

Making Disciples

Rev. Ernie Lassman

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go 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 I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:18–20).

Making disciples of Jesus Christ is based on one simple fact: He is alive. On the third day, he rose from the dead. If that is true, and it is, then everything about Jesus Christ is true. He is the world's only Savior from sin, death, and eternal damnation. He alone has done all that is necessary for mankind to be reconciled to God through the forgiveness of sin. On the cross Jesus Christ was punished for the sins of the world and the debt that every human being owed to God was canceled in full (Colossians 2:13–15). The cross is the turning point in human history. With sin forgiven and reconciliation to God accomplished, every other blessing of God is available including the resurrection from the dead to eternal life. No wonder that this message of Jesus Christ is called Gospel, the Greek word for good news.

Any good news is meant to be shared with others. How much more so then the Gospel? There is so much bad news in the world. The Christian Church and especially pastors have the wonderful joy of bringing good news to others. A pastor wants others to know what he knows and to have what he has: good news in Jesus Christ.

But Jesus tells us not simply to tell others about Him but to make disciples. There might be many ways to bear witness to Jesus, to tell others about him, but there is only one way to make disciples: baptizing and teaching. The New Testament Greek word for disciple means learner. We can see this definition of a disciple in what Jesus says in the Matthew 28:18–20: "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." This teaching is not simply head knowledge, although that is included, but this teaching involves the whole person: intellect, heart, and will. Such teaching includes the good news of Jesus Christ as savior from sin, death, and damnation. But, of course,

such teaching involves learning to live “a life worthy of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27). To be a disciple of Jesus Christ includes both what to believe and how to live.

The pastor has a central role to serve in making disciples. There are many ways to witness to Christ, to share the Gospel with others, but to be a disciple means to be taught the Christian faith. This is one of the main tasks of the pastor (2 Timothy 2:2) as he teaches the whole will of God (Acts 20:27). In addition to preaching the Word from the pulpit and teaching Bible classes, the pastor teaches a course on basic Christian teachings that every Christian needs to know to be a disciple. This course is known by a variety of titles: Adult Catechism, Adult Instruction Class, or Adult Information Class. The seminary’s mission is to equip men for this very task of bringing the gospel to others, teaching others the whole will of God. The life of a pastor includes ongoing study of God’s Word, building on the solid foundation he was given at the seminary. With great joy and enthusiasm the pastor teaches others all that he knows.

But discipleship includes being baptized. Teaching and baptizing always go together. The infant or young child who is baptized is taught the Word of God, both at home and in the congregation. While many may teach the child, the pastor remains the main teacher of the congregation and teaches children the whole will of God through catechism classes and in other ways. Adults and older children who are brought to faith through the Word are then baptized by the pastor who has been called by the congregation. Baptism is the linchpin that holds faith and works together. In baptism the disciple receives all the blessings of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ (Galatians 2:26–27). But Baptism also makes the disciple dead to sin and alive to God by uniting him to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Romans 6:1–11). Baptism empowers the disciple to live a life worthy of the Gospel. What a joy to be God’s servant by baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit so that others might receive what Jesus Christ has won and be His disciples. Through his call the pastor has been given the public office of the ministry in which he is authorized to preach and teach the Word and to administer the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper (AC V).

For three years Jesus Christ personally taught and supervised the twelve apostles so that they might be equipped for their mission. He gave them His authority and promised His presence. Through the many centuries, countless men have followed in their footsteps. Will you be one of them? Do you have a desire to make disciples by baptizing and teaching? Do you want to tell others what you know and give them what you have in Jesus Christ? If you do, the seminary is ready to form you as a servant of God to make disciples by baptizing and teaching.

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