

should have called those guys together and said, “You’re fired!” But that’s not what he said. “*Go and make disciples of all nations...*” Those imperfect men were exactly whom God wanted to use to carry his Word to the world.

That’s God’s grace. It’s always about God’s grace! We see God’s grace in his forgiveness. For every sin, Jesus has taken it away. For every failing in your past, Jesus has forgiven you. Just like he forgave Peter’s denials and Thomas’ doubts and John’s pride. And God’s grace doesn’t stop with forgiveness. God doesn’t just want to save you. He wants to use you to save others. Jesus gives you a mission for your life greater than anything else you could do. He wants to use you and me, as unfit as we are, to make more disciples for him. What grace! One of the Psalms says, “*What is man that you are mindful of him?*” Why would God choose to use us? But he does! How can we not say, “Here I am. Use me!”

Start with yourself. Making disciples of Jesus starts with you being a disciple of Jesus. Think of those three words: Gathering, growing, and going. Ask yourself, “What’s next in my walk with God?” Maybe it’s regularly gathering in God’s house for worship. Or maybe it’s finding a way to grow regularly through a Bible class or reading God’s Word on your own. Or maybe it’s every single day praying to God for the courage to go and invite someone to hear about Jesus at our church. Remember Jesus’ promise: “*Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*” This is a disciple’s life: Gathering...growing...going...

As we grow individually as disciples of Jesus, we come together—like at our voters’ meeting today—and ask, “What’s next for our church?” We know we have a great Savior, who has all the authority in the world. We know that we have his promise to be with us in everything that we do in his name. And we know there is a need. 46% of the people in our town don’t even belong to a church. What an opportunity! “*Go and make disciples of all nations...*” I bet those words always rang in Jesus’ disciples’ ears. They had a mission. We have a mission: Making disciples of Jesus!

One famous motto is that of the U.S. Coast Guard. Do you know what it is? *Semper paratus*. “Always prepared.” A movie just came out about a great Coast Guard rescue—“The Finest Hours.” In 1952, a big tanker split in two in the middle of a hurricane off the coast of Massachusetts. What do you think the Coast Guard did? Wait until the sailors came to them? No way! They went. The Coast Guard isn’t the Coast Guard unless it searches people to save. A church isn’t a church unless it’s making disciples of Jesus. Gathering. Growing. Going. That’s our mission! Making disciples of Jesus.

Matthew 28:16-20
Pastor Nathan Nass

State of the Church Sunday
January 22, 2017

16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 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, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Making Disciples of Jesus

Sometimes one line tells it all. The most famous companies in the world have found a way to express exactly what their brand is about in just one little line. Let’s try it. Guess the company: “Just do it.” Nike, right? How about, “I’m lovin’ it”? McDonalds. “There are some things money can’t buy. For everything else, there’s _____.” What about, “Betcha can’t eat just one”? Lay’s. “Like a good neighbor, _____ is there.” It’s really amazing when you think about it. Just one little phrase immediately calls to mind a company. Often success is based on how clearly you get your point across. How clear your mission is. Sometimes one line tells it all!

So what’s our church about? What one phrase describes the mission of Saint Peter Lutheran Church? Now, we’re not a business. Our goal is not to be catchy. But you know how valuable it is to know exactly what your purpose is. What’s our church about? We talked about this on our church council. It was hard—harder than we thought it was going to be! It’s easy to list off lots of things that our church does. We have worship services. We have a school. We teach Bible studies. But that’s just what we do. McDonalds’ motto isn’t, “We make cheap hamburgers.” Nike’s motto isn’t, “We sell expensive shoes.” Those are some of the things they do. That’s not their mission. What about us? What’s our mission?

Jesus understood the importance of knowing our purpose and mission in our lives. He refused to leave this world until he had stated as clearly as possible the mission of his church. The mission of the Christian Church as a whole. The mission of every single Christian congregation like ours. Jesus didn’t want to leave anyone hanging. So after he rose from the dead, he told his disciples to meet him on a certain mountain in Galilee. There his eleven disciples waited, struggling with doubts, with fears, with their purpose in life.

Until Jesus came to them and said, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*” I hope you grasp the comfort of that statement. Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth. That’s good to know today! There is so much insecurity. So many questions about authority. Worries about who really is in charge! Contrary to popular belief, there wasn’t actually a transition of power this past Friday. The same guy still has all authority—Jesus! Your life, your family, your church, your country are in Jesus’ hands. Our

mission as a church starts with the trust that Jesus is in absolute control of our world.

And here's what Jesus tells his church to do: "*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.*" It's not quite one line, but Jesus boils down the mission of his church to only 29 words in Greek. Short and sweet! Here's the goal of the Christian Church: Make disciples of Jesus. Notice that Jesus doesn't say to go out and get more members for the church. More members is not the goal. Being a member of a church won't save anyone. Jesus wants more disciples. A disciple is a life-long believer in Jesus. Believing in Jesus is what saves. Jesus says that his church's goal is to be making life-long disciples of Jesus. That's our mission: Making disciples of Jesus.

So how do we do that? Well, according to Jesus, there are three parts to making disciples. To make it easy, we could say that each part begins with a "G": Gathering, Growing, and Going. It starts with "*baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*" Jesus wants us to baptize people in his name. So we do. But baptism isn't the end! It's the start of a life of gathering with other Christians. Our first lesson said, "*Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another*" (Hebrews 10:25). Being Jesus' disciple means gathering regularly in God's house with other Christians around the Word and sacraments. This is the center of what we do.

And there's more. Jesus continued, "*And teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*" That's quite a statement! How much does God want us to know and obey? *Everything* in his Word. How many of you know and believe *everything* in the Bible? So what do we need? To keep on growing. God has a lot to say to you. God wants to bless you in lots of different ways. Being a disciple of Jesus is a life-long pursuit of growing in his Word. You will never be done! Gathering in God's house and growing in God's Word—that's a disciple of Jesus. With all the false ideas floating around today, we need it!

But that's not all! Jesus says one more thing about making disciples of Jesus: "*Go!*" That's maybe the most important word of all. "Go!" In Mexico, I had the chance to go to a conference with our Lutheran pastors and missionaries in Mexico. It's a small group: About 7 pastors and 3 missionaries in the whole country! Each one of them was encouraged to think about the same thing every day: Where can I start a new church? That sounded strange to me! But this is what God's church is to do. It's to be constantly going. There aren't enough Christians yet! Go and make disciples of Jesus—that's our mission! Gathering in God's house. Growing in God's Word. Going to tell all nations. It's not quite as catchy as, "I'm lovin' it!", but I think you can remember it. We're about making disciples of Jesus!

So where are you at today? I want you to first think about yourself personally. Jesus says being his disciple means you are constantly gathering, growing, and going. Does that describe you? Or which of those parts of being a disciple do you struggle with? Maybe it's with gathering to hear God's Word regularly. God's goal for you isn't to have your name on the membership roster at a church. He wants you to keep gathering with other believ-

ers. Maybe you've been gathering, but you haven't been growing in God's Word. Do you read the Bible for yourself, or does it still seem like this big, scary book? God wants to bless you as you grow in his Word. Maybe it's the going. It's nice to gather with friends here at church. It's hard to go and talk to someone else about our faith. Yet, this is what a disciple does: Gathering, growing, going... Where at you at today?

As you think about that, I want us to think about where our church is at. What's the state of our church today? How are we doing at making disciples of Jesus? Let's start with gathering in God's house. It is a blessing to have all of you here today! By God's grace, people gather every Sunday. That's a blessing from God! But if we're going to be honest today, the truth is that our church attendance has been declining steadily. The decline really started when I came about four years ago. I wish I knew why. Is it our sermons? Are there just more important things to do on Sundays now? Martin Luther once said, "If we handed out gold coins at the altar, the balcony would collapse under the weight of those standing in line." It doesn't seem like God's Word and Jesus' body and blood are quite so special. Our members haven't been gathering in God's house like they used to.

I wonder if that implies that we've also gotten complacent in our growing in God's Word. Jesus sets the bar pretty high: "*Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you...*" Are we excited to learn *everything* God has to say? Or do we think we know enough already? Study the Bible? That's for confirmation kids to suffer through, right? If the Bible really is true—and it is!—what could be more precious or more important than knowing Jesus' words? There was a time when the Lutheran Church was known as the church in which people read the Bible—as individuals and families. Is that true for us? There are some big tests right now in our country to see how well we trust God's Word: Marriage, abortion, the Trinity, salvation... Are we growing in the one thing needful—God's Word?

We haven't even gotten to the hardest one yet: "Going." If we struggle with gathering in God's house and growing in God's Word, than going and telling others probably isn't going to happen. What's our reputation? "That's the church that keeps to themselves. No one really knows what strange things go on there." It's easy for Christians to sit back and hope people come. Here's a secret: People don't just come. Jesus knows that. So what does he tell us? Go! I talked with a Jehovah's Witness in Mexico. I asked her if to be a Jehovah's Witness she really had to go around and tell others about her faith. She looked me in the eye and said, "How can I be Jehovah's witness if I never witness my faith?" I didn't know what to say. Except, I don't often witness my faith! We have a great God and an awesome mission to make disciples. But how we struggle with gathering, growing, and going!

Just like Jesus' disciples. We're exactly the type of sinful, doubting people Jesus looked at in our lesson. Peter? He swore three times that he didn't know Jesus. Thomas? He refused to believe that Jesus rose until he put his hand in Jesus' side. James and John? They selfishly asked Jesus for the greatest places in heaven. The Bible goes out of its way to show us the very real faults in Jesus' disciples. Surely Jesus could do better right? He