

“REDISCOVERING OUR IDENTITY (#4): GOING”

(Matthew 28:19-20)

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PROPS NEEDED: (#1) “*Will You Serve Me In Love?*” Drama; (#2) White Napkin]

[East Cobb U.M.C.; 10-26-08]

–I–

1. Read Text: Matthew 28:19-20 and Pray.
2. [DRAMA/SKIT: “*Will You Serve Me In Love?*”]
3. **[WATCH BODY OF CHRIST PHOTO-MOSAIC:** *Zoom in from pictures of church members in Missions/Evangelism activities, then out to FEET of Jesus, then to entire picture of Jesus with others]*

A–So, what does *your* understanding of Christian faith tell you to do in the situations described in the drama you just heard? How would *you* serve each of those persons in love?

B–It’s a question that strikes at the heart of our identity both corporately (as a church) and personally (as individual Christians).

C–And it’s also a question that’s squarely addressed in the third and final “G” of our church’s new mission statement that we’ve been learning about this entire month in a series called “Rediscovering Our Identity.”

D–As a reminder, you’ll find our mission on the front of the bulletin (say with me one more time)... we are “*A Mosaic of God’s family: Gathering, Growing, and Going*” – that is... “*GATHERING to embrace God and all people; GROWING in faith, love, and joy...*”

4. And then today as we wrap up this series, our focus turns to what it means for us to be “***GOING into the world to serve and share Jesus***” (in bulletin sermon notes).

A–Now, there are numerous places throughout the Bible that talk about this dimension of Christian faith, but the one I want to focus in on today is found in Matt. 28 (today’s scripture).

B–There, following his resurrection, Jesus shares with his 12 disciples what has come to be called the “Great Commission.”

[At 9:45 Service ONLY...] Listen to its words: “*Go out & train everyone you meet, far & near, in [my] way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, & Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I’ll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age.*”]

C–Essentially this scripture lays out **two fundamental tasks for all followers of Jesus:**

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5. The first of these is what we sometimes call **EVANGELISM** (or “Faith-Sharing”), found in Verse 28: [NRSV:] “*Go therefore and make disciples...*” [MSG:] “*Go out and train everyone you meet... in [my] way of life...*”.

A—Now, the version of this from Mark 16:15 is even clearer... “*Go into all the world and proclaim/announce the [message of God’s] good news...*”¹

B—So, what this is actually referring to is nothing more than our willingness to share with others (verbally or otherwise) the spiritual message of hope that *we’ve* found in Jesus² –...

1—...To share our faith with our friends, relatives, acquaintances, neighbors, and even with strangers –we’re *not* to keep it “private” or “to ourselves,” but to share it whenever possible.

2—Now, that doesn’t mean we go around beating people over the head with the Bible, or telling them that they’re going to hell if they don’t listen.

3—No. It’s not our job to guarantee results for God – *our* job is simply to share our faith, and then let the *Holy Spirit* produce the results!

C—So in what ways are YOU “*Going in the world to share Jesus?*” And in what ways are we as a church finding intentional ways to do the same? ...Because that’s the first task that Jesus gives us in today’s scripture.

6. The second is what I’m calling **SERVICE** (or what is sometimes called “Outreach/Missions”), and we find it referenced in Verse 29 where Jesus talks about... [NRSV:] “*Teaching [others] to obey everything that I have commanded you*” [MSG:] “*Instructing them in the practice of all I’ve commanded you...*” (“Practice” here referring not to *talking*, but to the *doing* of something)

A—[Trad. Service ONLY...] Now, the word “*obey*” here is better translated as “*observing or practicing*” something, meaning that it’s not something we *talk about*, but something we *do*.

B—So, think about what we’re to DO as Christians. Do you remember the popular catchphrase a few years back, “WWJD”? (“*What Would Jesus Do?*”)

1—Well, as Christians and as a church, we’re called to look at what Jesus did and to emulate those things in our own lives and actions. So what *did* he do?

2—Jesus fed the hungry, clothed the naked, helped the poor, healed the sick, and challenged the status quo where there was injustice.

C—Friends, we’re called to do no less, whether it be through our own *personal* actions and behaviors, or through the *corporate* actions and activities (the “ministries”) of our church.

D—As you heard in the drama/skit at the beginning of this message, we’re called to “*Go into the world to ...serve others in love*” – to look after their physical, tangible needs through acts and ministries of “Service/Missions.”

7. Now, a word about the relationship between these two tasks from Jesus (Evangelism and Service): They're actually flips sides to the same coin – neither can exist without the other.

A–How does James put it... “*Faith without works is dead*”? (James 2:26)

1–In other words, in our church, we can't have effective Missions without Evangelism; and neither should we do Evangelism without the work of Missions.

2–Likewise, in our *personal* lives, we can't *share* our faith without *doing* our faith; and neither can we *do* our faith without *sharing* it.

B–You see, biblical Christianity requires us BOTH to *do* good works, AND to *share* our faith.³

C–This is precisely why our church's mission calls us to be “*GOING into the world to serve*” (e.g., missions / the “*doing*”) “*and to share Jesus*” (e.g., evangelism / the “*sharing*”) ”

D–And I want us all to notice that these two tasks are reflected in the final two promises we make as United Methodist Christians: “*Service*” and “*Witness*” – meaning that as we fulfill our vows to God through our church, we're actually “*serving and sharing Jesus.*”

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8. Now before we wrap this series up today, I do want to call attention to the cyclical nature of our church's mission – that each phrase not only builds on the previous one, but in the end actually brings us back around to the first one.

A–Think about it:

1–As Christians & as a church, we **GATHER** to *Worship God & Fellowship* with others.

2–We then participate in intentional opportunities for Christian *Discipleship*, so that the Holy Spirit can **GROW** us to more like Jesus.

3–But then, the more we grow, the more we come to understand that the very reason for our “Gathering” and “Growing” is for the express purpose of **GOING** – of helping others to find God's kingdom through our acts of service and sharing, *so that they too may one day “Gather, Grow, and Go!”*

B–So, let me demonstrate the importance of this final “G” with a simple metaphor – here I have a napkin, which represents two ways of thinking of the church and Christianity.

1–There's a lot of people (including a lot of church folks) who think it's like this: [TUCK NAPKIN UNDER CHIN AS A BIB] ... “*I'm here. Now feed me! The church exists to meet MY needs, and if you're not doing that, I'm outta' here. I'll go to another church down the road that IS!*” And we sometimes do this with God, too!

2–But here's how the Bible teaches us to understand this: [TAKE NAPKIN, KNEEL & PLACE IT OVER ARMLIKE A WAITER] ... “*How may I serve you. I'm not at church to get MY needs met, but to find out how I can help meet yours, & those of others.*”

C–Friends, have you ever noticed that the first two letters of the word God spell “GO”, & that the first three letters of the word Satan are “SAT”? So are you a “Go-er” or a “Sit-ter”?

D–If we’re on God’s side, then we’re not called to be sitting comfortably on the sidelines, but to be “*GOING into the world*” so that *others* might (like us) become “*A Mosaic of God’s family... GATHERING to embrace God and all people; GROWING in faith, love, and joy; and GOING into the world to serve and share Jesus.*”

9. My prayer is that each of us would learn to live this mission – this calling – not only as a *church*, but most importantly as individual Christians, as well. May it truly reflect our identity in Christ Jesus!
10. [PRAYER]
11. [CLOSING SONG]

ENDNOTES:

1. The version I share here is a combination of the NRSV and THE MESSAGE translations.
2. Romans 10:15 says, “*How beautiful are the feet of those who share good news!*” In other words, it’s a wonderful, beautiful thing when God’s people get out of their church building go out into the world to share Jesus with those around them. Notice that at the beginning of today’s sermon, we zoomed in on the *feet* of Jesus as a reminder of our calling to “GO” to share Jesus with others.
3. This is why the concept of “saving souls” as the “one and only purpose” of the Christian church is a flawed and essentially incorrect understanding. “Saving souls” (or “evangelism”) is merely part of this overarching process of what today’s scripture calls “making disciples” that also includes the taking care of people’s physical needs.