

March 27th 2011: Non-Negotiable: Growing God's Kingdom:
Matt 28:16-20—1 Peter 3:8-17

I remember hearing this story used in a sermon many years ago and it is one that has stuck in my mind ever since. It suggests that when Jesus ascended to glory He was met by the angels who congratulated Him on providing Salvation for mankind. Of opening up the Kingdom of God to all comers through His death and resurrection. Then one of the angels, full of curiosity asked the Lord what plans He had left behind for the spreading of the good news about this salvation. "I have a small group of men and women who have come to believe in me and I have commanded them to do that work. And they are to pass that command on to all who believe their message through the ages. And they too will share and others will believe and the Kingdom will keep on growing until I return".

The angel was quite perplexed by this for he knew the weaknesses of the Lord's small band of followers. All He could see was the potential for immense failure. "OK" he responded, "That may be your first plan but what is your back up plan if that doesn't work. What is your plan B?" "I need no plan B" said Jesus, "for I have commanded and my followers who love me, will obey. And my Spirit will empower them, and my Kingdom will grow."

And indeed it has, and God's Kingdom keeps on growing, and we are all part of that if we are followers of Jesus. For to each one of us has been given the privilege of growing God's Kingdom. It is a non-negotiable for the believer but it is much more than that. It is a natural part of who we are as the family of God. Whether we treat it as a priority or not we can't avoid the fact that deep inside every Christian there is this feeling of wanting God's Kingdom to grow and increase. Of wanting others to become Christians too.

Some are so moved by this feeling that they make sharing their faith a daily priority. They give their all to talking about Jesus. They pray passionately for the Holy Spirit to give them power, boldness, and opportunity—and the Holy Spirit does. And God works mightily through them as His Kingdom grows.

There are also some who follow Jesus, who seem hardly moved by this feeling at all. They have made a confession of Christ but from their lifestyle you would hardly know it. They reveal no passion to share the Gospel and they are so much the centre of their lives that the growth of God's Kingdom

and the fate of those who die without knowing Jesus is hardly a ripple in their thinking. Such must truly disappoint Jesus.

Now somewhere between these two groups exist the majority of Christians. Those who have so obviously been given the calling and gift of an evangelist by the Holy Spirit, and those who desire deep down in their hearts to do their part for the growth of the Kingdom, yet are not really sure what they can do or where they fit into the scheme of things. People like the lady whose story is told in the Participaper today. And I reckon that many of us looked at that story and felt a kinship with her. A sense of what she did by her manner and by just having her Bible with her one day, is also the type of things we do, in the hope that God will use us as He used her.

So this desire for God's Kingdom to grow, that is found to some degree in each believer, is part of the response to the task of Growing His Kingdom that Jesus has given His church. But just having that desire, whether it's so weak that it's hardly ever thought about, or really strong, is not enough.

1. We need to cultivate that desire to see Christ's Kingdom grow until it becomes such a passion in us that we find ourselves thinking about it, and praying about it, everyday
2. We need to understand what Jesus really meant when He said, "Go and make disciples of all nations".
3. We need to know what we should be doing right now so that, by the power of God the Spirit, we will be effective Kingdom Growers.

- **FIRST: Cultivate The Desire To See Christ's Kingdom Grow.**

You need to Feed that small desire in your heart until you so want Christ's Kingdom to come here on earth that you are wanting to be involved in the process. A feeding that comes about through:-

INTEREST AND INVOLVEMENT.

We need to deliberately increase the interest we are taking in the work of God's Spirit throughout the world. God is at work and we should want to know about it. Everytime a Missionary comes to share their story, be there to hear them. When a fellow believer in this congregation has a story of how God has worked through them, listen to it and encourage

them. Take time to talk to those who go to impact Africa, to Cambodia, into the local schools. Be interested in the work God is doing through His people.

Be involved. Opportunities abound to be somewhere in the name of Jesus right here in this fellowship. You may never know about that card you dropped into that letterbox, or that person you smiled at last April at the Lion's Fair, or the visitor to church you had around for a meal, or the person in your street that you regularly take bread to. It will take your time, but in the end it is time that the Lord has first given you. And when the chance to be more than just there for Jesus comes, it is such a blessing.

Last Thursday our breakfast club team all went over to the school to help with the twice a year Big Breakfast the school puts on. There were 6 of us there and it was noticeable who we were. We were involved and ready for God to use us. One of the teachers we have had a bit to do with over the years was there. She is not a Christian at all but often she talks with me about the sign that Geoff changes every month outside the church. On Thursday she told me how great this sign was, and how she wished she could take her class of kids over to the sign and explain it to them—and how she hopes I will do that with the kids who come here, even if she can't. I felt so blessed by God to be on the end of that conversation because I was there. Because I was involved. And it prompted me to pray for the growth of God's Kingdom one day in that lady's heart.

- **SECOND: Understand what Jesus really meant when He said, "Go and make disciples of all nations".**

The passage that I am referring to is of course the one from Matt 28 that Julie read to us. Matt 28:18-19 says:-

¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,.....

What follows relates to the specific details of baptism and teaching that Jesus demands, but it is what Jesus says first that is important for us to understand.

The occasion follows the resurrection and precedes the ascension of Jesus. He is talking to His disciples who represent His church on earth. The disciples of Jesus throughout the ages till He returns. So the command He gives is for us as his Body here in Craigie.

It comes with all the authority of Jesus behind it, and that is total authority over all the powers of man and of the spirit world. He gives us both the right and the power to carry out His command.

And this command is to go, and the basic meaning of that word is that it involves action. The command to go is for us as a body of believers, and it will only be fulfilled to its full potential when each individual believer is in some way active in that going. The Body of Christ can still GO without the support of everyone, but the blessing of that Going will be less than it could have been.

The purpose of this Going is TO MAKE DISCIPLES. Note that Jesus doesn't command us to make converts. To make believers. That's the work of the Holy Spirit. He calls His people to make disciples out of converts, and that process of making one another disciples never stops. For a disciple is one who is following Jesus, living for Jesus, and growing every day in their understanding of Jesus.

That is our task as a church and it applies to those non-Christians who we witness to and who the Spirit draws into the Kingdom. We are to help them develop into disciples. And it also applies to those we fellowship with, for we are to encourage one another and help one another to be the disciples that Jesus intends us to be.

Jesus knew that converts needed a family to be part of that would help them grow because they were helping each other to grow. As a church we have this responsibility to make our fellowship a place where discipleship of each other is a priority, but it's a priority not for our sake, but for the sake of those who the Lord wants to draw into our midst. Our greatest concern should be for those who God brings into our midst. Everyone of us is responsible in some way for them. If we do not see them as a priority, then we become inward focused and God will send no new people our way. In fact, the number of new people the Lord gives to us as a fellowship, may well be a sign of how good we are at discipling one another, and how ready

we are to be disciplers of others. For discipling is loving, encouraging, and teaching by word and example the way of living like Jesus.

- THIRD: Know what we should be doing right now so that, by the power of God the Spirit, we will be effective Kingdom Growers.

The Apostle Peter talks about this in 1 Peter 3. He mentions in v8-9 the environment that we should seek to create in our fellowship. An environment that will attract others and not turn them away:- 1 Pet 3:8-9 (CEV)

⁸Finally, all of you should agree and have concern and love for each other. You should also be kind and humble. ⁹Don't be hateful and insult people just because they are hateful and insult you. Instead, treat everyone with kindness. You are God's chosen ones, and he will bless you.

And then in v15 he gives us two very important things we must do if we want to be effective Kingdom Growers, whether we are amongst the non-churched or the churched.

¹⁵ But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

I especially like the way the CEV puts it:-

¹⁵Honor Christ and let him be the Lord of your life. Always be ready to give an answer when someone asks you about your hope.

Honour Christ and let Him be the Lord of your life. That's where it all begins. Is He Lord of your life, or are you. Is your ego Lord...your abilities Lordyour attitudes and opinions Lord.....Your money, time, possessions?

Then there's the preparation of the mind. Always be ready to give an answer—whether it is to the non-churched person or to your fellow Christian—for the hope that is in you. How much effort do you put into being prepared?

One of our home groups at present is doing a series on how to answer questions about their Faith. That's part of being prepared. Other groups are

studying that small little booklet of daily readings we gave out. That's also being prepared. Reading God's word daily is being prepared. Trying to get the most out of a sermon is being prepared. Talking to another believer about the things of Jesus is being prepared....The list goes on, but the key ingredient is doing. You need to be doing something to be prepared, because you never know when the opportunity to share may come.

(Colin Attwood's testimony)

There is no doubt that God wants us all to be involved in growing His Kingdom. It is definitely a non-negotiable. But though we all want to see God's kingdom increase, we tend to feel a little fearful about our part in it. In Luke 12:32 Jesus gave us this encouragement:-

³² "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

We may well have the responsibilities for being God's Kingdom Growers here on earth but the wonderful news is that the Father has already given us the Kingdom, and one day we will enjoy being part of it with millions of others in glory. So let's be encouraged to know that whatever the cost of seeking to grow God's Kingdom here in the now is, the wonder of the treasure still to come and the joy we will then see on the face of Jesus, will make it all worthwhile.