

Trinity Sunday / Father's Day sermon. Fr. Hugh.

St. George. 6/19/11 Matthew 28:

The Great Commission.

A friend of mine told me: "I never know what to get my Dad for Father's day. So last year I decided to do what he used to do with me.

I sent my father \$100, and told him:

'Buy yourself something that will make your life easier.'

So he bought a present for my mother."

It's my pleasure this morning to wish all you gentlemen a very Happy Father's Day.

I'm sure some of you have seen the Mission Impossible movies.

You may also remember the TV show.

At times it seems that some of the things that the Lord Jesus asks of us fall into that category of ‘mission impossible.’

The Lord’s final instructions that we read in this morning’s gospel reading, are known as the Great Commission. His very last words on earth were,

“All authority on Heaven and Earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”

That’s a tall order.

The word ‘disciple’ is used a lot in the New Testament. But today we tend to think of ourselves as being Episcopalians, more than as being disciples.

But, strange as this may sound, Jesus didn't say:

'Go and make Episcopalians,' or Baptists or Catholics for that matter.

He told his disciples to make disciples.

People of God to help others to be people of God.

Can we in the 21st century picture ourselves as being Disciples of Christ, in the same way that the original disciples were?

The New Testament makes it clear that there are certain characteristics of disciples that are not limited by time or place.

I'd like to point out seven characteristics of disciples.

First disciples are chosen.

The gospels tell us how Jesus chose his disciples.

But we may think that we made up our own minds to be Christians, or simply that we were raised that way.

However, Scripture repeatedly states that God loved us first, and that He chose us before we were even born.

It may hard for us to really believe, but God has invited us into His Kingdom.

We do not choose Him from a variety of spiritual options. No, He chooses us. He invites us and we can accept or reject His invitation.

It's a beautiful thing to contemplate, that God chose you, that He chose me, and called us to follow Him.

Secondly disciples spend time with the Lord. Again we read of how the disciples associated with Him. This "being with Christ" is absolutely indispensable and we are

afforded the same opportunity of connecting with Him, through coming to church services, and through private prayer.

In prayer we might ask God for things, and thank Him for things, or, apologize for our sins.

But the real heart of prayer is just being together with Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, disciples learn from their Master.

In those days when He was on earth they listened to His every Word. They didn't always understand. They didn't always obey. But they were learning.

And it's just the same today. We might not hear His voice, person to person.

But we have the message of His life-giving Words, recorded in the Bible and presented afresh in Church.

It is a weakness of many modern churches that a lot of Christians these days don't study God's Word.

The result of this is the failure to use God's teachings as a guide in making personal decisions, or in analyzing pressing social issues.

Fourthly, disciples share.

We share our love relationship with God. We share experiences. Disciples are not just to do their own thing.

As disciples we are people doing Christ's thing and doing it together. We are the Body of Christ.

This is why coming together for Holy Communion is so important. This is why prayer, and sharing of our concerns, and helping one another is so important.

Christian fellowship is not a luxury. It is a necessity.

Fifthly, disciples follow.

That is they do what their Lord tells them.

There is a tough streak of obedience required in the Christian life. This may not sit well with our ideas about our rugged independence, but there it is.

It is not enough to glorify God on Sundays.

We must glorify Him Monday through Saturday and follow His ways.

He has told us to love.

He has told us to forgive.

He has told us to speak up for truth and justice.

He has told us to make disciples.

Sixthly, disciples work. All Christians are called to assist in the Lord's enterprise.

Being retired from a job doesn't mean you are retired from Christian service. Quite the contrary.

As disciples we are called to serve.

The form of service will vary according to the needs before us and the gifts we bring to the table.

It would be very dull if it were otherwise.

God gives us each special gifts for special ministries.

Some may wish to help the poor. Some may wish to help the elderly. Some may wish to visit the sick. Some may reach out to the lonely.

Some may wish to serve in and around the Church.

There is certainly no shortage of opportunity to serve here at Saint George.

The good disciple is someone who prays:

“Lord, how do you want me to serve you?”

One of the things that Christ expects of us is to be His witnesses.

We are called to bear witness for Christ in how we live, and whenever the opportunity presents itself.

Some years ago in the Soviet Union a demonstration of bravery took place. Christian gatherings were expressly against the law.

But the Underground Church would not give up.

One day they held a meeting in a house.

The house overflowed with people in the hallway, in the yard, even climbing into trees.

Eighty young people were converted that day and accepted the call to be Disciples of Christ. They decided they wanted to be baptized right away.

Knowing the risks, fifteen hundred Christians walked across the city to the river Don to baptize the new believers. Carloads of Communist Police showed up by the waterfront and threatened to arrest them. But it is hard to arrest fifteen hundred people.

The believers dropped to their knees and asked God to defend His people. Then they stood shoulder to shoulder, surrounding the young people, forming a human wall, allowing the ministers the time to baptize all the young people.

Most of us will never be called upon to be so brave about our faith. But these days most of us have been so conditioned to think it is socially undesirable to openly evangelize that we've gone to the other extreme. We've let ourselves be intimidated into never telling anyone how God has helped in our life, in our health, in our relationships.

