

This is the final message from our Cultural Engagement Sermon Series. Over Christmas and New Year, I was pretty immobile because I did something to my back. And those closest to me know that when I'm not feeling well, for whatever reason, I want everyone to know about it. Some I told said my backache was due to sitting too much. Others I told said I was good to sit, but I needed a better chair. Others told me I needed to work standing up. Others said I needed to stretch better and get flexible. And here is my favorite: Your back hurts because you are just getting old.

All I knew was that I had no trouble abiding by the "Stay at Home" order. I spent most of my time upright in a chair watching Christmas specials. I love watching the musical *White Christmas* but only so many times. I am not one who typically gets bored, but I was bored. So, when I wasn't applying ice, I did some online shopping. I wanted to buy an iPad, but I had lots of questions. So, I contacted our very own Apple Genius on our staff. Now I know this guy pretty well, but I had no idea how much he knew about Apple products. And not only that, I had no idea how excited he was to share what he knew. He guided and disciplined me through the process of buying the right iPad and getting the apps I needed. And he did it with knowledge and enthusiasm for his favorite products.

There was a great lesson there. The more I learn, the more I know. The more I appreciate something, the more natural it is for me to share it with others. I think this speaks well into our vision at CPC and what we are calling Cultural Engagement. The more we discover about Jesus, layer upon layer of these beautiful things about His love, forgiveness, grace, sacrifice for us, and granting us the opportunity to have a real relationship with him, as these beautiful things keep growing in our hearts, what is the most natural thing? The most natural thing is to share what's in our heart with others.

Over the past three years, our church has come together around a biblical vision that we believe God gave our church. A vision paints a picture of a preferred future—a vision, which brings a call to action.

Four pillars support our vision: Worship, Spiritual Formation, Getting Equipped, and Cultural Engagement. We believe as we grow deeper in our worship response to Jesus, become more spiritually formed to look more like Jesus, and get more equipped to serve Jesus, we will naturally want to engage others outside the church and share the good news we know about Jesus. Our hope is that we will want others to see the beautiful things growing in our hearts.

Cultural Engagement is our thoughtful and gracious participation in society, as both individuals and as a church community, so that people encounter God through our words and our actions.

I like to think that our cultural engagement pillar is our final one because it's where we take it to the streets. Where we recommit to bringing the good news of Jesus Christ to our neighbors up and down this peninsula, where we recommit to impact the culture in this place we live, that we love, and call home.

I hope this study gives us a sense of urgency for our vision. Because transforming the Peninsula through cultural engagement is about the biggest issues. Issues about life versus death, heaven versus hell, hope versus despair, grace versus condemnation, and about where one will spend their eternity.

I ask each of us to consider our final question regarding cultural engagement: What will it require for us to take the good news of Jesus to the streets? I believe our text gives us what is required. Matthew 8:16-20, is known as The Great Commission given by Jesus to his church.

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:16-20

These are the last five verses of the entire gospel of Matthew. It's about three weeks since Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus had already appeared to the women at the empty tomb, the disciples in the locked room, and many more of his followers.

Earlier in Chapter 28, while at the empty tomb, Jesus told Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to tell the disciples to make the trip from Jerusalem to Galilee and they would see Jesus again there. So the 11 disciples, 12 minus Judas, made the 100-mile hike from Jerusalem to Galilee to wait for Jesus. *"Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted" (vv. 16-17).*

Eleven imperfect men went to a mountain in Galilee. We don't know which mountain, but we do know that God does great things on mountains. On a mountain, we learned from Jesus how to fight temptation. We learn of Jesus' dual nature of being both man and God through his transfiguration. The most amazing sermons were delivered from mountains. The Olivet discourse and the Sermon on the Mount come to mind. Remember how the crowd responded to his Sermon on the Mount? Matthew said, *"When Jesus had finished saying these things, the*

crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law" (Matt. 7:28-29).

Why a mountain in Galilee? Because Galilee is the symbol of the homeland of Gentiles, and Jerusalem is the symbol of the homeland of the Jews. We are catching a glimpse of an important theme here. Jesus is moving the church out of Jerusalem on a mission. It's as if his followers were to hear, "Jerusalem is behind us, and it's to Galilee and beyond!"

Matthew says that Jesus appeared to them, and they worshipped him. But some doubted. In the original language, it says, "Some hesitated." Why did some hesitate? Hadn't they already seen and touched their risen Lord? So weren't they moving from unbelief to faith? Their friend had come back to life, so weren't they moving from fear to joy? But they hesitated. Maybe being Jewish, they had been taught to worship the one true God, and they hesitated because they were still trying to wrap their heads around Jesus' true nature.

I'm comforted to know that even these guys hesitated. It helps me to understand that God loves imperfect people like me. He loves imperfect people right into his kingdom. And God can use imperfect people like us to accomplish his perfect plan. Don't we all find ourselves swinging back and forth from worship to doubt, faith to fear? Of course we do, and that is why he tells us what we need to know and what we to do to take it to the streets.

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (v. 18). The first requirement is that we need to be convinced of Jesus' full authority. It's hard for many of us to reconcile in our heads that Jesus right now is in authority over our world. The world is a mess on so many levels. Shouldn't the world look different if Jesus has all authority? The claim Jesus is making is that his authority and dominion are moving the world from where it is now to where it's going to be. He is moving it at his pace, not necessarily our pace so that he will bring all wickedness under his rule of love one day.

And how is he doing it? Here is the shock. He is doing it through us, his followers. By his choice, his work goes forward insofar as we, the people he commissioned, are taking it forward. I mean, in our minds, there has got to be a better way than using us.

When my girls were younger, I liked to make chocolate chip cookies with them. It was something fun for us to do while mom was out. I'd put them in their little aprons, carefully lift them up, and set them on the counter. I'd let them scoop the flour, dump in the sugar, smell the vanilla, and lick the beaters. We'd spill things and measure wrong. Both girls would need baths afterward; clean up took so much more time, and the cookies didn't look perfect. But we'd get cookies even if it was a messy process.

The point is that I, their father, wanted my children involved no matter the mess. I wanted the relationship that we had to grow. I didn't need them to make great cookies. It would have been a lot more efficient and cleaner if I had made them by myself, but I wanted to involve them. In the same way, Jesus gave us the great commission because he wants us involved with him in his kingdom work. He has the authority and power

to efficiently make the cookies and build the kingdom himself, but he chooses to include us and have us wade through the mess with him. It's his choice because he has all authority in heaven and on earth.

The authority of Jesus is a theme throughout Matthew. Jesus demonstrated authority to heal, to cast out demons, and forgive sins. Now he adds one small but ultimate word: all. He has all authority. He takes authority to the highest level.

Do you remember the story back in Matthew 4 when Satan came and tempted Jesus? Satan tempted Jesus by offering him authority over all the kingdoms of the world if he bowed to him. Satan offered Jesus all the glory the world could offer any one person. But Jesus resisted that temptation and paid the price by suffering and dying to ultimately receive authority and glory that far outweighed what Satan could offer. For us to take it to the streets, we need to be convinced of Jesus' authority over those streets and our lives.

As a child, I remember singing and clapping, "He's got the whole world in his hands," and never came close to considering this was the highest claim in the history of the world. Jesus, who commissions us, has the whole world in his hands. Jesus is in charge of creation. Verse 18 might be the key verse of Matthew's gospel. "*Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."* Memorize this verse, and then apply it!

When we are convinced that Jesus is in charge, we can take it to the streets without fear because the Lord has already won. He will be vindicated, and even in our ways of messing things up, he will provide, and his will is done on earth as it is in heaven. Verse 18 is what we need to know to take it to the streets. And verse 19-20a is what we need to do when we get out there. What is required of us?

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. vv. 19-20a.

We need to be committed to Jesus' full assignment. There are four key actions in these verses.

Jesus says, "Go"

This is a present passive participle, which is best translated as "having gone." It's an assumption of going, not a command. In other words, for followers of Christ, it is assumed that we just go. It is assumed that we go out the front door, outside our comfort zone, that we go across cultural boundaries. It is assumed that we take it to the streets and engage our neighbors. It is assumed that we go to dinner with someone who has yet to believe. It is assumed that we go to that other side of town or the other side of the world. And it is assumed that we go with the full authority of Jesus.

Jesus says, "Make Disciples"

This is the key verb. It's imperative. It's Jesus' command. It's our mission. It requires us to move. It adds force to "the going." So what does making disciples mean? Making disciples means that we are to make others like

the teacher. Jesus is saying as you become like me, as you walk in my steps, bring others along to walk in your steps so they can be like me as well. It's about learning to live like Jesus by following an example as an apprentice learns from a journeyman. We are to make disciples of—all nations.

The phrase "all nations" was used by the apostle John who was on the mountain, and means "every tribe, language, people, and nation." We have talked about living on the Peninsula is like the world coming to us. But this commission is not just local engagement; it's worldwide engagement. So all of us are mission partners from CPC. We send some of our mission partners worldwide, but we send each other out our front door. Any church worth its salt or light has the mission to make and mature more followers of Christ; to be missions giving, missions sending, and missions praying. At CPC, we look forward to that day in heaven when disciples of all nations stand together and sing the words of the great hymn, "Oh for a thousand tongues will sing, "My Great Redeemer lives."

So what is involved in making disciples?

Jesus says, "Baptizing"

Baptizing is how followers of Christ are marked. I don't see Jesus imagining any of his followers not baptized. When a person comes to faith, they are to be marked, or I like "labeled," that they now belong to God. They belong to the one true God in three persons, the Sovereign Father, the Savior Son, and the Indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. When a person comes to faith and becomes a disciple, the follower of Jesus is marked with the symbol of public water baptism. Baptism is not just a public sign; it's also a public pledge of submission to Jesus. If you are a follower of Christ and haven't been baptized, I urge you to do so. We are planning one for Easter at CPC. Go to cpc.org/events for more information.

What else is involved in making disciples?

Jesus says, "Teaching them to obey all that I have commanded"

It's about passing knowledge, but it's also teaching them to obey. There is a focus on the practical teaching and commands of Jesus found in our New Testament. In the original language, the word for teacher is *didaskalos*, and the word for disciple is *mathetes*. Both words are here. It is impossible to be a *didaskalos* (teacher) unless one has a *mathetes* (disciple). And it was also impossible to be a *mathetes* (disciple) unless one has a *didaskalos* (teacher). Discipleship happens in an ongoing relationship between the two.

So becoming a disciple is more than getting to know what the teacher knows. It is becoming more like who the teacher is. You might be thinking, making disciples is hard work. You're right. I'm challenged by these words from one of my favorite Bible teachers, Tony Evans.

"People want salvation but don't want to put in the time to be strong disciples of Jesus Christ. What many Christians want to do is to audit the Christian life. An audit is where a person goes to

class to get information but is not required to do any of the work."

Those who came alongside and disciples me helped me do the hard work of discipleship in my life. They helped me wrestle with God's word, with what Jesus said about so many topics. Topics like God and man, life and death, true and false religion, happiness and sadness, righteousness and unrighteousness, money and idols, the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world, ethics and morality, blessings, parables, and prophecies.

Those who came alongside me helped me to apply God's word practically to the situations of the day. Those teachers had to sacrifice to disciple me. And looking back, I'd like to think it was worth it to them to invest in me. Have you ever asked someone to disciple you? Have you ever intentionally arranged to disciple someone else? That's the Great Commission. That leads to cultural engagement.

If Jesus ended his Great Commission on that note, we are left convinced of his authority over all things and committed to his full assignment, but maybe a little wobbly because we are figuring out that this full assignment means sacrificing self for something greater. It means rearranging priorities. It means putting ourselves out there and vulnerable. So that is why our gracious Lord finishes his great commission challenge with the comfort of the last half of verse 20. "*And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age*" (20b).

Be comforted by Jesus' assurance. This a great reminder. Jesus is present, and Jesus promises to be with us throughout the entire Great Commission process. In the original language, Jesus is saying, "See, pay close attention, behold and remember I AM. The word choice here "I AM" is significant.

In Exodus 3, Moses heard from God through the burning bush that God had called him to lead his people out of slavery and into the promised land. Moses was terrified to step up, and he made all kinds of excuses to avoid his commission. And then he asks God, "*Who shall I tell the King of Egypt if he asks who sent me?*" And looking back, we know now that the pre-incarnate Jesus was speaking to Moses through the burning bush. What did he tell Moses to comfort him? He said to Moses, "*Tell the king of Egypt that "I AM," God himself, has sent you.*"

Do you see it? When we take it to the streets, take comfort that "I AM" has sent you. Take comfort that each day where you are going, he himself will be with you. These verses are full of "alls." "All authority, all nations, all that I command, and "I will always be with you in all ways." It literally means "all the days." Not just that he will be with us sometime in the future, but he is with us now, every day as we live out this Great Commission.

Matthew ties the beginning and the ending of his Gospel together so beautifully. He starts Chapter 1 by introducing us to Jesus the Immanuel "God with us," He ends by telling us that "I AM" is with us to the very end of the age. Christian author Ray Pritchard stated, "You'll never know if Jesus has the power to help you until you really need his help. You'll

never know if Jesus is with you until you decide to go somewhere in His name."

I want to land on a challenge as we end our Cultural Engagement sermon series. Consider these questions: Who am I intentionally discipling? Who is intentionally discipling me? Who am I thoughtfully and graciously engaging with to help them see Jesus' love? How can I partner with my church family in Cultural Engagement?

Every one of us is called to engage in Cultural Engagement in some way. Our missions and outreach team want you to discover your way. And they want you to know that you will be blessed when you engage. Our team has given us six specific ways we can engage with the support of our church family.

Six Ways to Engage

Learn

Pray

Send

Welcome

Mobilize

Go

I challenge you to take your next step to engage. Right from your phone or iPad, text the word ENGAGE to 650-460-1144. You will receive a link to a web page, which explains how we can help you engage in any of these six ways as an individual, family, or small group—engaging in your own way, using your gifts and talents.

You might be thinking, "Okay, this all seems right, but Dan, this has to wait until this whole COVID thing ends before I take it to the streets." I want to tell you a story.

Some of our For Our Neighbor partners are local senior centers. Since COVID, we can't meet and encourage these seniors in person. And you know how much our elderly are suffering from this pandemic. One CPCer decided she would write cards to a senior, Anita, who was shut-in. Our CPCer took it to the streets by sending encouragement cards with words of hope to Anita. She did this for several weeks.

We recently received a letter from the director at that center.

Dear Friends, (our CPCer's name was here—personal relationship) I regret to inform you that our dear Anita passed away peacefully the second week of January. I would like to thank you from the bottom of my heart...your letters to Anita made her happy and special. A few days before getting sick, she got one of your letters, and our staff read it to her. She was so happy, carrying the card all day, and so calm. She would let other staff read it to her again and again. It made her so happy that someone was thinking of her. Anita's life was not

that easy, but you made her feel special on her last days. The facility is not out of the storm yet, but we are all doing our best. Please continue praying for us.

We are taking it to the streets even during COVID. Let us help you take that next step.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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