

The Great Commission
Matthew 28:16-20

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Thanks to the Internet, Church bulletin bloopers are broadcast around the world. While most do not deserve repeating, a few are down right funny. Among my favorites are these:

–The scouts are saving cans, bottles, and other items to be recycled. The proceeds will be used to cripple children.

–For those who have children and don't know it, we have a nursery downstairs.

–The pastor unveiled a new stewardship slogan last Sunday. It goes like this: I upped my pledge, up yours.

–On Sunday a special collection will be taken to defray the expenses of the new carpet, all those wishing to do something on the new carpet come forward and get a piece of paper.

– Let us remember in prayer the many who are sick of our church and community.

The greatest blunders of Churches, however, are not reflected in their bulletins. They show up in the heart and soul of a congregation. They happen when means are substituted for ends and the mission of a church is reduced to the management of an organization. Churches falter when they turn inward instead of outward and start trying to satisfy their members instead of saving the world.

Lest we forget our reason for being, our purpose for existence, our essential mission as the Body of Christ, I turn today to the GREAT COMMISSION. Listen to these instructions of Jesus:

GO THEREFORE, AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPRIT, TEACHING THEM TO OBSERVE ALL THAT I HAVE COMMANDED YOU.

Herein lies the mission of the Church. Dare we embrace it? Come let us consider its imperatives.

I. GO.

- A. We've a story to tell to the nations, that shall turn their hearts to the right.
A story of truth and mercy, a story of peace and light!

1. How will we explain to the king of kings and Lord of lords that we were too busy to share it, too timid to talk it, too preoccupied with trivial things to concern ourselves with eternal things?

2. Suppose you found a cure for cancer, or an answer to alzheimers. Suppose you got so enamored with your laboratory that we never got around to publishing your discovery. Would the world ever forgive you?

3. Religion is no mickey mouse, take it or leave it, social habit that people can easily do without. Religion is the framework from which all our efforts flow, a foundation for life that stands the storms of time.

4. James Michener's play THE SOURCE, pagan life of previous centuries is explored. A young woman stands in the doorway of her house weeping, as her husband carries their first born child to the temple to be offered as a human sacrifice. The same wife weeps at the doorway again as her husband goes to the temple to consort with the temple prostitutes in the name of fertility worship. In a lament the woman says IF HE HAD A DIFFERENT GOD, HE WOULD BE A DIFFERENT MAN.

B. Because our forefathers and mothers had a different God, they were passionate about sharing their faith with others.

1. So John Wesley declares the World to be his parish and proceeds for 50 years to travel over 250,000 miles preaching more than 40,000 sermons in every conceivable setting imaginable out of love for God who made himself known through Jesus Christ.

2. Circuit Riders travel Ohio, Tennessee, Kentucky, 200 years ago, through weather fit only for Crows and Methodist Preachers leaving one rugged frontiersman lamenting upon a visit by a preacher, "I left Virginia to get away from you Methodist Preachers, and here you are on the frontier before I can get my wagon unpacked.

C. Called not to sit on the premises but to stand on the promises with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

1. Not here to question How big can we be? Here to affirm "Let whosoever will come."

2. I log on to the internet. With a simple click on the word "go" I am transported into worlds I never known before. We can lament such technology or use such technology to the glory of God. Mainline Christianity largely ignored Television and Radio. We cannot afford to do the same with the informational highway. Let the church launch into this brave new world.

II. MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS.

A. I was on a plane traveling from Lex. Ky to Kansas City a few years ago when this guy, much bigger than I asked in burly voice. AND WHAT DO YOU DO FOR A LIVING? —never known exactly how to respond to questions like that. Tempted to play with people. What do you do for a living?

I bury people.

I stand up and speak for 20 minutes and it takes 8 people to carry all the money to me.

I am a Doctor, which I seldom use because people keep telling me about some ache or pain they have on the plane.

This guy was big. I thought it best to be honest. So I said meekly I PASTOR A UNITED METHODIST CHURCH. You mean you're a preacher! After he stared at me for what seemed like an eternity, he said, I've never been inside a Church in my life. If you don't mind me asking WHAT DO PREACHERS REALLY DO?

B. Had Jesus answered that man he would have said, I AM IN THE DISCIPLE MAKING BUSINESS.

1. The Church exists to produce Disciples of Jesus Christ.
2. A disciple is a follower. When Jesus called people he did not ask them to shape up, straighten up, or clean up. He just said "get up and follow me."
3. If the Church wants to be the Church in the 21st century we must make clear the tracks one can pursue as a follower of Jesus Christ.

4. Call me old fashioned-still believe—Jesus Saves

Naive—still believe—God forgives

Nickname me a Fundamentalist—still believe—Need to live a Holy Life
Condemn me as liberal—I believe—there's room at church all God's children.
If your heart is with my heart in love and loyalty to Jesus Christ, take my hand, as we try to walk today as Jesus would have us walk, living the way he lived, loving the way he loved, serving the way he took and towel and washed the disciples feet.

5. To make something is to conceive, create, fashion, form, forge, protect, reproduce. We are in the disciple making business.

III. BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, SON, HOLY SPIRIT.

A. To baptize is to mark people as Christian Disciples.

1. Say to parents, Do you know what you are doing here? You are bending this child in a certain direction of faith. You are about to determine your daughters early beliefs, and set your son's values.

2. Will Willimon tells about a student who went home from college for the summer. The student stopped by to see his pastor. Announced proudly that he was now a Sophomore. Since he already knew most things he would probably not be around Church much over the summer. The wise pastor said to the enlightened student. “We’ll see.” What do you mean “we’ll see?” inquired the student. Well said the pastor, you were baptized at this altar. God has already claimed you as his own. People around this Church know you. They pray for you by name. It will be interesting to see if you can pull it off—not coming around people who love you and claim you as their own. The pastor didn’t see the student for a few weeks. Then one Sunday he showed up in the balcony. Before the summer was over, he was helping with the youth. God does not easily let go of his own.

B. Everybody needs to belong.

1. Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name.
Sometimes you like to be where they’re always glad you came.

2. As the Church gets bigger, it must get smaller. Sunday School is an anchor but it can no longer be the only source of our connection. Small Groups of every kind must rise to fill the gap.

3. Wesley wrote in his Journal “Backsliding continued to be my chief problem among the societies, far outweighing the periodic theological disputes. — As a remedy for such fall out, Wesley organized the class meeting—a gathering of twelve or fewer people to tend to each others souls.

4. In this age of rugged individualism and rampant Isolationism, we must find new ways to uphold one another with our prayers, presence, gifts and service. Let us baptisms bind us together in Christian love and loving service.

IV. TEACHING THEM TO OBSERVE ALL THAT I HAVE COMMANDED YOU.

A. A pilot, an engineer, a pastor and a boy scout were traveling together on a single engine airplane, when the motor stopped. The pilot declared an emergency and further explained there were only three parachutes aboard. I have a wife and two children at home, said the pilot. They need me a lot. With that he took a parachute and jumped. Engineer spoke up and said. Some people think I am the smartest man on earth. The world would suffer a great loss if I were to die. With that the engineer grabbed for a parachute and jumped. The pastor looked at the boy scout and said. Son you are young, I am old. You have your life ahead of you. I am nearly finishing mine. You take the remaining parachute. That’s when the boy scout spoke up and said “Relax Rev. The smartest man in all the world just mistook

a back pack for a parachute. There are still two left for us.

B. In all our grabbing for survival I wonder if are missing the very life support systems that will see us through.

1. Life is more than Something to do. A reason for being.

2. People who go to church regularly are twice as likely to have good health as their non-religious counterparts.

3. Church goers are the most generous humanitarians in the world.

4. When the Nazi Revolution came, Albert Einstein made this observation: I thought the universities, who always boasted of their devotion to truth would speak up. They did not. I thought the newspapers with flaming editorials proclaiming their love for freedom would lead the resistance—they were silent.

ONLY THE CHURCH STOOD SQUARELY ACROSS THE PATH OF HITLER'S CAMPAIGN. I NEVER HAD ANY SPECIAL INTEREST IN THE CHURCH BEFORE. NOW I AM FORCED TO CONFESS THAT WHICH I ONCE DESPISED I NOW PRAISE.

5. There is a better way to live and move and have our being. It is grounded in the Judeo Christian Commandment of love.

Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, son and Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

With that commission I share with you a vision that I pray will guide us for years to come.

LET US TRANSFORM THE WORLD, ONE PERSON AT A TIME.