

“Go, therefore, and make disciples ...” It’s a phrase that’s launched a thousand church mission statements. They’re our Christian marching orders: Head into the world and spread the good news so all may come to believe Christ died and rose for them.

So, how many of you have ever read or heard this verse and felt personally charged to rush out there and tell the next person you see about Jesus? Anyone? Ok, how many of you hear that verse and feel just a little bit guilty? Here’s one more faith-related thing you know you should be doing, but aren’t. Somehow we’ve managed to take something that should be energizing and turn it into the biblical equivalent of flossing. (Actually, given that the average Lutheran invites someone to church once every 27 years, most of us probably floss more regularly than we make disciples. Good thing Jesus was a carpenter, not a dentist.)

These verses are the last ones in the gospel of Matthew. One could presume this is the take-away he wanted his readers to remember: *You’ve come to believe. Now go, and help others believe too.* Think for a minute: what do you hear in this sentence? I hear that there isn’t anything passive about faith for Matthew. Faith is active, it’s transforming, it’s relational. These things are meant to reflect the active, transforming, relational love of a God who comes close to us in Jesus Christ. That theme resonates throughout Matthew’s whole gospel.

And unfortunately, that’s what’s gotten lost with this charge over the years. We’ve taken these words and turned them into something someone else is supposed to do – missionaries, say, or pastors. They’re the professionals. They’re the ones who go out, who preach, and teach, and baptize.

Now you could argue that Jesus was giving these instructions to people who'd had a front-row seat during his three years of ministry. Surely they'd picked up a few tricks, a few techniques along the way that would help them carry this out.

But the fellows that stuck with Jesus to the end weren't professionals. They were ordinary folks who'd just happened to have experienced that active, transforming, relational love of a God who'd come close to them in Jesus. They weren't any more prepared to go than you or I. They didn't have any more answers, or a more solid faith. Even as they'd gathered on the mountain that day after Easter, even after they'd seen the risen Christ with their own eyes, some of them still doubted. But Jesus gives them this charge anyway. *Go, and make disciples.* Why? Because Jesus knew that the message they had to share of God's amazing love was one everyone needed to hear.

The thing is, Jesus has chosen ordinary folks like us for this job, too. We've already been invited to follow him. He doesn't expect us to have all the answers figured out right from the start. Growing closer to God is a process. It comes as we spend our time seeking to know God and taking in God's story. It comes when we talk with others about what really matters to us. It comes when we pray and trust that the Spirit will help us face whatever the day may bring. All Jesus asks is that as we go through that process, we don't keep it to ourselves; that we find ways to share what we believe. This charge Jesus gives us to make disciples, this Great Commission, is really a reminder to go out and tell his story – no, tell our story of life with him. It's what theologian Anna Carter Florence calls testimony: nothing more or less than what we ourselves have experienced, how we've come to trust that God is faithful, why we've chosen to put our future in God's hands.

I'll be honest: as a church we've done a really terrible job of getting people ready for this. We haven't been intentional about teaching how to do this, or practicing talking to one another about faith. In fact, I bet if I said we were going to do that right now some of you

would get really nervous. We've often bought into the cultural assumption that faith is meant to be private. That telling others about what we believe is being pushy, and that asking someone what they believe is intrusive or offensive. Now don't get me wrong – there are definitely ways to do it poorly. But remember: it's not up to us to convince other people to believe. That's the Holy Spirit's job. We just have to be brave enough to get the conversation started.

I know, I know, that can be a pretty scary thing. Not even the “professionals” are always very good at it. Last weekend I got my hair cut. We were making the usual chitchat about the Twins and the weather. My stylist asked if I was taking vacation. Not yet, I said, but I would be heading out on a couple of youth mission trips next month. She looked mildly interested, so I got bold, and talked a little bit about why I love those trips so much, how good it feels to serve and how much I love watching teens make a difference. Now, I know I was sharing a little about my faith. But what I wish I'd done is ask her, *so, have you ever done anything like that?* It makes me wonder where the conversation could have gone from there.

You know who does this really well? Tracey McGuire of ZLC. Tracey's a photographer, a darn good one. Maybe you've seen her stuff at her booth down at Thursdays on First. But as good as she is with her camera, she's even better with people. Tracey has this insatiable curiosity, and a genuine heart for listening. And as she meets people she makes it a point to talk to them, to ask questions and pay attention to their answers without judgment. Her motto is “I open a door, but I try not to push too hard.” She accepts people as they are and waits for God to show up – and in some form or another, God always does.

Really, that's all it takes to give the Spirit room to work: the courage to share out loud and invite someone to talk with us. Something like “Did you hear about that crazy bed race at Rochesterfest? Our church did that.” Or, “Say, I know you like bluegrass. There's this great band that leads worship at my church sometimes. Want to come listen with me?” Or, “Oh, my

grandkids just love Vacation Bible School. Wouldn't it be fun if our grandchildren went together?" That's not so scary. It's testimony.

Friends, I fully believe that God puts opportunities like this in front of us. God puts people in our lives who need to hear that they are loved, that there is hope, that Jesus cares. You are the messengers of that word. You carry it out every time you serve in God's name. You carry it out when you treat others with dignity. You carry it out as you create a place for all to belong. God promises that when his word goes out it will not return to him empty. Disciples are made, one conversation at a time, one invitation at a time, one act of kindness at a time. They're made when we reflect the active, transforming, relational love we find in Jesus. That's all we are called to do.

You know, before we can go out and tell the story, we have to get the story into us first. We have to let it seep into our bones and fill us from the inside out. So I want to read you those Christian marching orders again. And as you listen and let Jesus' words wash over you, **I want you to think: *What's one way I can share my faith in words or actions today? Let that be your guide every day this week.*** Write it on your bathroom mirror or put a reminder on your iPhone. And at the end of the day, jot down what you did. Because when you pay attention to what the Spirit is up to, the disciple being made just might be you.

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus has directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."