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Scripture: Matthew 28: 16-20

Sermon Title: Remembering Our Mission

Matthew 28:16-20

The Commissioning of the Disciples

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him, but they doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore 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 that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”[a]

Prayer...

Introduction:

Friends, we are finishing the church season of Easter today. Next week we celebrate Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit on the early church. As a reminder, after the resurrection, Jesus stayed around 40 more days and appeared to more than 500 people. Then in our story today we read that he gathered his disciples at a mountain and spoke words about fulfilling their mission. After speaking these words, we read in the book of Mark, Luke, and Acts that Jesus ascended into heaven.

This morning I want to remind of us of our mission as the Church. I grew up learning that the Great Commission that we read in Matthew 28 today lays out the mission of the Church. I grew up learning and still believe today that one good way to talk about the mission of the Church is to go and make disciples of all nations, to baptize people, and to teach people to follow the commands of Jesus.

Briefly let's look at those three areas and then I want to explore some examples of how we can live out our mission.

When Jesus says go and make disciples, it is fitting to be reminded that Jesus does not say go and make believers of me. Jesus is not simply interested in inviting people to believe in him. He wants something more. Jesus wants people to follow him and his teachings. He wants disciples. Jesus wants a relationship with his follower not just people who believe in him and not only people who do what he wants. The image of a disciple comes from the Jewish tradition of rabbis and disciples. Rabbis are teachers in the Jewish tradition who had followers that learned from them and shared life with them. In Christianity we see Jesus as a rabbi or teacher, but he is more than a teacher, He is also our Lord, Savior, and friend. Jesus wants a personal relationship with us that includes our following of his teachings, but also asks us to follow him into places of great mission among those who are suffering most in our world. So as a

refresher, making disciples means inviting people to become friends and followers of Jesus who live in close relationship with him, following his teaching and living his life of love and compassion to our friends, family members, and to our neighbors including the most vulnerable people in the world.

The second part of the great commission is an invitation to baptize people. Baptism is also something Christians borrowed from the Jewish tradition. Baptism was a cleansing process related to repentance for Jews. For the early Christians, it became a way to show repentance, but also a symbolic and spiritual experience where we identify with the death and resurrection of Jesus and publicly profess our faith as we commit to fulfilling the mission of Christ in the world. I still think baptism is a wonderful sacrament that every follower of Jesus should be invited to experience. It is a way to commit the mission of Christ. Do you notice in Matthew 28, we also see the presence of the trinity. Although the Bible does not

use the word trinity, here the disciples are commanded to baptize people in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is an early example of how Christians understood God to be three in one.

The third call within the great commission is to teach other disciples to follow and obey the commands of Jesus. When Jesus talks about his commands, we know he is likely referring to the teaching within the Sermon on the Mount about the kingdom of God. The heart of Jesus' commands may be summed up also in the story of the Good Samaritan. We are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Oh and the Sermon on the Mount even teaches us to love our enemies, which basically means that the commands of Jesus may be summed up in saying love everyone really well.

Now that feels like a high calling and maybe a little bit out of reach at times, but our passage finishes with a powerful reminder. Jesus says, "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Jesus does not expect us to fulfill his command to love without his help. And part of the way, Jesus helps is by sending us the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Our mission partner Mark McIlraith will join us next Sunday to talk more about the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

I want to now share a bit more about my experience of mission and how it relates to our calling as Newberg First Presbyterian Church.

Last week I had the privilege of attending a chapel at CS Lewis, where my daughter Cate and her fellows seniors shared about their experience of participating in a mission trip to Maui. They served with Praying Pelican Mission, kind of a cool name for a mission trip organization.

When we learned that Cate was going to Maui for a mission trip, it was natural to joke about it. Who would not want to go to Maui to serve Christ. Suffering for Jesus in Maui is rough. It is a natural joke, but after hearing about Cate's trip, we learned that in addition to

enjoying the beautiful culture, beaches, and other sites of Maui, these youth really did encounter opportunities to participate in mission work.

Cate and her friends talked about helping people who became houseless after the fires. They told stories of Native Hawaiians who are currently living in houseless camps trying to make it day by day, relying on the generosity of food pantries and mobile showers to help get back on their feet. Cate shared about her own powerful experience of learning from these people.

The mission group of CS Lewis H.S. seniors were able to do landscaping work to help with locations impacted by falling trees. They provided food assistance and clothing assistance. They formed relationships and truly listened to the stories, struggles, and faith experiences of the Maui community where they served. It was a beautiful thing for us parents to witness as our kids shared about how Jesus also came alive to them in a new way as they served in

his name. Four of the kids in Cate's class also were baptized at one of the local beaches, which was also a profound example of living out the Great Commission. One young man who was baptized on the trip said that the mission trip was the best experience of high school for him.

Friends, we all need to be reminded from time to time of the mission we have as Christians to spread the good news of Jesus. It was wonderful for me to experience that reminder from my daughter Cate and her friends this last week.

As some of you know, before coming to be the pastor of this church more than eight years ago, I spent most of my career in ministry working with young adults and youth. I have led mission trips to Fairbanks, Alaska, Charleston, South Carolina, Chicago, Illinois, and have participated in other mission efforts in Ganado, Arizona, Tulsa, Oklahoma, Dallas, Fort Worth, Monterrey, Mexico, Managua, Nicaragua, and Tegucigalpa, Honduras to name a few other

experiences. One thing I enjoy about missions is the way it combines sharing the good news of Jesus' love for the world with tangible actions of helping others in Jesus' name.

If you have experience in short term or long term missions, you may know that mission trips sometimes are critiqued for not being sensitive to the people they are coming to serve. This can be a fair critique. The best mission organizations work closely with indigenous communities or local churches run by people who live and work in an area. When done well, I still feel both short term and long-term mission are beautiful expressions of faith.

At our church, we support many local service or mission organizations, such as Love Inc., FISH Food Bank, Feed Newberg, A Family Place Preschool, and Henderson House, which supports women and children impacted by Domestic abuse. We also support monthly seven mission partners that include: Erik and Maureen York with Cru, Brian and Julie who work in Bible Translation, Bob and

Gracie Ekblad with Tierra Nueva, Taliilee Fiqruu and Urgessa her husband who work with Frontier Fellowship and Light of Hope Ministries, Caroline Kurtz- who works with Maji Development organization, Shalom Collective- a Spiritual Formation ministry for Christian leaders led by Kelly Dickson, and soma.digital a ministry in the digital space run by Mark McIlraith. Many of these folks visit our church from time to time, providing education, giving us opportunities to support them, and often preaching God's word to us in worship.

Our mission together as a church is continuing to grow. We are developing our Children and Youth Ministry. We are seeking to enhance our Media support and communication efforts. Our women's and men's ministries continue to grow. Our Peace garden provide a place of rest and renewal and we hope to use it also as a location for weddings, concerts, and other events to support the community. We are working to raise money for our current Capital

Campaign to put a new roof on our Fellowship Hall and to provide improved interior renovation including air conditioning. This will also help us care for our community. Currently we host AA groups and Rotary weekly.

God is giving us a unique mission as a church committed to fostering grace, hope, peace, and love. Our commitment to the mission of love in the name of Jesus affirms the beauty of God's creation, the equality, welcome, and affirmation of all people, the work of peace, compassion, and justice. We are Jesus people, Trinitarian- worshipping God as Mother/Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We preach a message of salvation in Jesus and we also support positive relationships across denominations and other faith traditions. We focus our mission on a spirit of kindness. I think of our church as neither overly progressive or conservative. I think of us as more centrist, centered on Jesus as his narrow way that calls us to love all and embrace all in the name of Christ. This is the mission of

Newberg First Presbyterian Church. We seek to befriend all and work for peace together.

If you are becoming newly acquainted with our church, I hope you pick up our recent Prez Newsletter. It lays our vision description of our church, which was the fruit of many months of work together among our elders and deacons and many of your voices that gave us feedback.

Friends, the great commission of making disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them to follow the commands of Christ remains our mission together. Take a moment and ponder, how you wish to be involved in Christ's mission as part of our church community. We are committed to equipping you as disciples who are able to fulfill your sense of call. Your calling may vary well include our calling together as a congregation committed to proclaiming and living out the gospel of Jesus Christ. Let us pray together...