

“Connecting Others to Jesus”

Acts 1:6–8; Acts 3:1–10 (NRSV)

***God has called us to his work,
not merely our own.***

What are we doing here? What is this all about? Why? What is the point?

It is easy to see all this—worship, “doing church”—as merely being for ourselves: our comfort, our experience, our families, our kids. But it isn’t. It can’t be. Before Jesus returned to the Father, he left quite explicit instructions that still shape our decisions and



actions today:

- Make disciples of all peoples
- Baptize them
- Be witnesses to the Good News about Jesus across the globe

Jesus also taught us to care for others, to make love concrete and substantial. We are, he said, to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the sick, visit the prisoners – in other words, we are to do all we can to enact God’s kingdom here and now.

All this is what we mean by mission. It is all that takes us outside ourselves, beyond our needs and our hopes. Mission is about others – telling them in word and deed about Jesus and ensuring their basic needs are met.

Regrettably, we often chop “mission” into two concepts, and then treat them as a choice, an “or.” Say the word “mission” to some Christians and they immediately think of making disciples, the so-called Great Commission of Matthew 28:19 and being Jesus’ witnesses (Acts 1:8). Others, however, will take “mission” to mean feeding the hungry, providing for the poor, and so on.

We must guard against this. If we concern ourselves only with disciple-making and neglect those who lack even the basics of life, then how are we truly emulating Christ? But if we provide food and clothing, yet do not tell the person of God’s love revealed in Jesus Christ, we are ignoring what matters most. We are to proclaim and to feed. We are to teach and to clothe. Both, together, constitute living the mission. As we go from Judea to Samaria and to the ends of the earth, we go with a Bible in one hand and a hammer in the other.

Witnesses

We are so used to hearing Jesus’ instructions about disciple-making and witnessing, that we can be blinded to what is on the page. Jesus doesn’t say, “Go and save souls,” or “Go and make believers.” Jesus knows that soul-saving and believer-making is God’s work, not ours. But Jesus does tell his disciples to make more disciples, to carry the Good News across the globe.

It is important to remember that the word “disciple” has a specific meaning. It doesn’t mean those who love Jesus. You can love Jesus and not be a disciple. Rather, a disciple of Jesus or of anyone else is someone who is learning to be like the master. More so than “student” or “learner,” the word “apprentice” gets us closest to the true meaning of “disciple.” Apprentices, in any vocation, are those who are consciously striving, learning, and practicing to be like the master to whom they are apprenticed. This apprenticeship encompasses every part of the apprentice’s being: her head, her heart, and her hands.

Certainly, disciples of Jesus love their Master and have faith in their Master, but they also share the desire to be Christ-like. Making the decision to believe in Jesus, as we often put it, is not the same as

making a decision to emulate Jesus. Every disciple of Jesus has not only made the first decision but the second as well. Further, we are called to be disciples who are *passionate* servants.

Peter's healing of the man outside the temple is much more than a kindness or even an enactment of God's kingdom, in which there are no crippled. Peter's act is a powerful witness to God's power and love. We may not make the lame walk as Peter did, but we too are called to proclaim to the world that, indeed, there is a God who loves us all, so much so that he gave his only son for us, so that we might be truly reconciled to God and to one another.

An empowered heart

Blessedly, we are not alone in this work, and we have more than simply one another. We have been given the power of the Holy Spirit, the power of God. Look again at today's reading from Acts 1. Jesus not only gives his disciples a mandate, he gives them the power to accomplish it. As Jesus had promised them on the eve of his crucifixion, the Spirit, the Comforter and Advocate, would come to Jesus' disciples weeks later at Pentecost. The Spirit would be God's empowering presence in their lives and work. And the world would be forever changed.

God's Holy Spirit dwells in all those who have faith in Jesus Christ. It is the Spirit who reshapes our hearts and minds. It is the Spirit who convicts us when we turn inward to the exclusion of others. It is the Spirit who works with us to foster an ever-growing desire in our hearts to proclaim Christ and to serve others.

The UMC Book of Discipline states that "The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world by proclaiming the good news of God's grace and by exemplifying Jesus' command to love God and neighbor, thus seeking the fulfillment of God's reign and realm in the world."

FUMC is every bit as much a part of that work as the disciples who gathered in Jerusalem nearly 2,000 years ago. This church began one-hundred-thirty years ago with a handful in an upstairs room at the courthouse and now consists of six-hundred people anxious to spread the Good News, to invite, to welcome, to share, to connect. May God's grace wash through all that we do . . . to his glory!

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What are some concrete steps our congregation could take to help us all be bolder in being the light to the world? How can we help each other?
2. What have you done today to witness to Jesus Christ? In the last month? In the last year? What will you do?
3. We witness to God in our service to others. What distinguishes our service from the service provided by secular groups such as the Kiwanis or Rotary?