

“This Is a Day of New Beginnings, Time to Make a World of Difference”

Third in a Four-Week Sermon Series

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Season of Lent, Sunday, March 10, 2013

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Holy Scriptures: Matthew 28: 16-20 2 Corinthians 5: 16-21

Matthew 28: 16-21

The Commissioning of the Disciples

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

2 Corinthians 5: 16-21

The Ministry of Reconciliation

16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. ¹⁷ So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything has become new! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰ So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Sermon

*“For by the life and death of Jesus,
God’s mighty Spirit, now as then,
Can make for us a world of difference,
As faith and hope are born again.”*

Lyrics written by Brian Wren;

music created by Carlton Young;

life transforming power supplied by Jesus Christ.

She stood in front of the bright lights of late night television.

She was quite a sight in her bulky black boots that laced up her legs.

She looked into the eyes of the live studio audience

and the eyes she knew were watching on TVs in homes across the nation.

Over there was the late night talk show host,

who was up for jokes and celebrities,

and she was neither.

She stood still and spoke clearly and succinctly,

knowing that she only had two minutes,

two minutes to make an impression,

two minutes to get her message across,

two minutes to make a world of
difference.

She said that she had heard of men and women working the land

in countries where past wars and current civil strife

had left landmines scattered and hidden,

landmines waiting in deadly silence and
mystery for years

for unsuspecting people to touch
them,

resulting in lost feet and
hands and lives.

She said she had invented landmine resistant boots,

handmade boots with thick soles of leather and metal to
deflect the blast.

She said the boots were field-tested, battle-tested, effective and
expensive.

She said the shepherds and tillers of the soil and their loved ones
would surely benefit,

however the cost of the boots was prohibitive.

She said she had a website and then she named it,

saying that you can give \$10 or \$100 or more

to help purchase pairs of landmine resistant boots

for our international neighbors who needed
them

yet could not afford what would save
their lives and feet.

That's it.

Her two minutes were up,

and the talk show host was back,

cracking jokes and announcing the special celebrity
guest.

My Lord and my God!

She had two minutes to make a world of difference, and sometimes
that is all we get,

and she used every second to drive home her passion,

her creativity and resourcefulness, her love for
humanity,

her hope that there were others, thousands and millions of
others who cared

and wanted to make a world of difference as well.

You know, as a matter of fact, I did not see her on television.

I did not witness her passion and drive and hope for humanity.

I heard her story second hand, and now you are hearing it third hand.

I heard someone else tell the story who had seen her live on late night TV.

So I researched it and found that it is all true,

and now here I am telling you her story,

all worked up because someone wants to make a world of difference

and is inviting us – you and me and you and you –

to join in and get on board.

Some of us were blessed to hear the Rev. Dr. Holly Mckissick speak in 2011

at the General Assembly of the Christian Church in Nashville.

Holly McKissick is the pastor of Peace Christian Church in Kansas City.

She spoke about what our neighbors are looking for in a spiritual faith community.

When you ask people what they want – in survey after survey – what they say is us.

“In survey after survey, what people say they want is this,” she

said,

gesturing to the over 5,000 Disciples of Christ in the audience. “It’s us.”

Holly pointed out that we as a denomination are poised for growth

because we embody exactly what people are longing for, searching for

even if they don’t really know it or can’t articulate it.

The frustrating part is that few people know who we are or what we are about.

She shared with us how when she first started in ministry over 25 years ago,

she wished that we, as a church,

would hire a slick advertising company

that would help us rebrand ourselves

into something new, novel, sexy or sleek.

As a matter of fact, we have had the same conversation and dreams here as well.

Now, she says, she realizes that’s not the answer.

Now she’d settle for an elevator speech.

An elevator speech is a couple of tight, well-crafted sentences

which say who we are, succinctly, with passion and hope

and joy.

Everyone here today needs an elevator speech.

All you have to do (don't you love that expression) -- all you have to do is practice.

So that the next time someone comes to you and says,

“Hey, your church seems to be really important to you.

What kind is it? I've never heard of it.”

You could be ready to say something like:

“Well, we aren't really all that well known

because we aren't like some of those faith traditions

who think they have all the answers.

We know the world is not black and white;

we know it is rich and filled with color and varied

and filled with hungry kids and flooded towns,

and we are just the kind of church that likes to roll up our sleeves

and seek to be a sign of God's healing and hope!”

Or you could tell someone how *“even I am welcomed!”*

Or tell a story about our practice of hospitality, healing grace, and hands-on missions.

According to Holly McKissick, unchurched people want a spiritual faith community

but they are not interested in churches

that “are all hung up on gays or straight, black or white,”

but rather churches that celebrate the range of God’s creation

and help each other through the difficult complexities of life.

Many of our unchurched neighbors say,

“If I could find a church that isn’t trying to own Jesus, but simply follow him, I would go.”

What they mean is that if they dream of a sacred place, a safe place,

a spiritual home and community

where they could go with their questions and doubts

and still be accepted, like us.

If only they could find a church

that was not trying to divide the world but found a way to live together, like us.

If only they could find a church that wasn’t trying to own Jesus

but simply follow him, like us.

If they could find a church like that, they would go.

We are a church like that, and you know this and feel this because you live this.

We've have experienced it firsthand, and we can share this discovery, like so.

In the Great Commission in Matthew 28

Jesus invites us to be disciples, to make disciples, and to grow disciples.

We know that it all starts with telling our story, our faith, our witness,

and trusting in God to make the reconciling connections.

Jesus is not asking us to make cold calls,

to start knocking on the doors of unknown folks

and suddenly inviting them to have a relationship with Jesus Christ.

The first and most crucial step to belief is to know that you belong.

How are we as a church at making folks feel welcome, that everyone belongs?

When I served as pastor in Jackson TN

I made 500 cold calls on newcomers in two years, and it netted one visitor.

Kathy Jenniges was the lone visitor.

She not only visited, she joined, became an elder,

and then as a mid-wife helped birth our daughter Katie.

There is a legendary story in my family from my childhood days

about the day my mother Buffy was in a back room of the house

and she heard a knock on the door.

My brothers answered the knock, and being only 5 or 6 or 7 years old,

said loudly, “Daddy is not home!” and then promptly slammed the door.

Buffy hustled to the front and reopened the door

and helped to smooth a church member’s ruffled feathers.

That afternoon she taught her sons how to open the front door very wide

and then say, “Won’t you please come in and have a seat?”

My mommy or daddy will be right with you.”

A few days later she was taking a bath when she heard a knock on the door,

and then a young voice said, “Won’t you please come in and have a seat?”

My mommy or daddy will be right with you.”

She hustled to get dressed, and when she walked to the front of our home

she found the living room full of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Two hours later Buffy was silently wishing

she had qualified the hospitality lesson she taught her sons.

The point of the Great Commission is that we are not in control,

yet we still need to make the effort.

We are not in control of anyone else's faith choices or responses to our faith stories.

We still need to make the effort.

The first step to making and growing disciples of Jesus Christ is to be one.

Be one.

Your living faithfully may be the only sermon your neighbor experiences.

Love someone. Serve somebody. Do justice.

Seek to connect your passion and skills and resources to make a world of difference.

Then, for goodness' sake, tell someone!

We may inform from a distance but we impact from up close.

When you get a chance – and trust me, God will give you plenty – use it.

You have two minutes to make an impression,

to tell your story, to share your passion and hope.

Practice opening the door and inviting someone in.

My Lord and my God!

We are richly, deeply blessed to be given two minutes to make a world of difference,

and sometimes that is all we get,

and so let's use every second to drive home our passion,

our creativity and resourcefulness,

our love for humanity,

our hope that there are others, thousands and millions of others who care

and want to make a world of difference as well.

Imagine what we will look like and sound like and feel like down the road

because we dare to share our own personal and communal stories.

Imagine what this sanctuary and the city of God will be like
because you and I decided on Sunday, March 10
that we are going to take a risk
and stand tall in front of someone else's eyes
in our funny-looking shoes that we
wear
because we want to walk like
Jesus, in His footsteps.

The point of telling faith stories is not only so the Body of Christ
will grow.

Holly Mckissick reminds us that, "It wasn't about this
denomination for our founders

and it sure shouldn't be for us."

The point is giving another soul, another family, another home

the same gift of God that you have:

the gift of hope, healing and hospitality.

The point is about helping the homeless and hungry

just outside our sanctuary and along the city streets.

The end of the story is the lame walking and blind seeing and thirsty drinking.

“And how will they know it unless we tell?”

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!