

WGUMC May 5, 2013 Matthew 28:16-20

Over ten million people watched "The Bible" miniseries on the History Channel before Easter. I wasn't one of them, and I confess that I'm not all that anxious to see what Hollywood did with our Holy Book. The problem for me is that not much of the Bible is made-for-TV material. Take the final scene in the Gospel of Matthew. Christ has died, Christ is risen, and Christ comes again, on a mountaintop in Galilee.

Should be a great cinematic climax, except that the cast isn't all that convincing. Here are the disciples with Jesus on the mountain, and while some worship him, others doubt him. After all they've been through, the disciples still don't come through. So, what we have at the end of Matthew's story is not a Hollywood ending. We have a mixed bag, and that's far too messy for a movie. My friends, welcome to reality.

Where the Gospel of Matthew ends is where real life begins, where we sometimes worship and sometimes doubt and

sometimes all at the same time. And I suspect that Jesus knows this, because to the some who worship and the some who doubt, he gives the same command: "Go make disciples." Given the people around him, wouldn't you think that Jesus would say, "Go *be* disciples" before he tells them to *make* disciples?

I hear that a lot. In fact, I've even said it. I use to say that we have to *be* disciples before we can *make* disciples. But now I think that that's a misleading statement. It's a kind of cop-out. It implies that "disciple" is a rank we must achieve rather than a path we must choose. And that would be a misunderstanding of the word "disciple."

What is a disciple? Our English word comes from a Latin one meaning "learner." A disciple is a student or an apprentice. A disciple isn't a teacher or a master or a guru. So, we shouldn't be so disappointed when the disciples do dumb things in the Gospels. Like us, they have a lot to learn.

But what is it that disciples are learning? If we are disciples of Jesus, that means that we are with Jesus, by choice and by grace, learning from him how to live in the kingdom of God. It doesn't mean that we are learning to live *Jesus'* life. It means that we are learning to live *our* life as Jesus would live it if he happened to be one of us. [Dallas Willard, *The Christian Century*, April 22-29, 1998]

One of our problems is that we hesitate to call ourselves disciples because we don't think we can make the grade. We forget that disciples are learners, and we think that we should be feeling learned. That's a trap. That's why adults don't try new things. Kids don't know how incompetent they are, so they'll try anything. Whereas, adults have to be seen as competent, except those adults who go to graduate school. The most important thing you learn in graduate school is how stupid you really are. Being and making disciples is a life-long learning process that can make us feel stupid. But remember,

we're in good company! Jesus' closest friends were in Disciple U for three years, and when they got out, they were still pretty stupid!

So, it's interesting that Jesus tells his students to go teach, when they're obviously still learning. Interesting, but not surprising, for every teacher I know is first and foremost a learner. In fact, the way they learn is by teaching. If teachers couldn't teach until they'd learned everything they needed to know about teaching, our classrooms would be empty!

Likewise, if we couldn't make disciples until we had learned everything we needed to know about Jesus, our churches would be empty! So, it doesn't get us off the hook to claim that we aren't far enough along to invite someone else along. If you want to become a disciple, go make one.

But don't take my word for it. Take John Wesley's. As a young man coming home from Georgia, he had a broken heart and a broken spirit. He had utterly failed his calling and was

convinced that he had not an ounce of real faith. So, he told a friend, a German Moravian, that he had better leave off preaching. How could he tell people to go get what he himself didn't have? His friend, Peter Böhler, wisely said to Wesley, "Preach faith *till* you have it, and then, *because* you have it, you *will* preach faith." [Wesley's Journal, March 4, 1738]

Albert Outler says that Wesley preached faith until others had it, and then when he saw faith in others, he finally received the assurance of faith for himself.

You're looking at someone who had to preach faith until she had it. I already told you about not being ready for the role of church pastor. I really thought that I'd been called to overseas mission work (feeding the hungry, digging water wells, that sort of thing). They told me that I had to "do my time" in the parish, so that I could get ordained and go on to what I thought God was calling me to do. It's not surprising that I sometimes felt like a phony as a pastor, because at age 24, I

was preaching about things I had never myself experienced. I don't know that I brought anyone to Christ in those first few years, but by the grace of God those Idaho farmers brought me closer to Christ.

That's how I know that each one of us can bring one to Christ here at Willow Glen. Not because my faith or your faith is so great or our practice is so perfect. But because God is so great and God's promises are perfect. Preach faith until you have it. Make disciples until you become one.

We're coming to the end of the Easter season. Lisa Jacobs preaches for me next week and the week after that is Pentecost. So, it's time to fish or cut bait. We're either going to make and become disciples or we're going to go back to our fishing boats. I'm going to ask you to make a commitment to do what you can do and let God do what God can do to not only bring someone to church, but into a new or renewed relationship with Jesus Christ, sometime, anytime in this next

year. The card in your bulletin will tell you what that

commitment entails:

- ✦ *praying for someone who is in need of God in their life*
- ✦ *asking God to provide me with a way and the will to reach them*
- ✦ *making time for face-to-face relationships and heart-to-heart conversations that will lead to opportunities for invitation*
- ✦ *inviting a friend, family member, neighbor, co-worker or stranger to an event at my church (a meal, a service project, a small group or class, or a worship service)*
- ✦ *trusting God to use the gifts I have, not the gifts I don't have, to help the Church make disciples of all nations*

What I feel about this venture is this: there's no way to become a skydiver without jumping out of the airplane. I was the introvert who became the public speaker. I was the pastor who had to preach faith until she had it. So, I know that you can take this leap of faith, that you can learn to fly, that you can make disciples of all nations, because I know that Jesus will be with you always, to the end of the age.

Pastoral Prayer

God, your call is clear: make disciples. But our response is muddy. Sometimes we worship you, sometimes we doubt you. All the time, we need you, and in a way, you need us. You need us to bring others to Christ. For Christ has no body on earth, but ours, and so we are here to offer what we have. First, we give you our doubt. Use it to invite someone into faith. We give you our fear. Use it to make someone feel safe. We give you our weakness. Use it to make someone strong. We give you our resistance. Use it to break the walls down. We give you our baggage. Use it to relieve someone's burden. We give you our guilt. Use it to lead someone into grace. We give you our failure. Use it to teach someone how to live in your kingdom.

And when we have given you all these things, the only thing that we will have left is your love and, by your grace, we will use it to bring someone to new life. If it be your will, we are willing. Ready and waiting, we pray. Amen.