

The “Why” Behind The “What”
Matthew 28:16-20
May 5, 2024

In 2009, a business consultant and author named Simon Sinek gave what has become one of the most-watched TED talks of all time. He began with a question: what it is that sets successful businesses or individuals or causes apart from others. He used three examples. Example one: Why is Apple so much more innovative than other technology companies? There are plenty of companies that are qualified to make digital devices, but few others have the market share that Apple does. Example two: How did Martin Luther King Jr. come to be the face and the voice of the civil rights movement? There were plenty of others who suffered the injustices of segregation and discrimination, and many of them were also great orators, yet no one else seemed to capture the essence of the cause the way he did. Example three: How did the Wright brothers succeed in mastering manned flight? There were other groups pursuing the same goal, and many of them were better funded, yet none of them achieved the same results. Why?

Well, according to Simon Sinek the answer to the question lies in the question itself – the question of why. People or organizations who are successful don’t just know what they do; they have a clear and compelling understanding of why they do it. And, they are able to communicate that why in a way that connects

with the desires, needs, and passions of the people they are trying to reach. As Sinek puts it, “People don’t buy what you do. They buy why you do it.” Before you can convince people to connect with your what, you must first inspire them with your why.

I am not a business expert, so I will leave it to you and to others to evaluate Simon Sinek’s theory, but for just a moment let’s apply his idea to the church – both the church in general and our church in particular. It’s not hard to figure out what we do. Here in the sanctuary we have a printed worship bulletin. If you are in the CLC or are watching us online, there is a digital bulletin. With that bulletin in hand, you can scroll past the order of service, or flip it over on the back, and you will see a list of activities that are happening in the near future. There’s a children’s musical happening today. There is a business meeting later this week. There are Bible studies on various days. There’s a grief support group meeting on Sundays. Beyond the bulletin you can go the website and look at the church calendar and see an even longer list of activities and events. Quite honestly, there is something happening on almost any day of the week at almost any time of the year. That is what we do, and anybody can see it for themselves.

But I can promise you that list of activities by itself is not going to change anyone’s life. They are all good activities, and I hope a large group of people participates in all of them, but the

world is not transformed, and the kingdom of God is not made visible by the “what.” For that to happen, we must know our “why.” We must first be captivated by, and then we must be able to communicate to others the underlying purpose that gives rise to all this flurry of activity. And the purpose, the why, is not necessarily to build a bigger or busier church, though that will most likely happen. There is something more fundamental at stake. What is the “why” behind our “what?”

The good news is that we don’t have to go looking far to answer that question. It is stated clearly in Scripture – and not just once. The underlying, driving purpose that defines the church is stated no less than four times. It is worded slightly differently in each case, but the essence is the same in every instance. In Luke 24:45-48, the resurrected Christ says to his disciples: *“Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. Christ says we are sent into the world to be witnesses of His message of repentance and resurrection.*

A second time appears in John 20:21-23. *“Again, Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you!’ As the Father has sent me, I am sending*

you.” And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.’” There again the emphasis lies on the fact that we are sent by Christ into the world to bear witness to him and his gospel.

A third time appears in Acts 1:7-8, *“He said to them: ‘It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’”* Once more we are told that we are commissioned by Jesus to go into the world to bear witness to Him.

Of course, the best known and most memorable statement of our purpose is the one we have read this morning. It comes sometime after the resurrection, though the timeline is hard to determine with any precision. In the prior verses, the resurrected Christ on Easter Sunday morning tells the women to deliver a message to the disciples: they are to tell them to go to Galilee, which is where so much of Jesus’ ministry happened. They are to go to a prearranged location on a mountain, though we aren’t told specifically which mountain. There they meet the resurrected Christ for themselves, and he delivers these famous words: *“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 to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

We have traditionally called this the Great Commission. While that is our label for this text, it speaks to its centrality to our purpose. These words lay out why we exist. All the “whats” we do derive from this why. All the activities on our calendar should be pointing back to this.

Very briefly, let’s notice a few important things about this commission. First, notice its origin. Here’s a hint: it’s not us. The origin of the why is Jesus. In the other three examples we looked at, Jesus said, “I am sending you to be my witnesses.” In this case, Jesus fleshes it out even more and says, “All authority has been given to me. Therefore, I am telling you to go do this.” That’s a huge claim for him to make: I have all the authority in the cosmos. No mere human being could ever say such a thing – or, if they did, you would have good reason to be worried about that person’s mental health. So, either Jesus is a deranged man with delusions of grandeur, or he is the Son of the living God who has the authority to call his church into action. Jesus clearly believed the latter, and as his church so do we.

So here' the critical point: our purpose, our "why" doesn't come from us. This is not the result of a carefully crafted strategic plan or a good branding campaign. We are sent by the One who has all authority in heaven and earth. This is his calling upon our lives.

Next, notice its obligation: we are commanded to go. That seems obvious enough. You can't be sent if you don't go, but let's not overlook the significance of that imperative statement: Go! Where we go and how we go and how far we go is not spelled out for us in any detail – that is left to be worked out under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the specifics of our time and place and resources. Some will go across the world and others will go across the street. Some will go to the work place and some will go to the homeplace. But the call of the church is to go. This means that what we know and experience and share here in this place is not meant to be contained within the walls of this building. The Lordship of Christ is not just for us; it is also for others. In fact, it is for the whole world.

In our pluralistic world we are told that it is fine for us to believe whatever we want as long we keep it to ourselves. Religion is meant to be private, we are told. But the call of Christ says otherwise. We are called to take Christ and his gospel to the unbelieving world. Once again, the ways we do this have to be

worked out under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, but there can be no hesitancy in our minds about this fact: what Christ has given us is meant to be offered to the whole world. The gospel is not simply one option among many others that people can choose from if it suits their purposes. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the one and only source of hope, the one and only source of life, the one and only source of salvation.

Finally, notice its outcome: Jesus' desire is that we make disciples. He is not necessarily interested in attracting a crowd, though often he did. He is not necessarily interested in making people curious, though sometimes they will be. He is not primarily interested in offering people helpful life lessons, though the things he taught have repeatedly throughout history proven to be the wisest and truest words ever spoken. Jesus' desired outcome is to make disciples. That is to say, Jesus calls to himself people who have been born again by the Holy Spirit and who are ready to take the lifelong journey of being conformed to his image.

That call, that outcome, has implications for any and all of us, no matter where we are on the journey. If we are an unbeliever, the call of Christ is to come to faith in him – to know that he is not just an interesting guy from history but that he is in fact the crucified and risen Lord and the only savior of humanity. If we are an apathetic believer – that is to say, if we are someone who has

intellectually accepted the idea that He exists and his risen from the dead, but we've not ever allowed that truth to change us – well, the call of Christ is to allow him to move from our head to our heart, so that we become truly captivated by Him and begin to be changed by Him. If we are a passive believer – that is to say, we are someone who is content to simply consume the spiritual resources of the church but who feel no calling to give and serve – well, then the call of Christ to start putting our faith into action and serve His kingdom with our hands, our feet, and our resources. If we are a believer caught in a habitual sin – that is to say, we have confessed Christ as Lord, but we are living in a pattern that we know does not please him or honor him or obey him – then the call of Christ is to repent and turn back to him and follow him on the path of obedience. If we are a mature believer – and by that I don't simply mean those who are more advanced in years; I mean those have attained some level of spiritual growth – the call of Christ is to recognize that we have never learned everything there is to learn, we have never grown as far as we need to grow, and we have never served everyone we need to serve. There is always another step of trust to take.

In short, discipleship involves every aspect of our lives at every step on our journey. Jesus doesn't want fans or advocates or lobbyists or curious onlookers: Jesus wants disciples – people who

are ever on the way of becoming more like him. That is the outcome.

So here is our why. It's origin is in the authority of Christ. It's obligation is for us to go. And it's intended outcome is to make disciples. Whatever our what may be, that is always our why. That is why our unchanging mission statement as a church is *Sharing Christ and Building Believers*. It is always a fair conversation to ask whether or not we are doing that faithfully, and we must always remain humbly open to the need to repent and return when veer away from that purpose, but there should never be any doubt in our minds that this why we do what we do. If we lose sight of that, it doesn't matter busy we are or how big we grow. The only thing that matters is whether we are allowing Christ to work through us to make disciples.

The meal we share this morning is there to call us back to this basic fact. When we share this bread and cup, we do so to remember that Christ our Lord has called us to himself. Through his life and death and resurrection he has restored us to fellowship with our heavenly Father. When everything else is said and done, this is the only thing that matters. Through Christ, God is at work to reconcile this fallen world to himself. This meal is given to remind us of the salvation he provided, and, in so doing, to nourish

us for the work he has given us to do. Let us eat and remember and give thanks.