

**READY, SET, GO!**  
**NOVEMBER 24 AND 25, 2018**  
**COMMITMENT WEEKEND**

The opening scene of today's Scripture is on a mountain in Galilee. Jesus had instructed his disciples to travel to this mountain; and when the disciples arrived Jesus appeared to them. When they realized that it was Jesus who was in their midst, they were excited and overjoyed! And they worshiped Him! However, within minutes, their faith and joy began to dissipate. Matthew writes: "They began to doubt."

In the middle of their worship, excitement, joy AND doubt, Jesus approached them and spoke to them, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me." He then commissions his faithful followers to "go and make disciples of all nations." Jesus had taught his disciples, he'd prepared them, and now he was sending them to go and to share with peoples of all nations what they had been taught.

We aren't told by the writer of the Gospel of Matthew how the disciples reacted to Jesus' instruction.

Were they excited about this possibility?

Were they apprehensive about their new mission?

How would they know what to do?

Had Jesus prepared them well enough?

Would they know the right words?

What if no one would listen?

If they had doubt when Jesus appeared to them, how much more did they doubt that they could fulfill the mission Jesus was setting before them.

Perhaps the writer of Matthew ends this very way because disciple-makers from this point on would struggle with the same questions as those first disciples.

We know it's important for each of Jesus' followers to accept the mission of making disciples for the transformation of the world, but it sounds really difficult to actually do.

And the part about going into all of the world makes people the most uncomfortable. We don't want to leave home or our friends and go talk with strangers about Jesus. Why would they listen to us?

Jesus knew he was asking a great deal from his followers and from those who would come after them.

The first disciples have a distinct advantage over the rest of us—they had spent three years with Jesus—getting ready, preparing for this very time when he would leave them and send them out on their own.

He ends his charge to them with a reassurance-- *And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.* Jesus reminded his followers they would be able to accomplish all of the tasks that he had set before them—AND they are NOT going to enter this disciple-making field on their own.

The very last words of the Gospel of Matthew remind us of the very first words of this same Gospel – a story we'll remember together in the coming weeks of December as we turn to the season of Advent.

In Matthew's birth narrative, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

This child would have a greater purpose beyond simply being a part of their family. This child would serve humanity. This child would become a conduit through which people would encounter God.

And, though they would name the child Jesus, he would be known to embody a different name, Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

When Jesus needed to encourage and inspire his closest friends to continue his work, he called upon this part of his legacy. "Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." God is with you. The Holy Spirit will move through you. I will always be with you. They would not be doing this work alone.

That's a pretty strong ending.

So what does this mean for us, all these years later?

Generations later, if we, too, are sent to make disciples how might we expect to do this? What might hold us back?

Does it help knowing that Jesus promised we wouldn't do this on our own?

Making disciples isn't really a convenient option for us, because it's what we're called to do as followers Christ – we are to live as disciples who make other disciples -- the whole process of discipleship would have a multiplying effect.

In other words, when you and I reach and teach one, that person is then prepared to reach and teach one. As each follower of Christ seeks to faithfully obey Christ's command, soon enough disciples will be made in "all the nations."

So, what are some ways that we can practically begin the disciple-making cycle in our lives *right now*?

While there is little else in this world that can help our spiritual growth more than regularly gathering together with others of the same mind – like worship – remember that the very first word in Jesus' command is "go." That little word carries much weight.

It implies that we get up, and move out of our comfort zones. Opportunities abound! We've talked about this as we've explored our new mission statement. Where are the "wells" and "third places" where we gather with others often?

We can never know what kind of conversations the Holy Spirit will inspire! If we are open to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit will inevitably stir our hearts to share about our faith.

Here's some easy, practical suggestions:

When people ask about your weekend, don't forget to include that you went to worship. Maybe even add in a quick sentence of something that really spoke to you.

When people are going through a rough time, let them know that you'll include them in your prayers.

Be honest about a tough time you might be having or have had and how you really had to rely on God to get you through it.

Do a random act of kindness and leave a note simply saying "because Jesus loves you."

Invite people to church events. Many people who don't attend regularly would go if you ask, especially around Christmas. This weekend's Living Nativity is a great conversation starter.

If you send Christmas cards, buy ones that focus on the true meaning of Christmas.

And here's where the pennies come in that you received when you came into worship today.

One you can keep for yourself – as a reminder that indeed, Jesus is with you, as he was with his first disciples, even to the very end of the age. Put it in your pocket, or purse, or somewhere you'll see it often as a reminder of Jesus' presence with you.

The other two – give away – now here's the challenge – try to give the pennies away to two different people – to two people that the Holy Spirit tells you might really need to know right at that moment that Jesus is always with them.

Maybe you know someone going through a particularly difficult time. Maybe you'll check out at one of the busy stores this Christmas season and come across a really grumpy cashier; maybe you'll be visiting in the hospital or nursing home, and come across a nurse or staff person that seems overwhelmed; maybe you'll be out at a restaurant and the waiter or waitress seems distracted; maybe you'll be talking with a friend who doesn't have a relationship with Jesus, and that penny will open up a conversation; maybe you'll mail it to someone far away who just needs a reminder of Jesus' presence. Open yourself to the Spirit's leading and you'll know exactly when and where your pennies are to go. And if you give those away and need more? Let me know!!

I want to thank Ron Rogers for supplying us with all of our pennies today. We've been talking about our new Vision of HOPE, Ron had received one of these pennies in the mail from someone. He then went on a mission to find them so that we could have them to share as part of our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Carry them in your pocket and remember, Jesus was the one "sent" to us and now we are "sent" out to go!

Lord, we know that you call each of us to go. To go out from ourselves into a world that is longing for your grace, love and hope. As you work in the hearts and lives of all people and nations, bless us Lord as we go -- as we go into our communities, our nation and the world. And, bless these pennies that we have received to share. May they be a practical way for us to share your hope with others. Amen.