

MISSION MONTH

Global

Acts 1:4-8 and Matthew 28:16-20

June 25, 2017

This week we go global in our thought process about missions. I want to read for you two passages in the Bible where Jesus is speaking to those who want to be his disciples, meaning his followers. The first one is found at the end of Matthew. Let me set the scene: Jesus has come back from the dead on what we now call Easter morning, right. He has been with his disciples for what Acts chapter 1 verse 3 tells us is a period of 40 days. So, at some point during those 40 days Jesus says the words we find in the two passages we're going to hear from today. And let me just say this, in both passages Jesus is telling the Disciples and his followers to do something so significant that when they do it, the world as it was known then would change forever. It is a fact that the message of Jesus has penetrated the world and has brought eternal life change to millions of people.

The statement Jesus makes and that Matthew writes down is this:

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.

¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him—but some of them doubted! ¹⁸ Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Matt 28:16-20 NLT

The second statement is written down by a guy named Luke. He is a friend of the disciples and a traveler with Peter and Paul on the journeys they take into the known world as they live out the directive that Jesus gives the disciples to go into all the world. Here's what Luke writes:

⁶ So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, "Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?" ⁷ He replied, "The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:6-8 NLT

I don't want you to miss this...in both passages Jesus is giving, what might be called, his final address to his closest followers. This group of what is now down to 11 from the original 12 is paying close attention because Jesus is in teaching mode and they have learned over the last three years that when Jesus is teaching, you better pay attention. Jesus is about to leave them and ascend into heaven and as the Gospel of Mark tells us, will sit at the right hand of God the Father. So, Jesus is handing over the mission to this group of 11 who in turn are supposed to do what? Take it to all the world.

Okay, so, if I can be a little bit honest with you...you would think that Jesus would have picked a better plan than to hand the most life altering message ever to a group of rag tag fisherman and commoners. But, the King of the World knows what he's doing and he gives them these two directives or commands to cast vision and give them a focus that will direct their actions every day, for the rest of their lives. And listen, that directive has not changed when it comes to those of us who want to follow Jesus today. Now, I know we tend not to like it when someone tells us what to do, do we. We tend to say things like "you're not the boss of me" or "who are you to tell me..." or we out right reject someone else telling us what to do because it doesn't line up with our plan. But, I want you to consider today what Jesus is saying to anyone who wants to follow him and to be one of his disciples. Jesus is telling each of us that being a missionary is a non-negotiable and that taking the life shifting message of salvation to the entire world is who we are to be. It's less of a directive for the follower and more of a passion and a desire to want the world to know what you have found...that God loves us, that Jesus saves, and that eternity in heaven is waiting for anyone in the whole world who believes.

In effect, Jesus is saying we are to go long. Are you familiar with that phrase? If you've ever played the game of football in your back yard, on a city street, on an official field you've heard the phrase "go long." It's what is said when the guy throwing the ball wants you to run as far down field as you can and he/she will throw you the ball in the hopes that your team will, at worst, get down really far down field and at best, maybe even get a touchdown. For most of us, when we hear the words "go long" we get excited because it means something big, something exciting is coming. No one says to the quarterback you're crazy when the call is "go long." It means that the QB has confidence that he can air it out and they you'll catch it. It's an adrenaline filled play. Jesus is saying to all of us, with confidence, to go global, to go long. To take the message as far as you can and maybe even score a win for the team. And who can say no to the King of the World when the call is "go long?" It should be exciting for us to hear Jesus calling us to go long.

Going global stretches us.

Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations... Matthew 28:19 NLT

And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:8 NLT

Those first disciples did just what Jesus asked, they went global. They listened to the directive of Jesus to not just reach Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria but to go all over what was the known world of their day. The extra biblical accounts of the travels of the 11 with the addition of the journeys of the Paul tell us that most of the world was affected by the message of Jesus. Look at the far-reaching effect of just these 12 men:

- Both Paul and Peter start churches all along the Mediterranean basin in what is now Syria, Greece, Turkey, Italy, Macedonia, Albania, Bulgaria, and Spain
- Andrew travels to what is now Russia via Greece and Turkey and hitting several countries on the way
- Thomas travels to what is now modern-day Syria and all the way to India
- Philip travels throughout Northern Africa
- Matthew is a missionary to Persia and Ethiopia
- Simon makes his way to both Britain and Persia
- Bartholomew makes his way to India, Armenia and Southern Arabia
- James went to Syria
- John travels all throughout Asia Minor
- Alphaeus travels to Spain
- Jude has his ministry in Assyria and Mesopotamia

It just might be our modern spiritual near sightedness to believe that Jesus didn't call us to go into all the world or that the first followers did not lead the way in how we are supposed to live as disciples who are willing to GO. Those apostle's message about Jesus moved from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth because the system that Jesus chose, the effective system that he – Jesus – picked was sending out people just like us. You can say that those first disciples were special because they had three physical years hanging out with Jesus. But, the truth is, we're the special ones because we've had over 2000 years of perfecting this evangelistic process. And oh, there are times when it still looks messed up. Those first disciples had no idea what they were doing. They didn't have mission boards or societies, the Salvation Army or World Vision or Compassion International, or CURE international for that matter. They just went out and loved people the way Jesus loved them. It makes me wonder if we haven't over worked what God planned as a somewhat simple process...people who love Jesus and want to tell the world about him because the world needs to know and we are the messengers. We should be changing the world just like they did and the problem is, we're not because we don't want to go.

But, we as followers of Jesus are called to GO so, first we go long. We commit to going next door like we talked about over the last few weeks and we also commit to going around the world. As a church, we are made up of all kinds of people with all kinds of gifts, and passions and talents and some of us like the idea of stretching out a bit and reaching far into the world we live in. Going long we reach far. That means reaching deep into people's lives with not just the life changing message of Jesus but, reaching the many needs that exist in other parts of the world.

Second, we reach far.

Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations... Matthew 28:19 NLT

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A hand out is just that, a hand out. But, having been someone who has done mission work for over 25 years I believe Jesus is calling us to offer a loving hand up. That means we need to reach far into the culture and the lives of those we go to and help develop lasting relationships, create systems that are sustainable, and support the church so that it can become the base of operations for those in need.

Reaching far means systemic and lasting change.

...and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8 NLT

That's why our work in Sierra Leone took a significant change earlier this year. For the first time in our ten-year relationship we have seen the opportunity to push our work solely in the direction of developing and designing systems that will allow for the church and the people of the congregation to become self-sustaining. To reach far means to GO in such a way that the future for those you meet has been changed forever. Over 30 years ago, missionaries went to the village of Mabooleh and built a church and then they left. Their legacy slowly faded because the systems were not in place to sustain the life of the church. Now, through the Women's Agricultural Project we are seeing over 45 women of the congregation uniting together to plant, raise, harvest and sell crops that will not only sustain their families but, care for the financial needs of the church like: paying the pastors salary, basic repairs and maintenance, paying denominational fees, and sending delegates to the national annual UMC conference each year.

In doing this kind of global work, we are not just going long and reaching far but we are also touching many. Our sister congregation in Sierra Leone sees a weekly average attendance of 130 men, women and children. But, our touch doesn't stop there...those 130 are interconnected with the almost 1000 people in and around the village proper who call Mabooleh home. Many are Muslim which is consistent with the population where 60% are Muslim, 30% are Christian and 10% believe in tribal gods. When we Go long, reach far we touch many.

When we Go long and reach far we affect lives.

Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations... Matthew 28:19 NLT

And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8 NLT

People all over the country of Sierra Leone have heard about CrossPoint Church because of our work there. Because we chose to impact an entire village, a whole country now knows about us. And it is our hope that we will continue our work in Mabooleh for the next 5 years were we will have created the sustainable systems that will allow the people in our sister village to reach out to other villages and do the same.

We're going to wrap up our time today and our GO series with a few words from someone who chose to GO. Each one of our campuses will be hearing from someone from CrossPoint Church who committed to going and because of that, they have been to our sister church in Maboleh, Sierra Leone, West Africa. So, I want to turn you over to...