

## Summons

13th Sunday after Pentecost – August 29, 2004

### Sermon Background Study

Scripture Passages (NRSV)

Matthew 5:14-16

<sup>14</sup>“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. <sup>15</sup>No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup>In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

Matthew 28:16-20

<sup>16</sup>Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup>When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup>And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>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, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

*Today, we wrap up this four week series. We've heard Jesus' invitation to “repent and believe in the Good News” and his shocking open-armed welcome to God's banquet. We've been confronted with Jesus' challenge to actually live as God's New Covenant people. Now, we strive to embrace Jesus' summons of us all to help make disciples.*

Summons??<sup>1</sup>

Summons is a bit of a harsh word. It seems rather demanding. The Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary says “*summon* implies the exercise of authority.” I guess that is the rub. But it is also the point. Jesus does summon us, his disciples, with all the authority of a Lord and Master. It is a summons, not a request. Jesus is not asking nicely; he is not asking at all. Further, this is not a summons of a few or only of the ordained or only of those who work for a church . . . it is a summons of all those who claim to be followers of Jesus. Plainly put, we cannot claim to be disciples of the Christ and ignore the summons.

To what are we summoned? The heart of this summons can be found in what we call the Great Commission from Matthew 28. Jesus summons us to be his helpers. We, his disciples, are to go out into the world and make more disciples, baptizing and teaching. Sometimes “mission statements” can get pretty long and abstract. Ours is

#### Learning for Discipleship

At St. Andrew, we have emphasized learning for discipleship through programs such as the Bible Academy. In the Bible Academy, we offer a variety of classes ranging from small discussion-group classes to larger, more lecture-oriented classes. This fall, we will offer the largest array of classes yet.

We know that biblical illiteracy is a problem in the United Methodist Church and we are striving to help all of us to become more knowledgeable and confident in our understanding and use of the Bible. This is crucial because “United Methodists share with other Christians the conviction that Scripture is the primary source and criterion for Christian doctrine.”<sup>1</sup>

Though a well-educated Oxford man, John Wesley considered himself to be a “man of one book,” the Bible. We are called to be a people of that book. In its pages, we learn of God's hopes for us and expectations of us. In its pages, we confront the living Lord and learn of his love for us. In its pages, we learn how to live the sort of life that God intended for us. Indeed, William Willimon reminds us that “a congregation is Christian to the degree that it is confronted by and attempts to form its life in response to the Word of God.”<sup>2</sup>

1. from the *UMC Book of Discipline*, 2000  
2. from Willimon's book, *Shaped by the Bible*, Abingdon Press, 1990.

<sup>1</sup>This four-part series (Invitation, Welcome, Challenge, and Summons) is based upon the writings of Bishop N.T. Wright. The fullest lay treatment of this is in his book, *The Challenge of Jesus*, Intervarsity Press, 1999. Copies are available in our bookstore, *Inspiration*. For those who want to go deeper, Wright's book, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, (Fortress Press, 1996) is the full-blown treatment. It is easier to read than you'd think!

neither. We are to make disciples. Indeed, the stated mission of the UMC is exactly that: “to make disciples for Jesus Christ.” In the NT, “disciple” translates the Greek word, *mathete*, which connotes a master and pupil relationship. A disciple, a *mathete*, is an apprentice or student, more than merely a follower or fan. The *mathete* seeks to learn from and emulate the Master. In the Great Commission, the Master summons his disciples to help in the Master’s work.

### *Baptizing??*

It isn’t hard to understand why we might think that Jesus is speaking to someone other than to us. We are to make disciples by *baptizing* and *teaching* (v. 19 & 20). I’ve certainly never baptized anyone and, in all likelihood, neither have you! But it would be a profound mistake here to think that Jesus is speaking only to Robert or Charles or Kathryn or Doug or other ordained clergy.

#### The Light of the World

This has come to be one of my favorite passages. I can hear Jesus asking his disciples, “How can you be the light of the world if you are hiding?!” Or, “How can you be the light of the world if you refuse to help?!”

We know we are to be the light to the world but we are often unsure as to how to go about it! Sometimes we think it means we have to pull people out of their homes or stand on street corners passing out tracts. Of course, we invite our neighbors and friends to church with us. Of course, we share the Good News with strangers. But the biblical understanding of invitation, of being the light to the world, extends to every part of our lives. We invite when we worship, when we learn, when we love, when we care, when we serve, when we work, when we play – every part of our life is to be an invitation and a witness to others.

Let me give you one example. We often don’t think of our own worship as an act of invitation. But when a person who is not a churchgoer visits our worship service, they are looking for three things. They want to feel the presence of God. They want to see the Christian church living out its faith – kindness, love, patience, service to others, and so on. Finally, they want to see the relevance of the faith for their lives. Every Sunday, each of us, as a member of the St. Andrew community, is an important witness to the reality of Christ’s love and invitation to all persons. Just as sports heroes are unavoidably role models for our youth, we are always, in all times, and in all places, witnesses to the living reality and glory of Christ’s sacrificial love.

Baptism signifies our entrance into the body of Christ. Robert may be the one who lays on hands, but all of us are summoned by Jesus to do all we can to build up the community of God’s people. It is we who invite. It is we who welcome. It is we who promote harmony and unity in the body. We are not spectators at the baptisms on Sunday mornings, we are participants. This is the whole point of the baptismal response: “Now it is our joy to welcome . . .” When Jesus tells his disciples to baptize “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” it is a summons meant for us all.

#### *Teaching*

Jesus’ summons to teach may seem more straightforward than his summons to baptize, but even here we can get off track. We can fail to grasp that we teach others in everything we say and do. The teaching Jesus speaks of is far more than the teaching that goes on in a classroom, as important as that is. If others are going to learn the faith-obedience of a disciple, it is going to be through us, through Jesus’ helpers . . . through you and me, just as we learn from each other.

Imagine a person who enters our faith community with no prior understanding of Jesus or of our faith, or worse, someone who thinks they understand, but do not. If they are to begin learning what it truly means to be a disciple, they are going to learn it through us . . . and we will learn through them! Yes, thankfully, God’s Holy Spirit leads and guides us all in this. But still, God wants to work with us, not in spite of us nor without us. We are so used to needing Jesus that we can fail to see Jesus’ own “Help Wanted” sign.

#### *Looking back*

For the last four weeks, we’ve looked at Jesus’ ministry through four lenses: *invitation*, *welcome*, *challenge*, and *summons*. I hope that you will take the time to commit these to memory. Then, as you read, hear, and talk about Jesus, try to see how this framework might help you to understand better why Jesus said what he said and did what he did . . . and what it all means for us.

## Daily Bible Readings

*(more on Jesus' summons)*

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p>Day 1 Matthew 10 Jesus sends out his twelve disciples (apprentices) as apostles (messengers).</p>	<p>Day 2 Mark 8:34-9:1 The summons has a cost.</p>
<p>Day 3 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 Some surprising words from Paul about baptism. What could he mean? (Remember, Paul wrote this letter 20 years or so before Matthew wrote his gospel.)</p>	<p>Day 4 1 Corinthians 3 There is simply no place for divisions in the body of Christ.</p>
<p>Day 5 1 Timothy 6:2b-10 The dangers of false teaching and the fruitless path</p>	<p>Weekly Prayer Concerns</p>

## Sermon Notes

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### **Fall Bible Academy brochures are available today**

Here are some anonymous comments from the Spring 2003 Bible Academy evaluations:

"I took this class hoping I would leave with a better understanding of the NT after taking the Introducing the Bible class and the OT class. I have never felt so close to God as I do now and every day. . . . This was a wonderful class! Every week I left filled with joy and contentment."

"[I have a] new resolve to share Christ and Christ crucified with others, to reach out in love. I desire to do God's work daily."

"I feel blessed to be a member of St. Andrew and have all the wonderful people that have so much knowledge of the Bible. I believe I am a better Christian from taking your Bible classes."

"I want to learn, learn, learn and grow, grow, grow! . . . I have increased my discipleship."

**You Can Register On-line at [www.standrewccl.org](http://www.standrewccl.org)!!**

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection

Jesus with a "Help Wanted" sign. That is quite a mental image. We are used to speaking of our need for Jesus, but we don't very often speak of Jesus' need for us. But if the work of God's kingdom is going to move forward, it is going to be through us, as we are strengthened and led by God's Spirit. But Jesus is not simply *asking* for help, he is *summoning* us to go out into the world and make disciples of Jesus Christ. You might begin by discussing what you think it means to "make disciples for Jesus Christ."

John Wesley was never afraid of making others angry with him – for what he said, whom he said it to, or what he did. Wesley took the Gospel to the poorest, the neediest, and the outcasts of polite society. Late in his life, Wesley worried that he had become respectable! In contrast, many of us can hardly make ourselves say the "J" word in public, say grace in a restaurant, or even invite a friend to church with us. Why are we so timid? Are we afraid of offending or seeming "intolerant?" Are we embarrassed? Are we afraid of being made outcasts? Are we afraid that we are too ignorant about our faith to answer the most basic questions that might be posed to us? What are some concrete steps our congregation could take to help us all be bolder in being the light to the world? How can we help each other? What have you done today to witness to Jesus Christ? In the last week? In the last month? In the last year? What will you do? These questions make us pretty uncomfortable, don't they. Why?

What are some concrete steps we could take to become ever truer disciples of Jesus Christ? What is the place of prayer in this? How about Bible study? Worship? How might God use all these and more as the means by which we grow closer to God and more capable helpers of Jesus?