

*Matthew 28:19-20 (NRSV)*

<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.”

*Acts 1:6-8 (NRSV)*

<sup>6</sup>So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” <sup>7</sup>He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup>But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

*Matthew 25:34-40 (NRSV)*

<sup>34</sup>Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; <sup>35</sup>for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup>I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ <sup>37</sup>Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? <sup>38</sup>And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? <sup>39</sup>And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ <sup>40</sup>And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’

*Jesus has given us a mission. What is it? Are we prepared for the challenge? Will we step forward, saying to Jesus, “Send Me!”*

We see in today’s Scripture passages two concepts of what we mean by mission. Regrettably, we often treat these two concepts as an “or.” Say the word “mission” to some Christians and they immediately think of making disciples, the so-called Great Commission of Matthew 28:19. Others, however, will take “mission” to mean feeding the hungry, providing for the poor, and so on.

We have to guard against our tendency to chop up our concept of mission. If we concern ourselves only with disciple-making and neglect those who lack even the basics of life, then how are we truly emulating Christ? But if we provide food and clothing, yet do not tell the person of God’s love revealed in Jesus Christ, we are ignoring what matters most. We are to proclaim and to feed. We are to teach and to clothe. Both, together, constitute living the mission. As we go from Judea to Samaria and to the ends of the earth, we go with a Bible in one hand and a hammer in the other.

*Living the Great Commission*

We are so used to hearing Jesus’ Great Commission, that we can be blinded to what is actually on the page. Jesus doesn’t say, “Go and save souls,” or “Go and make believers.” Jesus knows that soul-saving and believer-making is God’s work, not ours. But Jesus does tell his disciples to make more disciples, across the globe.

The word “disciple” has a specific meaning. It doesn’t mean those who love Jesus. You can love Jesus and not be a disciple. Rather, a disciple of Jesus or of anyone else is someone who is learning to be like the master. More so than “student” or “learner,” the word “apprentice” gets us closest to the true meaning of “disciple.” Apprentices, in any vocation, are those who are consciously striving, learning, and practicing to be like the master to whom they are apprenticed. This apprenticeship encompasses every part of the apprentice’s being: her head, her heart, and her hands.

Certainly, disciples of Jesus love their Master and have faith in their Master, but they also share the desire to be Christlike. Making the decision to believe in Jesus, as we often put it, is not the same as making a decision to emulate Jesus. Every disciple of Jesus has not only made the first decision but the second as well.

Pews in churches across America, large and small, of all denominations or no denomination at all, are filled with people who have experienced the first decision, but have not made the second. They are hardly even aware that there is a second decision to be made. To reiterate, accepting Jesus as one's savior is not the same as making a conscious decision to begin the path of discipleship, what Dallas Willard has aptly called, the "curriculum of Christlikeness." Willard writes:

"A mind cluttered by excuses may make a mystery of discipleship, or it may see it as something to be dreaded. But there is no mystery about desiring and intending to be like someone—that is a very common thing. And if we really do intend to be like Christ, that will be obvious to every thoughtful person around us, as well as to ourselves. Of course, attitudes that define the disciple cannot be realized today by leaving family and business to accompany Jesus on his travels about the countryside. But discipleship can be made concrete by actively learning how to love our enemies, bless those who curse us, walk the second mile with an oppressor—in general, living out the gracious inward transformations of faith, hope, and love. Such acts—carried out by the disciplined person with manifest grace, peace, and joy—make discipleship no less tangible and shocking today than were those desertions of long ago. Anyone who will enter into the Way can verify this, and he or she will at the same time prove that discipleship is far from dreadful."<sup>1</sup>

### *Disciples who serve*

Our second passage from Matthew is one of the most challenging of all Jesus' parables. Simply put, all peoples are divided into two groups – those who provide for people in need, and those who don't. It is door #1 or door #2. A or B. One door leads to God's kingdom. The other is the entrance to oblivion. There is nothing comforting and consoling in this parable. It is a challenge laid down before all those who call themselves disciples of Jesus.

From the time of Moses and Pharaoh, God has expected his people to care for the neediest among them. The Israelites were not to pick their fields clean so that the "the poor and the alien" could gather the remnants of the harvest (Leviticus 19:9). The Israelites were to love their neighbor (Lev. 19:18). God told them that he is the one "who executes justice for the widow and orphan and who loves the strangers. You shall also love the stranger . . ." (Deuteronomy 10:18-19).

Jesus could not have drawn a more stark contrast for us. Do we provide for "the least of these" or do we not? Close to home and far away? This love for neighbor, this sacrificial love grounded in action, is every bit as much a part of becoming Christlike as Bible study, prayer, or any of the other spiritual disciplines.

### *An empowered heart*

Blessedly, we are not alone in this, and we have more than one another. We have been given the power of the Holy Spirit, the power of God. Look again at today's reading from Acts. Jesus not only gives his disciples a mandate, he gives them the power to accomplish it. As Jesus had promised them on the eve of his crucifixion, the Spirit, the Comforter and Advocate, would come to Jesus' disciples weeks later at Pentecost. The Spirit would be God's empowering presence in their lives and work. And the world would be forever changed.

God's Holy Spirit dwells in all those who have faith in Jesus Christ. It is the Spirit who reshapes our hearts and minds. It is the Spirit who convicts us when we turn inward to the exclusion of others. It is the Spirit who works with us to foster an ever-growing desire in our hearts to proclaim Christ and to serve others.

The UMC Book of Discipline states that "The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ by proclaiming the good news of God's grace and thus seeking the fulfillment of God's reign and realm in the world. . . . This mission is our grace-filled response to the Reign of God in the world announced by Jesus." The Reign of God is one of justice and mercy. And so we go out, a Bible in one hand and a hammer in the other.

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<sup>1</sup>This selection is taken from Renovare's *Living the Mission* spiritual formation guide. Many of us (hundreds!) used the *Renovare Spiritual Formation Bible* when we read through the Bible as a congregation in 2006. I still see lots of copies being carried around the church and copies are available in the St. Andrew bookstore. Renovare is now publishing a series of spiritual formation guides, suitable for small groups and individual use. If you are part of a small group looking for something new to use to guide your discussion, I urge you to check out these guides. Renovare's website is [www.renovare.org](http://www.renovare.org). Samples are available there.

## Today's Scripture Passages – Reflections by Rev. Michael Reeves

"In the first passage Matthew 28:19-20, we have the passage that is called 'the great Commission.' Here the words of Jesus clearly says that our primary mission is to make disciples. These are the intentional first words of the mission statement of St Andrew.

Then in the second passage from Acts 1:8 we have more words of Jesus that give us an additional theological perspective. It is our belief in the Methodist church that as Christians we receive the Holy Spirit at the point of our conversion. Here we are told that when the Holy Spirit comes into our lives, we shall receive an empowering to be a witness to Christ in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth. This layered definition will be presented from a St Andrew perspective in this lesson. We could consider our Jerusalem as Plano, Carrollton, and Dallas; our Judea might well be the entire state of Texas; and Samaria could be our entire country; and the outermost parts could encompass our mission efforts in the whole world.

The final passage from Matthew is again from the words of Christ when he identifies a broad range of ways to be a witness including not only spiritual concerns that we see in the Great Commission but also social concerns such as hunger, poverty, healthcare, and social justice. This interpretation is one that is strongly and uniquely a part of our Methodist heritage.

John Wesley said 'Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you ever can.'

When St Andrew supports local social service agencies, builds homes in Juarez, leads vacation bible schools in Nuevo Laredo, creates a response for the care of displaced families from Katrina, or commissions workers to go on a Volunteer in Mission program to work at a women's clinic in Kenya, we are doing missions. Supporting St Andrew financially allows the framework necessary to respond to mission opportunities as they are identified."

## READING WITH HEART & MIND, OCT 21 - 27

**Sunday, 1 Samuel 18:1-16** We learn of the deep friendship between Jonathan, Saul's son, and David. You'll see that Jonathan understands friendship better than David. Saul's relationship with David continues to worsen. How would you explain to someone Saul's desire to kill David? What do you make of the "evil spirit" in v. 10.

**Monday, 1 Samuel 18:17-30** Saul hatches a murderous plot. What is his scheme? Why does it fail? This is an episode to keep in mind. David will send Bathsheba's husband to death in battle.

**Tuesday, 1 Samuel 19** What tack does Jonathan take in trying to get his father to relent in his murderous hatred of David? Does Jonathan succeed? When David goes to Samuel, it will prove to be the only occasion when David, Samuel, and Saul are together. What is God's role in protecting David? How does God accomplish this? What is the underlying message of this story?

**Wednesday, 1 Samuel 20** David now returns to Jonathan for advice and help. Jonathan will help his friend but won't plot against Saul. What warning system does Jonathan set up? Note that the Saul's obsession with David now pollutes the relationship between father and son. Jonathan's faithfulness to David endures.

**Thursday, 1 Samuel 21** David is on the run. He lies to a priest in order to get help, endangering the priest. Is David's lie justified? Are lies ever justified? Is there a moral to these stories? What about his pretending to be mad?

**Friday, 1 Samuel 22** Now we learn that David's seeking refuge with the priests is met by Saul with murder. The priests and their families are killed. Does David bear any guilt here? How could we discern God's purposes at work here?

**Saturday, 1 Samuel 23** Now Saul resorts to besieging a city to get to David! What is Saul so afraid of? How would you explain his obsession? Jonathan is actually the first person to tell David that he will be king (v. 17). How do you think this would affect David?

## Sermon Notes

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### ***From Scripture to Canon***

#### **A one day workshop with Prof. Leroy Howe, Sat., Oct 27.**

2 Timothy 3:16 speaks of "all scripture" as inspired by God. But what "scripture" was he talking about? This workshop explores the process by which individual writings that informed both Judaism and Christianity in the first and second centuries evolved into a single collection by the fourth, and how that collection came to be viewed as alone containing "truths necessary for salvation."

This Saturday workshop with Prof. Leroy Howe of Perkins Seminary will be held on Saturday, October 27, from 9-2. Lunch will be provided. To register, please go to [www.thebibleacademy.com](http://www.thebibleacademy.com). Childcare is available and reservations can be made when you register for the workshop.

#### **Hold the date!! Kim Edwards on Thur., Oct. 25, at 7pm**

Kim Edwards, author of the huge international bestseller, *The Memory Keeper's Daughter*, will be at St. Andrew as part of our new St. Andrew Author Series. Her most recent book has been on the NY Times bestseller list for 65 weeks!

#### **Hold another one!! Diane Ackerman on Wed., Nov 7, at 7pm**

Ms. Ackerman will be the second best-selling author coming to St. Andrew. Her latest book is *The Zookeeper's Wife*, a true story about husband and wife zookeepers of the Warsaw Zoo who save 300 Jews from the Holocaust – hiding them in the zoo!

### **Questions for Discussion and Reflection**

Rev. Michael Reeves has provided us with some very thought-provoking questions about faith and money. Any of these could generate a lively and fruitful discussion. Use them in your classes, small groups, or even over dinner!

1. What aspects of my life do I find to be most important?
2. If I came into a wholly unexpected \$10,000 tomorrow, what would determine the way I used the money?
3. How does my personal devotional life relate to my budgeting of money?
4. What does it mean to say that yesterday's luxuries are today's necessities?
5. In what ways is the power of money god-like?
6. Has God been training me in a new understanding of how much is enough?
7. What major purchase have I decided against in order to free up money for compassionate giving?
8. How would I define greed?