

“The Great Commission – The Church 3”

February 15, 2026

First Christian Church

Scripture Text: Matthew 28: 16-20

Welcome to week 3 of our sermon series on the Church. Our first week was the 100 year anniversary celebration of worshipping in this sanctuary and we talked about worship. We talked about what we receive when we worship. We receive spiritual nourishment and a sense of belonging to something larger than ourselves. We recognized that when we worship, a life of gratitude naturally follows because praising God gets us out of the center of our lives and into a place we can see the amazing gifts that surround us daily. We claimed the sometimes hard truth that worship draws us nearer to God, which means when things are the toughest is when we need to worship the most, for that is when we need to draw near to God the most. But we also recognize worship is not all about what we receive. It is also about what we give. We give God praise. We give God His due for all God has created, for all God gives us, for all the things God has pulled us through, and for God's heart which loves us enough to send Jesus to make a way home for us. We worship in order to bless God and in return we are blessed.

We put a large percentage of our resources into worship, which makes sense because it is in worship that we devote ourselves to the teachings of the Apostles, to breaking the bread in communion, and to prayer which are two and a half of the four things the church learned to do on its first day in existence. The other 1 and a half things we do as soon as worship is over as we gather together for food and fellowship. That is what we learned from the Church's first day in existence when the Holy Spirit fell upon the disciples and they began to share about Jesus. Three thousand were baptized that day and “devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” That was last week.

Today I want to share with you a little bit of Jesus' vision of the Church. Our Scripture lesson is the last words in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus has been crucified for the forgiveness of our sins, been raised from the dead, and has appeared to the disciples in His resurrected form on multiple occasions. It is in His last appearance before being taken up to heaven that Jesus shared these words, “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 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”

There are two huge assignments in that one sentence. The first is what we call evangelism. Evangelism is “making disciples of all nations, baptizing them.” Evangelism is sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with people in a way that makes them want to become followers. Evangelism is bringing people to a saving relationship with Jesus. Evangelism is winning souls for Jesus. And that is made possible because of God's grace that proclaims God loves them right

where they are. Neither we nor they need to become perfect in order to be accepted by God. Like an infant who does nothing but processes food, sleep and demand their parents' attention, but is still deeply loved by its parents; God loves us first, before we have done anything to earn it. In evangelism, we share an invitation to a place of guaranteed acceptance. God loves you right where you are. But one of the things the church has learned over the past two thousand years, is that sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ is not simply about transferring information. If information was all someone needed to positively respond to Jesus, the internet would be the greatest evangelism tool in history. We could make one video that shared information about Jesus, put it through google translator, it would go viral, and the whole world would be Christian. But in America and Western Europe at least, the more internet access, the fewer Christians. Information by itself is not what is needed, which is why God sent us Jesus. In Jesus, the word became flesh. The wisdom and truth of God became real and walked among us, and people took notice and followed. The Church continues that. The Church embodies Jesus' love and teachings and makes them real. And that is when it becomes real enough for others to see it and want to be a part of it. And when I say "Church", remember, "The church is not a building, the church is not a steeple, the church is not a resting place, the church is the people." The Good News of Jesus must be seen in you and me. So evangelism is not about having all the right words and all the right arguments and counterpoints to convince someone to leave the life they are living and start following Jesus. Rather, it is about saying, "God and church are important to me. They ground me in love and help me be who I want to be. You are important to me and I want that for you too. Will you come and share this time in church with me?" It is not about having all the answers and the right words at the right time. It is about saying, "I care for you, and this really helps me. Please, 'come and see'". Remember that is what Jesus said to Andrew, and Andrew said to Peter, and Phillip said to Nathanael – "come and see". Of course there must be something here for them to see. The word has to be embodied in us as a church and us as individuals. The love and encouragement, the peace and the joy, they must be tangibly present. Evangelism is letting Jesus live in you, letting Jesus change you, and saying, "come and see" the difference. Jesus loves them right where they are. Acceptance is guaranteed. Let them see what they are missing.

For many, this is the Church's primary and most important job – to bring people to Jesus. Gideons hand out Bibles. Multiple companies produce gospel tracks that get left in bus stops, restaurants, and doctors' offices. People go on evangelistic crusades and learn how to tell their personal story in a way that points to Jesus and our need for Jesus in our lives. The verbiage of Ephesians 4 says we should be gathering in order to equip the people to go and share Jesus. I have said before that the most important decision you make in this life is the decision to take Jesus as your Lord and Savior. It is the most important because it is the only decision with ramifications beyond this life. Everything else is temporary. But as some congregations are realizing, if we just do evangelism, we end up with church big and wide, but only a quarter inch deep. And with no depth, any little poke by the adversary and it all falls apart. Or as Jesus said

in Mark 4, “Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root it withered away.”

Which is why the second huge part of Jesus’ call says, “and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.” We call that discipleship training. It is true that Jesus loves us right where we are, but Jesus also loves us too much to let us stay there. Just like those parents love their newborn, food processing, alarm clock just as it is, they also love it enough to not let it stay there. They teach it to crawl, then stand, walk and run. They teach her to understand words, use words, read words, then write words. They help him move from diapers to pull-ups to big boy underwear. God loves us right where we are, and loves us too much to let us stay there. Discipleship training focuses on helping each person be the most amazing follower of Jesus they can be. It is guidance on the journey from being a person of this world to becoming a person of Christ. It is teaching, supporting, encouraging each other beyond competition to compassion, beyond selfishness to service, beyond greed to generosity, beyond me to we. To be able to say with Jesus, in word and action, “not my will, but Yours be done.” Discipleship is what incarnates the word of God. It is what makes it real and alive and living in our midst. It is the deep embodiment of the Good News. But if the church is all discipleship and no evangelism – so intently living the way of God that it doesn’t have any contact with those outside the faith, we end up with a deep, committed church for one generation, then an empty building, and God’s mission is dead.

Evangelism and discipleship, there needs to be both. There needs to be a balance. To again allude to Mark 4, church is where people can deepen their soil so they can withstand draught, attacks and floods; to yield seeds thirty and sixty and a hundredfold that can be intentionally planted in new ways with new people. The individuals as well as the church body together is both discipleship and evangelism – going forth to make disciples and obeying everything Jesus taught us. Well what does that mean? What does it look like? For one thing, it means the church is always going to be a mess. The church will always be filled with sinners and saints. Saints who are journeying deep with Jesus and the sinners who they have invited to come and see. There will always be people who don’t get it yet, people who are still people of the world, who think how they feel is the definition of reality, people who scare us a little bit, but people who have come to the place God can touch them, transform them, and make them new. Yes, very worldly, non-Christians need to be in church, for this is where Jesus can touch them and we can disciple them into followers. They need to be part of church as much as those who have perfected righteousness – if there ever was such a person. By our very calling, the church is going to be a mess, with the sinner and the saint sitting next to each other hearing and thinking very different things from the same message. That mess is multiplied in a congregation like ours that votes on things, for the vote of the brand new Christian who is still mostly a product of the world, counts the same as the vote of the mature Christian who breaths in Jesus and breaths

out love with every breath. Sometimes the 12 year old goes to their parent for help with her homework from membership class and realizes they know more about Jesus than their parents do.

But the beauty is, God holds this mess together. When we gather to worship and devote ourselves to the disciples teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayer; God holds us together. Not because we are all the same. Not because we all agree with each other ideologically, theologically, or politically. God created the Church through the coming of the Holy Spirit. With that move, God shows us that He loves us right where we are, and loves us too much to let us stay there. And when we worship to bless God and receive God's love for us, God not only holds us together, but uses us to reach new disciples and train them to be followers of the giver of life. Yesterday was Valentine's Day, and in many different ways, Amy said to me, "You're a mess. Thanks for being my mess." I think God says the same about the Church, for it is how God chooses to be present in our world.

Mike Van Heyningen