

“Making an Impact”

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Matthew 28:16-20 • Acts 1:1-8

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As many of you know we just got back last week from our annual family vacation. This year we were blessed to be able to travel to places in our country that are not at all like south Texas, so I thought I would share a few pictures with you.

We spent some time in the Black Hills of South Dakota where we visited Mount Rushmore and waited in traffic jams caused by herds of bison walking in the road. Yellowstone National Park, of course, is an amazing place and three days was certainly not enough time to see everything.

But what I want to talk about this morning is something that occurred to me while we were in Glacier National Park in northwest Montana. One of the things that is striking about Glacier Park is the sharp, jagged mountain peaks, many of which really are only a couple of feet wide at the top.

The other thing that you will notice in this photo is that instead of being the typical V-shape, the valleys are more of a U-shaped bowl. What we learned is that both of these unique features are the result of glaciers. During the last ice age, these valleys were filled completely by glaciers. In fact, geologists believe the ice was as much as 4000 feet thick. If that's true, that means those valleys were completely filled with ice, all the way to the mountain peaks. It was the tremendous weight and the movement of those glaciers that carved out those smooth valleys and sharp peaks.

Since Presbyterians have often been referred to as “the frozen chosen,” it seems to me that maybe *we* can learn a lot from glaciers about what God is calling us to do with our lives. And so the first thing I want us to see is that glaciers do what God created them to do. They don't fight against their purpose, they simply do it.

In our reading from Matthew 28, Jesus says, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of

all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

What Jesus is saying to us is that we were created for a purpose. We are here for a reason. And what is our purpose? What is the meaning of life? I think the best summary of what the Bible teaches about our purpose in life is the very first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. It says, “What is the chief end of man?” In other words, what is the most important purpose in our lives? The answer is, “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” You and I were created primarily to worship and glorify God.

Here Jesus tells us that a big part of worshipping and glorifying God is to show others how to worship and glorify God. That's what Jesus means when he tells us to make disciples. Each of us individually and all of us as a congregation are called to teach other people what it means to be a follower of Jesus and we do that best together in community with other followers of Jesus.

An important aspect of this passage is lost in our English translations. Our version says, “Go, therefore, and make disciples.” This verse has been used to send people into the mission field for centuries, which is not a bad thing. But the original Greek is a little bit different. A more literal translation would be something like, “As you are going, make disciples...” The idea is that we are called to teach people how to love and follow and worship Jesus along the way. Wherever God has called us in life is where we should be making disciples.

We can't say, “I can't go to Africa this year so I won't be able to make disciples. Discipleship is something we are called to do all the time wherever we are. In our reading from Acts, Jesus told his disciples that they would be

his witnesses along the way, everywhere they went – Jerusalem, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. They were witnesses, doing what they were called to do, as they were going.

The second thing we can learn from glaciers is that they aren't in a hurry. They do what they do according to God's timing. In our reading from Acts, Jesus' disciples were in a hurry for him to conquer the Romans and give Israel its independence. But Jesus tells them, "it's none of your business when things will take place. Instead, you concentrate on what *you* were called to do, which is to tell people about me."

Like a glacier, often times we need to realize that God is in control and that His timing is perfect. Our efforts to control other people and circumstances are really a form of idolatry. We are saying that we don't trust God to take care of us. And yet he has promised in Romans 8:28 that "for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." That also means that God, by His Holy Spirit, provides everything we need to accomplish our purpose. Jesus says in today's passage, "you will receive *power* when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." That's what he meant when he said, "I am with you always."

The third thing for us to learn from glaciers is that they have a significant impact on the world around them. The landscape is dramatically changed as the glaciers move. The mountain lakes we saw that were carved by glaciers are nearly 300 feet deep. In the same way, the world around us should provide evidence that we were here.

When you look at the history of the world over the past 2000 years, Christianity has indeed had a significant impact. The Church has spread to every continent with millions of followers of Christ. The rise of science as a legitimate study was only able to take place within a Christian worldview and its assumptions about the nature and meaning of life. No other religion or philosophy could have created the scientific method, which basically involves taking apart the natural world to see how it works. The ancient Greeks, for example, thought that the physical world was evil. The most intelligent and best educated Greeks, therefore, spent their time

studying philosophy. They wouldn't waste their time studying something like the material world. Some religions believed that the gods inhabited the natural world. You certainly wouldn't go around dissecting something if you thought it would make the gods angry.

Instead, the early scientists were all Christians. Their biblical worldview told them that because God had created the world in an orderly way, then studying the way the world worked was a way of understanding something of the mind of God. For those early scientists, science was a form of worship. For example, the 17th century astronomer Johannes Kepler, who is considered one of the key figures in the scientific revolution, wrote this prayer in one of his notebooks: "I give you thanks, Creator and God, that you have given me this joy in thy creation, and I rejoice in the work of your hands. See, I have now completed the work to which I was called. In it I have used the talents you have lent to my spirit."

Science is not the only area where Christianity has made a significant impact. The idea of the university, a place where truth can be learned, was the direct result of Christianity. Most of the early universities in this country were founded as theological seminaries. Our American Democracy was born out of the Christian faith as well. Healthcare is another area that owes much to the Christian faith. For many years hospitals were primarily built and run by churches as a distinctly Christian ministry.

So the question for us today is this: When people see our community are they able to see the difference that Christians have made. More importantly, though, are we making a significant impact on our world today? If First Presbyterian Church went out of business, would anybody in Corpus Christi notice? Are *you* personally impacting the world around you for Christ?

I think this brings us back to the first point, that our highest purpose in life is to worship and to make disciples for Christ. John Piper, the preaching pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis has said that missions is not the ultimate goal of the church, worship is. Missions exist because there are places where worship doesn't.

So what does this mean for us today? First of all, I think it's clear that each of us should be worshippers. That means striving to glorify God in everything we do and it means making a commitment to be here in worship every week, if possible. Even if you've been a Christian for

decades, find someone who can help and encourage you in your walk with Christ. Second, we need to take seriously Jesus' command to teach others how to worship and glorify God. Find one or two people that *you* can teach and encourage, intentionally helping them in *their* Christian walk. Third, trust that God is in control and that His timing is perfect. Work on giving up that desire to control other people or circumstances. And finally, look for ways to impact the world around you for Christ. It might mean going to a far away place, but more importantly, be the hands and feet of Christ along your way, right where God has put you. Help us find ways as a congregation to make a difference in our neighborhood, around the country and indeed to the ends of the earth. In other words, lets be like glaciers.

Amen