

Title: “Go Out.”

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Matthew 4:12-25

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Lesson:

We are called to be disciples of Christ Jesus and we learn how to do this through our imitation of Him. This week we focus on our relationship with the world. (part 2 of 2)

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Today's Word comes to us from Matthew and in many Bibles this section is titled "Jesus begins his ministry" or "Jesus calls his first disciples" and I would like to focus on the first few verses this morning. Starting in verse 18:

¹⁸While walking by the Sea of Galilee, [Jesus] saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. ²²Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

This passage always trips me up and causes me pause, not because it is difficult to understand or complex in its message. It's not. On the surface, it's actually pretty straight forward. What catches me is the ease at which those he calls, obey. He simply says, "Follow me" and they immediately drop what they are doing and heed his call. Is this the picture of discipleship that he paints for us? Is this what it should look like? When Jesus commanded us to make disciples of all nations, is this how he expected it to play out for us? If so, then it is quite deflating, even demotivating because that is not my experience. In fact, it's quite the opposite. I have found that making disciples is messy, hard, and full of things like emotions, and pain, and stress. And, it has never been immediate: in that I have never simply called out to someone "Follow God!" and have them immediately abandon their secular or non-Christian beliefs and live for Christ. So, if discipleship is not this easy, what is God teaching us about making disciples with this passage?

First, we need to understand from him what a disciple is so that we can understand how one is made. And if we can understand how one is made, we can understand how we are to live, and what we are called to do. And if we can understand what we are called to do, we can begin to understand what it should look like to make a disciple. Last week we talked about how you must be a disciple before you can make a disciple and we explored this personal formation through two different dimensions. The first was through Christ's relationship with his Father. Time and again we are told

that Jesus prayed - he was in constant communication with God. In fact, if you read the first verses in Matthew 4 leading up to today's Gospel you will see that immediately before Jesus begins his ministry and calls his first disciples, he spends 40 days in the wilderness praying. And so, being disciples of Christ, we too are called to pray without ceasing. We are called to be in the Word - to read the Bible and to study it in groups so that we imitate this model of personal discipleship that Christ provides for us.

The second dimension that we looked at concerned the fellowship of Jesus with his disciples. He lived with them - day in and day out. He worshiped with them, ate with them, everything. They were a community of believers, a church, with Christ as their center. And although they were one body, they were comprised of individuals. And the church of today continues to be one body that is comprised of many, many individuals and many, many spiritual gifts that all work together to be that light in the darkness for the world to see. And we are a body that was formed to not only be a light for others but to be a light for *each* other: to strengthen and encourage each other, to celebrate with each other, and to live in fellowship with each other. And so, being disciples of Christ also means being in active community with the church through worship and bible study.

Through God's powerful Word, worked in us by the Holy Spirit, we become disciples of God. This week we look at the third dimension, that of Jesus' relationship with those in the world. He was interested in the lives of those around him. He cared deeply for them. You see, discipleship is understanding that Jesus is deeply interested in us. He sees our messy lives, full of stress and pain and sin and instead of turning away from us he sends the Holy Spirit into us to do all the dirty work of cleaning, of sanctifying, of making us perfect in Christ. He invites himself into the deepest dark corners of our lives and instead of recoiling he engages. Instead of damning, he restores. And his transformative work is available to everyone without exception. No one will find his arms closed. And he calls us to be imitators of him, not to sanctify others, of course, but to open our arms and build intimate relationships with everyone. To get our own hands dirty in the messy lives of those we come in contact with. To care, to really care, about the struggles and the pains and the successes of everyone. To make connections, caring connections with those around us - and especially with those who don't yet know Jesus.

This call of imitation manifests itself in many different ways but it always starts the same: recognizing where Jesus is already working in the life of another person and then finding a way to join in. You may find that Christ calls you to speak words of truth to that person, to help them understand where they have turned from God and to help them, through love, turn back to him. You might find that you are the one to plant that Gospel seed into the heart of someone where it will be watered and nurtured by others. You may find that you are to simply be a model of Christian living, a light in the darkness for someone and that through simply living out your own discipleship, the beginnings of another are formed, unbeknownst to you.

When we talk about discipleship, it doesn't have to be complicated, and doesn't have to require advanced knowledge or degrees. When we talk about discipleship we are mostly talking about relationships: relationships with God, relationships with other Christians, and relationships with the world. And it is through those relationships that discipleship happens: for ourselves and for those we come into contact with. In our personal time with God he restores and strengthens us, through the power of his Word. And in our relationships with other Christians, through worship and Bible

studies he does the same thing. And being filled with the Holy Spirit, supported by the body of Christ, we minister to the world through relationships that we forge with others. We see every moment as a moment of ministry - every moment as a moment to point others to Christ.

This is how God sees discipleship? Do you?

Please pray with me.

Here we are, Lord. Use us to reveal you to this world. Use us to be your light in the world of darkness. Use us to touch lives with your transformative love and power. Give us the courage to be your hands and feet, to meet others where they are, where you already are, and to build a relationship that helps point them to you.

In your name we pray. Amen.