

Let's begin at the beginning -- when the earth was formless and empty. In Genesis 1 we read "in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. On the first day God said 'let there be light' and he saw that the light was good.

"God saw that it was good" appears seven times in these opening verses.

Goodness is a part of all that God creates. But God wasn't done creating, so goodness means something other than finished. It means in process, moving toward perfection.

On the second day, God separated the waters of the sky from the waters of the land. God is in control.

On the third day God gathered the waters to one place and the dry ground to another. Again, he pronounced it good.

God said, Let the earth put forth seed bearing plants and trees. And it was good.

To aid in this bringing forth of new vegetation God provided sun to govern the day, and the seasons. And it was good.

God created the birds of the sky, and the living creatures of the water and of the land, and blessed them.

Then God said, 'Let us make human beings in our image'; make them reflecting our nature, so they can be responsible for the fish of the sea, the birds of the air and the living things of the earth. Humankind was created, and was asked to rule over, take charge, have dominion, to subdue the earth and all that was created. This means to be in partnership with God, to be responsible, to take care of, it means stewardship. God enlists what he is creating (humankind) to aid in further creation. Though perfectly capable of creating on his own, God instead invites participation.

God looks at everything He has made and He says it is very good. There is this incredible sense of satisfaction and joy that God has over His creation. What an awesome realization to consider the majesty of all that God has created.

God set it all in motion and invited us to be a part. We participate in God's act of creation by making sure that it lasts as long as it can. It means prioritizing quality of air, water, soil, and natural resources in our decision-making and actions. It means accepting responsibility to use less, to reuse rather than to buy more, and to recycle rather than add to the landfill. It means partnering with the earth to bring forth enough to feed the growing billions of God's people. God is calling those made in his image to enter into this work of expanding and in sharing the goodness that he created. We are asked to cultivate and keep the garden, so that the glory of God can be seen by others throughout the earth. Our work is described as being the hands and feet of God that fill the world. We do this as we fill the world with food, families, housing, research, science, education, social work, the arts, health care, justice and more. Through the things we produce and do, we are actually continuing the work that God began in creation. We are called to create. We are called to act in the way that God acts, to reflect his nature. Everything, however humble it may be, that contributes to the health, the happiness and the welfare of humankind is work done for God.

Just as God calls those made in his image to be a steward of creation, Jesus calls his disciples into stewardship through the great commission. It begins on a mountain, one of those mountains that God created.

Mountains in the Bible are more than simply geologic formations. They are theological signposts. Something significant is going to happen. Mountains are alive with the presence and power of God. In Matthew we stand on a mountain with the disciples. Jesus has been crucified and raised from the dead. The disciples are carrying their wounds, their failures, their disappointment, and their fears. Jesus instructs them to go to a mountain in Galilee. They wait for whatever might be coming next. Standing on this mountain, the disciples' lives were about to change forever. Not that they knew that at that moment. All they knew is that they heard that word: "Go." (go to the mountain). There Jesus gives the great commission: Go and make disciples. When Jesus says "make disciples," He imagines a relationship. He says, "Go, spend time with people, value them, learn from them, know them, help them, tell them what makes you the person that you are." It's a way of living that we are always growing into. Like creation itself, the goodness is found in the process.

The command in the Great Commission to "make disciples" means to teach people to follow and obey Christ. Why are we privileged with this responsibility? I believe it is because we are created in the image of God. Because of this, gratitude is the main approach to our existence. We know that all we are and all we have belongs to the one, who in the beginning, said, "let there be light."

We are invited to participate in God's ever-continuing act of creation. We are called to join in. We are called to go. Jesus has given us a command. This is not the great suggestion. This is not an idea. This is not a challenge. It is a command; it is a commission. Jesus is telling His followers to go and make disciples!

Jesus was saying, 'Give them something else to live by, to be defined by,' "Give them Me," And teach. Teach them obedience, with passion and joy and encouragement.

Jesus is telling the disciples to go into a new world, a new reality, a new way of being. The horizons are calling, and the world is yours. Go and see, go and live, go and be. This new command is a new beginning.

Jesus didn't want His followers to just stay in Galilee, although the go did include Galilee. Jesus doesn't want us to just stay in Waupun, or Fox Lake or Fond du Lac although the go does include these places.

Jesus said go to all nations; that is, all peoples of the world. Every tribe, every tongue, every nation! We are to go! The mission is here and the mission is elsewhere. The mission is every place that has a breathing person. This might mean go to the next block down the street, or go to another country.

Some might say, "Well, this commission is only for certain people. After all, wasn't Jesus just delivering this message to His disciples?" This mission is, indeed, for the disciples of Jesus. So I ask, are you a disciple of Jesus? Are we disciples of Jesus? This commission is for all the followers of Jesus!

He wants us to make disciples by teaching others the commands of Jesus and teaching them to observe those commands. Jesus wants those who are willing to become more

like Him! He doesn't just want us to know His ways, He wants us to observe, follow and do His ways.

Discipleship is not a matter of choice. It is a matter of surrender, a giving in to God's initiatives in our lives. We may sing the old hymn, "Have Thine Own Way, Lord," to express our devotion to Christ. But there is a note of desperation when we finally quit resisting, when we finally discover that we cannot follow Christ by our own strength. It is the point at which we realize that we must hand things over to God, and say "Very well, God, have it your way!"

In other words, we enter Christian discipleship in blind trust. We do not know where Christ is going to lead us or what he will ask us to do. All we know is that we have come to a stage where we are willing to take the risk of following him.

Are you a disciple of Jesus?

Will you go? It applies to us all.

There's only one central command in these sentences. And it is that phrase, 'make disciples'.

A disciple is a follower. It's like an apprentice. If you want to become a carpenter or electrician, the best way to learn is to follow the carpenter, follow the electrician. You watch what he does. You learn from him. You copy him. You mimic him. You disciple after him.

And that's what Jesus is saying, "Your Great Commission, your mission, the command I leave to you is that you must help people follow Me well. Help them to learn of My values. Help them to learn of My ways. Help them to learn of My teachings. Help them to follow My life, in My character, in My ministry, in how I deny Myself, take up the cross in order to follow the Father's will. Help them to be like Christ."

This is our priority. We are to so invest and build and give to the lives of people so that Christ could be formed, could be seen in men and women's lives. So that more and more will be more like Jesus.

The church is not commanded to construct buildings, but we are called to make disciples. Neither are we called to make money. The church today is not expected nor is God commanding us to make a profit. As if we go to heaven and say, "Look God! How great is our church! We made so much money." That's not God's commission. Neither is it to make programs, "O Lord! Look at our training program. Look at how many we have, so many sessions are set up. Oh, look at our programs that fill our calendar." Nope! God's will is not that we have many programs and miss out on making disciples.

Neither is it about making events, having fun day, sports day, family day. And ... satisfying ourselves that because we have so many events, we must be a good church. Neither is it about holding services. "Oh, we have so many worship services. Mid-week as well as Sunday." That's not God's will for us.

Let's be clear, the Great Commission is making disciples, not about making these things. There is nothing wrong with these things. But they are not the focus. We can use these things to make disciples.

In order to make disciples, you need to go. Don't stay in the church building. Go. Let's go back 2000 years ago, with Jesus meeting the disciples. They must have all been enraptured with the reality that Jesus is alive. They must have wished that they will stay with Jesus forever. But Jesus says, "Don't stay here. Don't huddle here. Go! You are on a mission. You are sent." And we are to go.

The Church must not only gather on Sunday mornings. The Church must not just fellowship and commune together in little groups. The Church must remember to go. We are called to be missionaries, not stationeries. We are called to be on mission, to go out of our comfort zone.

It's like a basketball game. You don't win a basketball game by having good timeouts only. Oh! Let's ... let's have a timeout. Let's talk about strategy. Let's talk about how we beat the other team. Let's have a great cheer." Now, this basketball team will win nothing until this team, after the huddle, gets out onto the court and plays ball. We gather on Sunday mornings, both in-person or online, we hear God's Word. But that's not the goal. The goal is so that on Monday to Sunday, we will get out into the court of our lives, to go into our families, our office, our factories, our schools, our neighborhood and make disciples. We've got to go! Out of our comfort zones. Take the initiative to love, and to pray.

We are called to disciple making, the whole process of leading someone to Christ. And then helping him mature and then helping him become the leader, the disciple that he is to be. We are to be involved in the whole range of Christian growth and development.

So, when we make disciples, this is the challenging part. Don't just help him to grow as a Christian, but help him to also become a disciple maker, who will make disciples, who will disciple others. The Great Commission is so that disciple makers will make disciple makers, who will make disciple makers.

This is a big task so let's look at Jesus' assurance. How comforting that this grand edict is more than just a command, but that it comes with a promise. The promise is, "Behold, I'm with you always, to the end of the age." [Matt 18:20] How amazing that God, Jesus Himself promises to be with us!

Now, this promise, of course, was directly applicable to the eleven that were gathered at the mountain in Galilee. But I think it is also applicable to you and to me. Why? Because it says, "To the end of the age." For all times, Jesus promises to be with His church, with his people.

'End of the age' or 'always', means the whole of every day. In other words, there's no timeout for God. He's always with us, from the beginning to the end. He will be with you as you Go make disciples.

Amen