

*God, whose fingers sculpt sun and moon and curl the baby's ear;  
Spirit, brooding over chaos before naming each day;  
Savior, sending us to earth's ends with water and words:  
startle us with the grace, love, and communion of your unity in diversity  
that we may live to the praise of your majestic name. Amen. (Vanderbilt Divinity Library)*

**Matthew 28:16-20**

28:16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

28:17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.

28:18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

28:19 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,

28:20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

**Proclamation of the Word**

Vince Lombardi was famous for starting every Green Bay Packer season by holding up a football and saying, "Gentleman, this is a *football*." The point was to get back to the very basics of the game to provide a sure foundation for everything that would follow.<sup>i</sup>

Jesus has gathered his 11 disciples together after the resurrection. He reminds them of the basics of the games to provide a sure foundation for following him.

And he takes them to a hill. They go up on the mountain in Galilee. In the Bible this is code for "Something significant is about to happen. Pay attention!" Moses goes up the mountain to receive revelation of the 10 Commandments. Jesus is the New Moses in Matthew's gospel. And he is having a Commissioning service for this little band of disciples. Jesus preaches his most significant teaching on a mountain in Matthew chapters 5-7.

And for those of us who love Clemson football, we know about another special hill. Called the 25 most exciting seconds in College football, running down the hill is the start to all that has been practiced and prepared for, namely playing the game. Jesus spent three years preparing the disciples, practicing with them, and teaching them. He hands them the ball, for now they will make disciples, baptize and teach in his name. This may be Jesus' last words, his curtain call, but it is only the beginning for these disciples. Let's look closer at his final instructions.

He gives them clear verbs: Go, Make disciples, baptizing, teaching and remember.

Of all those verbs only one is in the IMPERATIVE. It is the command. Could it be the verb go? The worldwide missionary movement that caught fire in the 1800s assumed they were all equally imperative. And in some ways that was great. Right now for instance, there are more Korean Presbyterians in South Korea than there are USA Presbyterians. There are approximately 10 million Presbyterian Christians where a total of 18 million Christians are reported. Now the Korean Presbyterians have missionaries in 77 countries. <sup>ii</sup> Missionaries went to parts of Africa, Asia, and South America from North America. When Jesus says Go- they went! But Go is not the imperative and neither is baptize and teach.

Other churches focus on numbers of baptisms themselves. The pressure to baptize or re-baptize is there because they believe that God's saving happens in the baptism. Sadly, a recent article <sup>iii</sup> the pressure in some Mega-churches to produce numbers of baptisms, have led one Southern Baptist mega-church in Charlotte, Elevation, to plant people who start the movement of folks forward at the altar call. They are placed strategically in the room to encourage others to come forward. The spontaneous baptisms are not so spontaneous. But it has worked, baptism numbers have increased dramatically. A preaching professor at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and Pastor in Raleigh, Tony Merida said,

“I wasn’t as surprised by [the baptisms] because we have a history in a lot of revivalism and evangelicalism in that type of planning to get numbers,” ....“I can’t imagine [the apostle] Peter saying, ‘Hey, 15 of you get up and we’ll see if 1,000 will join.’”

The pressure for emotional experience comes at the cost of theology and biblical teaching.

The imperative verb is not Go, baptize, teach or even remember. Jesus commands us to "MAKE DISCIPLES." We can go out and start baptizing people and move on without a continued relationship with them as some evangelists do. We can go to the mountaintop and have an emotional experience. I have had those and would love to live at that mountaintop. Perhaps you have had them too. I have had those powerful moving experiences at a Christian concert, mission trip, or Montreat worship experience. But the real work happens down the hill, in the un-staged real world, where we have to practice being disciples.

Making disciples is our real mission. We state it regularly as our mission, grow disciples, along with glorify God, and meet human needs. And we have to focus on our discipling methods. For generations discipling children happened in families, extended families, and faith families who "discipled" by show and tell. There was no Sunday School or church programs. Living together, knowing each other, and talking about faith and the bible along the way formed Christian character and identity. The show and tell method of learning, was perfected in my kindergarten class, where Mrs. Inman asked us to bring something special in to share. I told my classmates why it was important to me, why I loved it, what was unique about it.

Disciples have always had the responsibility and the joy to show and tell about their faith. It is how we learn best, I think. We model praying, serving our neighbors, studying, and loving to one another. I learned about being a caring Christian because my mother took me to visit elderly friends in the church. I learned to read the Bible as teachers taught me to open it up, use it, and discover God's word. I learned to love because I was blessed with so many individuals in church who loved me.

Since today is Father's day, I was thinking of my father whose faith in action I witnessed, but I was also thinking of all the men of my church who modeled the faith for me, cared for the church, provided for me. And I realized I always had men teaching me in Sunday School (usually teaching alongside their wives)- what a blessing to a little girl whose father died. I knew Ralph Hoke, Joe Templeton, Ronnie Bailes, and Bill Perkins, not just once a quarter, but weekly for years they taught. They taught me more than the Sunday School lesson. We had an adopt- a- grandparent program and Mr. David Glenn was my adopted grandfather. Every youth was assigned to two or three elder (elderly) members of the church to befriend. We had a dinner each year together, but he also took time to see me and talk to me regularly in church. I loved to get a hug from Mr. David at church. While we didn't have youth group each week, when our little youth group went anywhere, Buzz Smith drove us in the van, hitting the railroad tracks too fast, so we could all bounce in the back seat. (Before seat belt laws) All the men who mowed, clerked, made the coffee, taught, preached, served the most delicious breakfasts, and taught me, were discipling me. I was a part of a church community. They were showing and telling me about who God was and how to serve. Maybe you have long list of men who have discipled you, too. Think for a moment of those who have and give thanks....

Men of the church (member who is male) please stand if you are able

**You are the models of faith for the church. You have a special role to father the church of Jesus Christ at Fort Hill. To protect, guide, nurture, and love the church and its people, especially the children of the church. We thank you and honor you who have and are serving as wonderful church fathers. And consider yourself commissioned to make disciples.**

Our Christian Education Ministry is helping us figure out how we grow disciples in a new millennium as culture shifts and work and family life changes. We can all pray for our church leaders in this ministry to discover how God is calling us to new forms of faith development in a new era.

"Teaching them to obey" has taken different forms, but the content is still the same. Jesus refers to what he has already taught them back on the Sermon on the Mount, another mountain top experience. This is what we are to obey. Jesus redefines the Law (Torah) and the Prophets. When Jesus comes on the scene the faith had been fragmented and perhaps lost focus. The sermon on the mount is like Vince Lombardi telling his team, "Gentlemen, this is a football." Here is the summary of the Law. The religious leaders had complicated things so much. They had devised a list of 613 laws. 613 was the number of separate letters in the Ten Commandments, and they searched Pentateuch, the

first five books, to name those 613 commands to be obeyed. Then they divided that list into affirmatives and negatives. There were 248 "to dos," which correlated to each part of the human body. There were 365 "don't dos" to correlate to the days of the year. It was a well-devised teaching tool. Each day you remembered one command, one "to do." And each body part reminded you of what not to do. But it had gotten legalistic. And Jesus came with a revolutionary teaching. The Pharisees try to test Jesus and catch him in a mistake, so they ask what is the greatest of these 613 commands, and Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as you love yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two. Leading up to this, Jesus had taught on the hill in Galilee things like Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn all the Beatitudes.

Then he continues with things like "You have heard it said, do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment, but I say anyone who is angry with his brother, will be subject to judgment."<sup>iv</sup> He continues with "Do not commit adultery and takes it further with anyone who lusts after another commits adultery in his heart."<sup>v</sup> "You have heard it said, love your neighbor and hate your enemies, but I tell you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."<sup>vi</sup> He teaches about divorce, giving to the needy, taking oaths, praying, fasting, and storing up treasures in heaven. Our primer for being a disciple can be found most clearly in Matthew 5-7. Go home and read it today.

Do you think the "Great Commission" is a daunting task for us disciples? sure it is! Imagine how the 11 leftover disciples felt. After the crucifixion and resurrection, most believers were afraid of the authorities. These eleven bravely went up this hill in Galilee with Jesus where they were given this great commission. Some read this and think, Jesus might as well say, "Go into all the world cure cancer, clean up the environment, evangelize the unbeliever, and, while you are at it, establish world peace."<sup>vii</sup> Matthew 28:17 reads, "When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted." While it may be refreshing that even some of the first disciples had hesitations about their mission, the actual Greek reads differently. A more direct translation is, "When they saw, they worshiped, but they doubted."<sup>viii</sup> Even as they worshiped Jesus, everyone not just some still wondered how in the world their little band of 11 were going to all the world to do what Jesus asked.

That is why Jesus' final words are most critical. "Remember I am with you always." Remember is the last verb. He commissions us to **go, make disciples, baptizing, and teaching** with authority and power, but also gives us his powerful presence. For nothing is possible on our own power, it is possible with God's powerful presence. We are completely at the mercy of God who strengthens us for every good work. All our good works are made possible by his power and not our own. It is when we forget that, that we lose trust and confidence. That is why the last word is REMEMBER. We so easily forget.

## Conclusion

We are sitting on a hillside right now. Fort Hill disciples have been gathering here for almost 120 years. We come up the hill and gather together for a brief time each week in order that we can be sent out the gate and down the hill to be on the field, the mission field. We have been commissioned, even while we worship and doubt, to go and make disciples. As we go let us teach by showing and telling the good news never forgetting that it is the presence and power of God that goes with us.

It's time to get into the game.

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<sup>i</sup> Steve Godfrey, <http://churchintheworld.com/2014/06/09/this-is-a-football/>

<sup>ii</sup> [www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/presbyterian-church-of-korea](http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/presbyterian-church-of-korea)

<sup>iii</sup> "Baptisms prove to be not so spontaneous," Feb 24, 2014 by Sarah Pulliam Bailey

[www.christiancentury.org/article/2014-02/megachurch-pastor-steven-furtick-s-spontaneous-baptisms-not-so-spontaneous](http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2014-02/megachurch-pastor-steven-furtick-s-spontaneous-baptisms-not-so-spontaneous)

<sup>iv</sup> Matthew 5:21-22

<sup>v</sup> Matthew 5:27-28

<sup>vi</sup> Matthew 5:43-44

<sup>vii</sup> Feasting on the Word,

<sup>viii</sup> [Galilean Rendevous](#), D. Mark Davis, rough translation and notes, *Left Behind and Loving It*, 2014. Many translations make this "they saw" and "but some doubted." The "they" is the implied subject of the plural verb προσεκύνησαν. The "some" is the curious translation as "they" but reduce the pronoun οι to "some"? Precedent is 'the 11.' Kudos to the New American Bible (translated by the US Council of Bishops), which renders: "When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted."