

# The Great Commission

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Preacher: Pastor Lisa Taylor

[ 0 : 00 ]     Ovalapipe Thank you.

Thank you.

Listen, listen to me and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest affair. Give ear and come to me, listen that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David.

See, I have made him a witness to the people, a ruler and commander of the peoples. Surely you will summon nations that you know not, and nations you do not know will come running to you because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel.

For he has endowed you with splendor. See the Lord, seek the Lord while he may be found. Call on him while he is near.

[ 2 : 12 ]     Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the Lord and he will have mercy on them. And to our God, for he will freely pardon.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth.

It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. You will go out with joy and be led forth in peace.

The mountains and the hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the fields will clap their hands. Instead of the thorn bush, we'll grow the juniper, and instead of briars, the myrtle will grow.

[ 3 : 15 ]     This will be the Lord's renown for an everlasting sign that will endure forever. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Thank you, Terry.

That passage from Isaiah is a strong portion of what we're going to be talking about today, but there's another shorter passage that's also important to what we're going to be talking about this morning.

It comes from Matthew chapter 28, and I'm sure it's quite familiar to everyone. It's happening after Jesus has died, risen from the dead, and has been meeting with his disciples.

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Therefore go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them everything, to obey everything I have commanded you.

- [ 4 : 37 ]      Therefore go. Go and make disciples of all nations. We know this passage by the nickname, the Great Commission.
- And it's really the call and the purpose of the church, isn't it? As United Methodists, we have learned our mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.
- We're supposed to do that. Transform the world. Wow. This command came to us from Jesus Christ himself through our Bible.
- I know what you're thinking. Well, at least if you're thinking along the same lines I'm thinking. I can't even get my kids or my grandkids to pick up their socks off the floor. Aren't there people in the church whose job it is to go make disciples?
- You know, evangelists and pastors and people who feel like they're called to do this. Well, at the risk of losing your attention completely, I am going to quote the United Methodist Book of Discipline.
- [ 5 : 49 ]      There's a section in it. There's a section in it called the ministry of all Christians. It's paragraphs 126 through 132.
- No, I'm not kidding. No, I'm not kidding. It's in there. One of the things it says is, The ministry of the laity flows from a commitment to Christ's outreaching love.
- Lay members, lay members of the United Methodist Church are, by history and calling, active advocates of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- Every lay person is called to carry out the Great Commission. Because their Christ-like examples of everyday living, as well as the sharing of their own faith experiences of the gospel, is the primary evangelistic ministry through which all people will come to know Christ.
- And therefore, the United Methodist Church will fulfill its mission. Its mission, to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.
- [ 7 : 08 ]      This is what United Methodists have signed up for. The ministry of all Christians flows out of our love for God.
- It's love for neighbor being lived in a way that transforms both the one who brings and the one who receives.
- The good news. I think Jesus' intention goes beyond the United Methodist Church, too. I believe that this is what the church, the big church, was intended to do.
- Many of you know that I've been teaching dance, especially ballet, for over 40 years now. It's a long time. I've had my own dance studio since 1993.
- And I've mentored lots and lots of dance students and their families through years and years of the ups and downs of becoming good at dancing. In the process of trying to build a student enrollment that would make the business viable, I spent lots of time and energy and money researching the best dance studio marketing strategies and putting them to work.
- [ 8 : 24 ]      But you know, over the years, I noticed something. Most of my best students and the families that stayed in my studio the longest were the ones who came because they heard all about the kind of work I did and the kind of environment I created for students to learn in from somebody else who was already in the studio participating in the programs I offered.
- Over the years, very few families that really committed to the kind of work in the dance world that I do came because they saw an ad or found me on a website or Googled me.
- I'm not sure I want to be Googled. It was the people who had already experienced growing and developing their skills who were already feeling the excitement of conquering a new step or receiving applause in a performance.

The ones who were already convinced I knew what I was doing and that I would continue to do a good job with their kids who went out and told other people they should come too.

These students use their skills in lots of ways that go beyond what we do in the studio too. They use dance in school projects.

[ 9 : 57 ] They use it as community service. Sometimes they get jobs teaching what they know in other studios and other places. They're excited about what they do and they're excited about sharing what they've learned with others.

They're kind of like evangelists for ballet. The word evangelist comes from a Greek word that means a messenger.

Especially a bringer of glad tidings. Like the angels brought to the shepherds when they told them Jesus had been born or the women who ran from the empty tomb to tell of the risen Christ.

I don't know about you but I love telling people good news. Do you love it? When you have good news that you're excited about?

Don't you want to share it? Don't you sometimes just about bust open because you can't keep it inside? You know that feeling when you just have to tell someone.

[ 11 : 02 ] My dear friend Marie just became a grandmother again. Her youngest daughter and son-in-law just had their first baby. A beautiful little boy.

I remember more than 25 years ago sitting on a staircase in my little house that we lived in at the time in the middle of the night on my landline phone with another dear friend as we prayed for hours while Marie was in labor with this daughter.

When she was born our phone call was interrupted. Remember when you could call the operator and have the call interrupted? I know young people don't get that but you could. You would call if you had to get through to somebody you would call the operator and say I need to break into the call at such and such a number and they would break into the call.

Well the call was interrupted so Marie's husband could share the news. Now all these years later on a Wednesday afternoon just a couple weeks ago as I was leaving a church staff lunch Marie texted to ask for prayer for this daughter as she was in labor.

Marie couldn't wait to share the news once the baby was born. Our being born again in Christ and having the Holy Spirit dwelling within us assuring us that we have in us the hope of eternal life in God isn't that at least as exciting as the birth of a new baby?

[ 12 : 49 ] Isn't that at least as exciting as dance students wanting to share their skills to bring joy to people? God has been calling people to share the good news of his great love and mercy since Old Testament days.

In the passage from Isaiah that Terry read earlier we learn about David being a witness to peoples and nations he didn't even know about at the time. But here God isn't just talking about David the passage says come all why spend your labor on what does not satisfy?

David was to be a witness of God's faithful love but the all God was speaking to here the all are the ones who were to summon nations you know not that do not know you and the promises made that they will hasten to you now why would nations hasten to anybody just because they claimed to have a covenant with God and God's faithful love?

why would anybody believe these people that God was calling? The prophet said it was because of the Lord your God not because of us because of the Lord our God the Holy One of Israel for He has endowed you with splendor splendor splendor splendor is magnificence and grandeur impressiveness and luxury the brilliant and glorious appearance of a palace but beyond all that in the Bible splendor is a word that describes the appearance of God's glory the prophet has proclaimed that God's people are endowed with splendor are you among God's people today?

if you do if you are you are endowed with splendor say I am endowed with splendor I am endowed with splendor amen we are all drawn to nice things aren't we?

[ 15 : 15 ] it's really part of our human being to be drawn to things that are beautiful and clean and good it's how God made us part of being made in God's image we don't necessarily have to have a lot but we like what we have to be nice don't we?

people are drawn to those who have God's presence in and around them because God is so beautiful so splendid we are full of God's splendor if we share it people will see it and be drawn to it but there's more to it than that Jesus called his disciples to make disciples these people his disciples had spent three years with Jesus learning with him traveling with him pretty much living with him by watching what Jesus did listening to what Jesus said and working alongside him they had become people who could authentically represent him to the people Jesus sent them to and remember it wasn't just their own

Jewish people who Jesus ministered to and sent them to the nations Jesus' message went beyond his own people to the nations the pagans the Gentiles people who worshipped many gods or no gods or who worshipped people like Caesar who claimed to be gods as they grew in their own discipleship Jesus sent them out to try for themselves he gave them power he had to heal the sick to cast out demons to tell the people they encountered that the kingdom of God was near sometimes they did a better job than others but they were learning and growing just like we are throughout our Christian lives we will continue to move on to the ultimate perfection and love that God calls us to but only if we continue to obey God and go where God sends us like the prophet told the people that they could summon nations that would hasten to them because

God had endowed them with splendor Jesus said he had been given all authority in heaven and on earth and so has told us to go make disciples church part of loving God in fact the primary way we show our love to God is through obeying God we talk a lot about another great thing in this church too besides the great commission it's the great commandment and I know you know it love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul with all your mind and with all your strength and love your neighbor as yourself Jesus commission to go and make disciples requires of us that we demonstrate our love for God and neighbor in all these ways disciple making requires that we have hearts of love for those who do not know

God's love it takes the strength to put aside some of the things we want for ourselves in order to have room in our lives to have time to reach out to others and it takes time in worship in prayer in learning more and more about our faith so we can go deeper and farther in our journey with God as we find others along the way often the reason Christians don't seek out those who are in need of God's love is that they aren't sure exactly what they believe or why they believe it those are who are pretty solid in these basics aren't sure how to share the good news that they have that they know about they're not sure when it's the right time and place so that the person they're sharing with will be able to choose for themselves without feeling embarrassed or somehow coerced into believing something they're not sure they want to believe still others prefer to leave it up to someone else but our united

[ 20 : 23 ] Methodist faith tells us that it is up to us regardless of how we feel about it everyone is called to share God's love with someone to allow God's splendid spirit to move in us and through us to make new disciples and to help them grow in their Christian discipleship even as we're growing in ours the prophet spoke for God through writing for my thoughts are not your thoughts neither are your ways my ways as the heavens are higher than the earth so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world means we have to be disciples first we can only give others what we already have teach others what we already know and if transformation of this sinful world is really going to happen we need to keep on allowing

God to transform us from people who cling to our own thoughts about what our lives should be like to God's thoughts about who God intended for us to be in the first place the eleven disciples Jesus originally told to go to the nations had no idea how far the gospel was going to eventually spread but there's something about making disciples that goes beyond simply telling people good news that we want to share Jesus called people who were disciples already to make more disciples he said to baptize them and teach them to obey everything he had commanded them to do and be remember in another gospel he also said if you love me to his disciples if you love me you will obey my commandments this means we have to know and put into practice what Jesus has taught and modeled for us what will be the result of our obedience to

God of going outside our comfort zones to work on our own discipleship share God's love with others out of God's love for us and make disciples well God promised as the rain and snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and make it bud and flourish so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater so is my word that goes out from my mouth it will not return to me empty but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it yeah yeah you say so God gets what God wants what's in it for me I still don't want to do this you're telling me all about it but I don't want it it sounds like a lot of work and I'm already swamped remember the beginning of the passage why spend money on what is not bread and your labor on what does not satisfy

Jesus said I am the bread of life he who comes to me will never go hungry and he who believes in me will never be thirsty and the prophet wrote your soul will delight in the richest affair your soul will live you will go out with joy and be led forth in peace the mountains and hills will burst into song before you and all the trees of the field will clap their hands instead of the thorn bush will grow the pine tree instead of briars the myrtle will grow this will be for the Lord's renown for an everlasting sign which will not be destroyed friends when we work for the things of this world the kind of gratification our culture tells us is what will satisfy us it only lasts a moment and then we become hungry again hungry for more of what will not last but the things of

God the things of God last for eternity our ongoing practices of discipleship in our own lives lead to the riches and splendor of God's kingdom that can't be matched by anything we can imagine here on earth and part of our discipleship includes making disciples in whatever ways with whatever people God may put in our path the general rule of discipleship in our United Methodist Church is to witness to Jesus Christ in the world and to follow his teaching through acts of compassion justice worship and devotion under the guidance of the Holy Spirit throughout the ages God has called his people to be witnesses of his great love and faithfulness this is what true discipleship is the kind we are called to and what we have been sent by God to call others to so we can all live faithful lives together in peace won't you pray with me now and ask God to rid us of those things that get in the way of being able to do what

[ 26 : 42 ] Jesus has commissioned all his disciples to do dear God I have not loved you with all my heart soul mind and strength I have not completely loved my neighbor as myself I know I'm in a process with you that by your grace you are transforming me into the person you intended me to be help me to transcend my limitations to transcend my fears to transcend those things that keep me from loving you perfectly help me allow your light in me to burn bright for all to see so many will come to you and be nurtured as your disciples as you have made me willing to obey your commands out of love for you in Jesus name I pray amen

God loves us so much God just wants what God has intended for us from the beginning and he doesn't want it just for us he wants it for all people in the world he wants everyone to seek him and to know who he is to love him so that they can receive the love that he's poured out it's not that we loved him first but that he loved us first but the love that God puts in our hearts boy we can reach out to the world with that we can reach to the nations with that isn't it amazing what God has done for us that before we even knew we needed help like this he sent his son to die so we could be saved from our sin and we can say to one another with confidence in the name of Jesus Christ your sins are forgiven glory to God amen we are to bring that message aren't we we sang that song earlier how beautiful how beautiful it is and how beautiful it is when we serve as Christ served amen the point is that we are to grow as Jesus disciples so that we can continue to be making disciples this is the best way the church grows by word of mouth one disciple reaching out to someone and making another disciple even as they are growing in their own discipleship until

Jesus comes back we have a story to tell to the nations a story of peace and love that comes from God as you go go in that peace and love and share it wherever you go may God bless you and keep you amen for to you may where■ know but to no may not AM better