Christ alone for their salvation. Jesus identified two practices involved in making disciples - baptizing and teaching. Baptism is an outward physical sign of an inward spiritual reality. In baptism a person declares their loyalty to Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. The water symbolizes the cleaning they have received for their sins and the new life in Christ they have entered. When a person is baptized as a young person or adult, the baptism is an expression of their present faith. When a person is baptized as an infant, it is an expression of our hope in their future faith. Parents

and the church commit themselves to raising this child in a way that constantly confronts them with Jesus to the end that he or she will embrace their baptism as their own by believing in Jesus.

So, Jesus' use of baptism here points to the first step in discipleship which is to believe in him alone for your salvation. It means you recognize that you are a sinner who has rebelled against God. It means that you recognize that there is nothing you can do to fix this problem. You can't do enough religious activities and good works to bridge the gap between your sinful self and our holy God. And it means that you recognize that only through receiving the results of Jesus death on the cross and resurrection to your life can you be forgiven and reconciled to God. The Apostle John writes "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God..."(John 1:12) The Apostle Paul wrote, "For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. <sup>24</sup> Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. <sup>25</sup> For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood." (Romans 3:23-25)

A disciple is someone who believes in Jesus Christ alone for their salvation. But that is not all.

## **A Disciple is Someone Who is Becoming More and More Like Jesus**

Second, a disciple is someone who is becoming more like Jesus. Jesus said that in addition to baptizing, we make disciples by “teaching them to obey” everything he has commanded us. So a disciple is a learner of God’s word, but not just a learner. A disciple is also a doer. A disciple obeys Jesus’ commands. A disciple puts into practice what he or she learns from God’s word. The result will be that they will become more and more like Jesus. It is not enough to admire Jesus, we are to imitate him. Paul summarizes the goal of a disciple this way. “And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”(II Corinthians 3:18)

A disciple is someone who believes in Jesus alone for their salvation and who is becoming more and more like Jesus. But that is not all.

## **A Disciple is Someone Who is Making Disciples of Others**

Third, a disciple is someone who making disciples of others. Jesus’ command to “go and make disciples” wasn’t just to the remaining 11 apostles he spoke to that day, or to pastors and other church leaders, but it is a command to every one of us who is a follower of Jesus Christ. And this may be where there is the biggest gap between the Biblical definition of a disciple and what many of us are living. Most of us in the church believe in Jesus for our salvation. Many of us

are seeking to become more like Jesus. But making disciples is not something that a lot of us are involved in and that is a problem.

It is a problem because there are people in all of our lives who don't know Jesus and they need us to tell them about him. It is a problem because there are people in all of our lives who are not imitating Jesus and they need us to teach them Jesus' commands and how to obey them. And, it is a problem because there is someone in your life who is not living out their full potential as a disciple. That person is you. You were called by God into a relationship with himself through Jesus and given spiritual gifts to make disciples. You and I can't fully experience what it means to be a disciple unless we are investing in helping others become disciples. That doesn't mean becoming a pastor or Bible study leader or missionary. It just means using the experience and gifts that God has given you to help move the people who are a part of your life closer to Jesus. It helps to know what your spiritual gifts are. If you don't know what your gifts are, you may want to take the *LifeKeys* adult Sunday school class we will be offering Starting January 29. It, also, helps to know some strategies for sharing you faith with others. During the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of adult S.S. we will be offering a class on how to share our faith with others. Above all, it helps to pray. Pray for openness to Jesus among those in your life and pray for courage for yourself to step out of your comfort zone to become a disciplemaker.

## Conclusion

The mission of the Argyle Presbyterian Church is to make disciples who are making a difference. A disciple is someone who believes in Jesus Christ alone for their salvation, who is becoming more and more like Jesus and who is making disciples of others. Next week Bryan will be talking about how we make disciples.

(Pray)

One of the great gifts that Jesus has given to his disciples is the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. So that we won't forget that we are sinners in need of rescue, he has given us the Lord's Supper. So that we won't forget that it is through Christ alone that we are saved, he has given us the Lord's Supper. So that we won't forget the great cost by which we have been saved, he has given us to the Lord's Supper. And so that we won't forget that he is coming back, Jesus has given us the Lord's Supper. (Invitation to the Lord's Supper)