**Matthew 28:16-20**

**The Great Commission**

What does God want you to do as a follower of Jesus?

It’s actually remarkably simple: there’s only 3 things he has asked of us. The first is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. The second is to love our neighbour as ourselves. The third is to go and make disciples.

That’s it. That’s all that God has asked of us.

On 25 November, to mark St. Andrew’s Day, we will launch our new Mission Action Plan; a new guiding document for us as a church as we look towards 2030 and discern what type of church God wants us to build over the next decade and how he wants his people to be here at St. Andrew’s. The new Mission Action Plan is essentially a document that will guide us as we seek to fulfill these three obligations that God puts on us; to love God, to love our neighbour, and to make disciples.

And it’s the last of these that we are thinking about today in the light of our Gospel reading from Matthew, that is often known as the Great Commission.

These are the final words of Jesus to his disciples before he ascended to heaven so, if these are his parting words, they must have ultimate importance for us, right? And what did Jesus say as his final words? He didn’t say, “Go and find a comfortable church and enjoy a load of social events”. He didn’t say, “Go and build a church that is cosy for you and your friends and will never change”. He didn’t say, “Try and do nice things for other people when you can”. He said, “Go and make disciples”.

“Go and make disciples”.

That is what we are about as a church at St. Andrew’s: trying to create a climate of kindness and welcome and compassion and challenge in which people can meet with Jesus and make a decision to follow him, knowing that they will be loved and supported and not judged as we all stumble forward on our spiritual journey together.

“Go and make disciples”.

This is called ‘The Great Commission’, not ‘The Great Suggestion’: it’s not an optional extra for us – it is the very reason for this church’s existence…

Sadly, in the last few decades, many churches have lost sight of this and no longer see it as a priority to make disciples. To grow a friendly community, yes. To enjoy time together, yes. To do good in the local neighbourhood, yes. To feed the poor and support the vulnerable, yes. But to actually go and make disciples? It is not often high on the agenda of most churches.

And as we see a church in decline across the nation and the Western World, it is because we have not engaged with this aspect of Christian living. There are only two Dioceses in the UK that currently are seeing numerical growth: Norwich and London - and both of these Dioceses have very clear mission strategies for making disciples and I hope that, increasingly at St. Andrew’s, we are too.

If we want to move into our next phase of community life with God as a mission-shaped church, we simply must focus ourselves down on creating an environment in which individuals and this whole family can be hallmarked by these three imperatives from God: love God, love your neighbour, and make disciples…

And the early Church was able to do that because they relied on the power of the Holy Spirit to guide them. The first disciples weren’t particularly sophisticated people. They weren’t learned theologians. They weren’t gifted beyond the ordinary. They were just average people who gave themselves over to God and allowed God to work through them to build his church. They were prepared to take risks, they were prepared to step out in faith because they trusted God to do the work through them.

And the more we inherit those characteristics of faith ourselves, the more this church will become what God longs for us to be. In the power of the Holy Spirit, we will develop a deep and real passion for God, and that passion and energy and enthusiasm will spill over into the local community and people will increasingly be led to God themselves through the witness of this church.

“Go and make disciples”. The Great Commission, not the Great Suggestion.

And I have often said that we need to be a culturally useful church, not culturally relevant. If we constantly seek to be relevant – chasing the next fad or next trendy way of doing things, then we will always be one step behind and always slightly behind the times. But being culturally useful is something altogether different. It is about being a church that is helpful for people in their everyday lives as we seek together to find God in our other six days of the week.

And I genuinely do believe that when people come to church for the first time, they are looking for something a bit different; a bit ‘out of the ordinary’ from their everyday lives. Why would people be attracted to church if it is no more than a social group or a concert, or a stage show?

People will be attracted not by what we *do* but by who we *are*. People need to find welcome and kindness and non-judgmentalism here. People need to know that we are far from perfect; we are a community on a journey and that as vulnerable as we are, as far short as we often fall, we are heading in the right direction with God and that is all that matters…

The power of the early Church was that they got this: they knew they weren’t perfect, they didn’t pretend they had all the answers - but they were single-minded in their task and they relied on God to lead them.

“Go and make disciples”. The Great Commission, not the Great Suggestion.

And there’s just three quick points that I want to draw out from this passage today that can help us understand our role before God in making disciples. The first is this:

**1. All authority is given to Jesus, not to us**

This is a crucial point. In this passage, Jesus says, “I have been given all authority in heaven and earth”.

Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, is utterly unique. He had, and he still has, all authority in heaven and earth and this is something that Matthew stresses throughout his Gospel. In 7:29, he says that Jesus “taught as one who had authority”. In 9:6, he claimed that the Son of Man “has authority on earth to forgive sins” and so on.

Jesus has the authority – we don’t.

This is not our church – this is Jesus’ church.

This is not our mission – this is Jesus’ mission.

The work of the Kingdom is not ours – it belongs to Jesus.

And we are merely invited to participate in that as partners with God.

So none of us – me as priest, churchwardens, PCC, congregation members - none of us have the right to say how we “want our church to be”. Our task is always to seek the will of God and, to the best of our ability, work with him to build the type of church that he wants. Your preferences and my preferences are not the issue. The issue is – what does God want St. Andrew’s to be?

“Go and make disciples”. The Great Commission, not the Great Suggestion.

If we forget that the authority belongs to Jesus, then we will be driven by our preferences and we will turn mission into a process of human propaganda as we try to get people to join our Club according to our Rules. Mission must never be that.

All authority is given to Jesus, not us.

**2. We are to make disciples, not converts**

The good news is that you and I are not called to convert anyone to Christianity! What a responsibility that would be!! Only God converts people: he may use us in that process as we tell other people about his love. But it is not your responsibility or mine.

But once people do come to faith, we have been given the responsibility of caring for one another, encouraging one another, and nurturing one another as we journey towards God as disciples and that is something altogether different.

But we must be taking that responsibility seriously, so ask yourself as I ask myself often: what are you doing to encourage other people in the Christian faith? What role are you taking at St. Andrew’s to support discipleship? Are you bringing positivity, kind words and encouragement to this fellowship or are you lost in grumbling, complaining and negativity?

“Go and make disciples”. The Great Commission, not the Great Suggestion.

We can only play our part if we constantly and consistently choose the way of love, the way of encouragement, the way of positivity.

All authority is Jesus’, not ours.

We are called to make disciples, not converts.

Finally,

**3. We are disciples ourselves, not dominators**

As we seek to disciple other people, we do so from a position of weakness, not authority. We do so from humility and vulnerability, not strength.

Let’s be honest, I may have a dog collar on and wear all these fine robes - but I don’t know God any better than you do. Sure, I may have read more books about God, I may have taken more exams about God, I may have written more books than you about God, and I may have all the letters after my name to prove it…but I am on the same journey as you. I have all the same doubts, all the same fears, all the same weaknesses, and I mess up just as much as you do.

We are on this journey together – and we are all amateurs in God, stumbling forward two steps and then back one.

As we make disciples, we do that from a position of recognizing that we are all learners together and so we are then more prepared to learn from others as well as teach them what we know of God for ourselves. And so St. Andrew’s will increasingly become a learning community.

“Go ands make disciples”. The Great Commission, not the Great Suggestion.

This is our responsibility under God: to love him, to love others and to make disciples.

The authority belongs to Jesus, not us. We are not called to convert people, but we are called to walk humbly with one another as we journey deeper into God.

We pray that, as we come closer to unfolding our new Mission Action Plan at the end of this month, we will increasingly become a church of the Great Commission and increasingly move into God’s vision of who we are created to be.