

“Go”

Matthew 28:16-20

It is time to leave. Time to begin saying your “good-byes”. You have a lump in your throat as you realize that you are not sure when you will be back. The lump in your throat grips even tighter as you acknowledge the reality that you may never see them again – at least not on this earth. You swallow hard as it hits you that you may not be with them again until heaven. You have to leave. You need to say good-bye. What do you say? What words do you choose? Is there anything that remains unsaid? You try to slow your mind down and choose your words very carefully.

Jesus was about to say good-bye to the disciples. He told them where to meet Him. They were obedient and came to the mountain where Jesus had said He would meet them. Jesus knows that His Father in heaven is about to bring Him home to glory. Jesus

knows that in just a few moments His cloud awaited Him. A cloud that would lift Him right before their eyes and take him into the heavens. The seconds were ticking away. Jesus was about to speak to them. He knew, and the disciples were about to realize, that these would be His last words to them. What would He say?

Let's pick up the story in Matthew 28:16-20. READ

Earlier in His teaching Jesus had reminded them of the two greatest commandments. We consider it as one and call it the Great Commandment: to love God and to love our neighbor. You remember that Jesus told them that all of the law and the prophets are fulfilled in this commandment. But now Jesus is giving them yet another strategic command. Jesus had fulfilled the purpose for which His Father in Heaven had sent Him to earth. Now Jesus was entrusting this divine mission to His followers. Jesus was putting the purpose of God for redeeming a lost and broken world into the hands of His followers. As Jesus left this earth to return to the

glory of Heaven He was unleashing this fledgling church. And what were His final words? He said to them, “Go”.

This new commandment flows out of the first – the Great Commandment. This new commandment has come to be known as the Great Commission. Jesus said, “Go” and as you are going – make disciples. The Great Commission to go and make disciples can only be fulfilled if one is living out the mandate of the Great Commandment to love God and to love our neighbor. One can not go into all the world and make disciples unless one is first loving God and neighbor. And with this command, Jesus was commissioning the disciples to go into all the world and make disciples.

It is absolutely essential for us to understand that this commissioning did not end with the eleven disciples. It is a commission that extends to all who believe in the name of Jesus and become His follower. Don’t just take my word for it. Let’s

look at the words of Jesus in John 17. This is His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane just before He is arrested and tried and then taken to the Cross. Jesus first prays for Himself, then He prays for His disciples, and then He prays for all believers. Let's look more closely. In verse 18 Jesus says, "As You sent Me into the world, I have sent them into the world." Okay, here Jesus is sending the eleven disciples. (We know that the original twelve disciples have now become eleven because Judas has betrayed Jesus.) And then in verse 20 Jesus goes on to say, "My prayer is not for them alone (referring to the eleven disciples). I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message ...". Here Jesus is including each of us. Jesus is praying for every one who will believe in Him as they begin to share in this commission to go into all the world and make disciples.

Last week we looked at the second part of this command – to make disciples. But this morning our focus is on the command to "Go".

Let's go back to the original language to make sure we understand

what Jesus intended when He said “Go”. And by the original language I am not referring to the King James Version. Jesus spoke in Aramaic, the language of Palestine but His words were written down and recorded in Greek. The word that Jesus used to express this command to “Go” has a couple of very closely related meanings. Let’s take a look at them.

One meaning of the word used by Jesus when He commissioned us to “Go” is to pursue the journey one has begun. When we begin to follow Jesus, when we ask Him to forgive our sins and we invite Him into our lives, and we surrender our will and desires to His will and purpose for us – we have started on a journey. And when Jesus tells us to “Go” He is telling us to stay the course; to carry on; to keep on keeping on; to pursue the journey with Jesus to the very end when we are welcomed into His presence.

A second meaning is closely related – when Jesus commissioned us to “Go” He was commanding us to order our lives around this

journey He was calling us to. To be a Christian means that we are a follower of Jesus. He is the teacher. To be His “disciple” means that we are His apprentice; His student; His follower. And to follow Jesus we must walk with Him. Now we know that Jesus is not physically present in the world today. So, how can we follow Jesus if He sits at the right hand of God the Father in Heaven?

First, Jesus promised to send us the Holy Spirit so that we would not be alone. In Galatians 5:25 the Apostle Paul tells us that we should “keep in step with the Spirit”. As disciples of Jesus, we have the Spirit of God living within us. To fulfill Jesus’ command to “Go” we are to live in such a way that we are keeping in step with the Spirit of God that is within us.

We also have the living Word of God; the words of Jesus. The Bible tells us the story of Jesus and how He wants us to live in this world. In Psalm 119 the Psalmist wrote, “I have hidden Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You (verse 11)”. In verse 105 of that same chapter, the Psalmist goes on to say, “Your word

is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” We fulfill the command of Jesus to “Go” as we hide the words of God found in the Bible deep into our heart so that they give us strength not to have to sin. We fulfill this command from Jesus to “Go” as we allow the word of God in the Bible to bring the Light of Jesus to the path we walk in a dark world.

So what did Jesus really mean when he commanded us, or commissioned us, to “Go”? Jesus was telling us to get our lives in order. He is telling us to build our lives around Him, around following Him and obeying His commands to love God and to love our neighbor. Jesus is telling us that as we go through life loving God and neighbor, He wants us to make disciples. As we become more like Jesus, He is telling us to help others become more like Him. Jesus tells us that this is our purpose for living. He wants us to pursue this until our last breath. And for as long as we have breath, He wants us to build our lives around these commandments

to love God and neighbor, and to “Go” into all the world and make disciples.

Last words – chosen carefully – why “GO”? These are His last words. They were chosen carefully. But why did Jesus tell us to “Go”? As we look at the Big Story – at His Story, we can see that the command to “Go” was not new with Jesus. Let me show you as we go all the way back to the beginning in Genesis.

In Genesis 1:28, in the very beginning, as God created the earth He turned to Adam and Eve and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth ...” To fill the earth one must “Go” to and fro across the earth.

In Genesis 9:1 God is speaking as Noah and his family are leaving the ark. God tells Noah to “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth ...” Again, God is telling His people to “Go” into all the world.

But as we go to Genesis 11 we see that God's people had stopped. It was as if they had taken the wheels off the wagons. Let's look more deeply into this story. These people had been moving eastward, filling the earth as God had commanded. But in verse 2 it says that they found a place they apparently liked and they stopped there. And as they stopped they made plans to build to build a city. And in their city they were going to make a tower that "reaches to the heavens". As we read this chapter it says that these people all spoke one language. And their unity of language and purpose seems to indicate that they were advancing the technology of their day. It says that they used bricks instead of stone, and that they were now using tar as mortar.

But as God looked down, God was not pleased. What was the problem? God had commanded them to "Go", not to build a monument to themselves. So it says in verse 8 that "... the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth ...". In the next verse it

says “From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.”

God’s command for His people was to “Go”. They stopped when God said “Go”. So if they weren’t going to “Go” obediently, God scattered them so that His purposes would be fulfilled.

God continued to command His people to “Go”. In Genesis 12:1 God told Abraham to “Go to the land I will show you”. God told him to pack up and start walking and keep walking and that He God would let Abraham know when he had arrived.

The command to “Go” did not begin with Jesus. It goes back to the very beginning of creation. It has always been the heart of God for His people to “Go”. We see this in Isaiah 6:8. The prophet Isaiah has a vision where he sees God seated on a Throne. And then Isaiah hears the Lord ask, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” The prophet Isaiah is so gripped by this question that

he says, “Here am I. Send me.” These verses are so compelling that they are used in the ordination of our pastors. It is as if God looks around the world and He sees the brokenness of people living without His love and grace and mercy. And from the depths of His heart God is still asking, “Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?”

And so in His final words to the disciples, Jesus told them to “Go”. But we need to next ask the question, “Go” where? I think we find our answer to this question as we again look at Jesus. Where did Jesus go? Who did Jesus go to?

The answers to these questions are most intriguing. In Matthew 9 we see Jesus personally inviting Matthew to become a disciple. Matthew was not a religious leader. He was not a respected public figure. Matthew was a tax collector. He was a Jew that extorted money from his fellow citizens and then turned over a portion of it to the occupying Roman authorities. Matthew had become a rich

man in that he abused his authority to collect taxes. He took more than the Romans required and kept the rest for himself. And he was a hated and despised man for this. But ... amazingly Jesus walked up to Matthew and said, "Follow Me". And Matthew did. He left his piles of money and followed Jesus. Matthew was so excited about being with Jesus that he invited his friends over to his house to have dinner with Jesus. In Matthew 9:10-11 the Pharisees – the religious leaders – saw Jesus having dinner with all of the wrong people. He was eating at the house of a tax collector and they were joined by other tax collectors and "sinners" (verse 11). How did Jesus respond? Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick."

Jesus welcomed the prostitutes as they found forgiveness; as they came to cry over His feet with their tears of thankfulness. Jesus went to the beggars and the blind and the lame and the lepers and the deaf and the dying and even to the prisoners. He went out seeking to save those who were lost.

Where do we “Go”? We should simply try to be like Jesus. We worship on Sunday with God’s people so that we can become more like Jesus. We enjoy fellowship and good times with God’s people so that we can become more like Jesus and help one another be more like Jesus. We become more like Jesus as we love God and love our neighbor. But as we become more like Jesus, Jesus wants us to remember His commission to “Go”. And where do we “Go”? Strengthened by our worship and fellowship with God’s people, we go to the lost and hurting and broken just like Jesus did. The problem with so many churches in our country today is that in most churches the longer one has been a Christian the fewer friendships they have with those that most desperately need Jesus.

When we first become a Christian, we are so excited at the transformation that is taking place in our life. In this excitement we are uninhibited and we rush to tell all of our family and friends about Jesus and the change He is bringing into our heart. And over

time we become a part of church life. We get to know Christian friends and get busy in church stuff until we are immersed in a Christian bubble. What are the signs that we might be living in a Christian bubble? This happens when we begin to think that evangelism, telling others about Jesus and inviting others to Jesus, is a program of the church primarily accomplished through events. We find ourselves in this bubble when we begin to think that church is something that we invite people to rather than something we are. We wonder why people don't want to go to church instead of living to take the church to them. We find ourselves in this Christian bubble when we get more excited about taking an overseas mission trip and have little or no interest in going across the room or across the street to ask if our neighbor knows Jesus. We are in danger of being trapped in this Christian bubble when we get excited about going overseas or across town to build something for Jesus but we never take the time to ask those who sit out and watch us build if they would like to know our Jesus.

Something is badly broken if the longer we have been a part of the church, the fewer friendships and relationships we have with those that most desperately need Jesus. This was not the spirit or the heart of the pioneers who went before us and birthed the Deer Flat Church. We must rediscover God's commission upon us as a Deer Flat family – a call to “Go”; to build our lives around this commission. It is a call for us to go into all the world loving God and neighbor as we make disciples; as we help others be more like Jesus.

But, “Go” and do what? In Matthew 28:16-20, Jesus tells us to do this as we go:

- Remember that we go in His authority. This is not in and of ourselves. We go in the matchless name of Jesus, as His ambassador.
- Baptize new believers in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Baptism symbolizes our new life in Jesus. Our old life dies as we find new life in being like Jesus. In Christ

we become a new person. The old person we used to be is gone. We are now a new creation – a new person – as we become more like Jesus.

- Teach them to know and love the words of Jesus. Teach them to obey the words of Jesus. Teach them to obey His commands. And what are His most important commandments? The Great Commandment is that we are to teach them to love God and neighbor. The Great Commission is that we are to teach them to join us as we “Go” into all the world making disciples.

This is the heart of the Deer Flat family. It is not about a preacher and it is not about a program. It is not about comparisons of first, biggest and best. It is about Jesus. It’s about being like Jesus and helping others be like Jesus. Look at the history of the Deer Flat family. In our best days we were blessed with the presence and power of God because first and foremost we simply wanted to be like Jesus. In our best days as a family we were blessed with the

presence and power of the Spirit of God because those who went before us built their lives around helping others become more like Jesus. This is the command of God to “Go”.

My last question of the morning – what changes when we go?

And by the way, I want to thank our Life Groups for taking these questions and reflecting on them together as you meet each week.

I am trying to offer the outline for each of these sermons in such a way that you can also use these same questions as you meet together.

But back to my final question, what is it that changes when we “Go” as Jesus commanded or commissioned us to do?

1. The first thing that changes is me. I change. I begin to order my life around the call of God to be more like Jesus and help others be more like Jesus. I honor family and I am faithful to my work but as I do my life is shaped around this ongoing

pursuit to be more like Jesus and to help others be more like Jesus. Jesus has changed my heart and is transforming my life. As I walk His way, I am continuing on the journey that He has laid out for me to walk. I find that this is not only the heart of the Deer Flat family, it is also my purpose for life.

2. What else changes as I “Go”? Those who are closest to me. My journey and my joy begins to rub off on them. My purpose and my passion begins to seep through into my closest relationships. When we live a joyless and fruitless life even our own children – our flesh and blood – grow tired of playing church and they walk away. They don’t want to give their life just going through the motions as they perceive that so many in the church are doing. The old maxim that more is caught than taught is so true. What we do speaks so much more loudly than what we say. Who we are is the most powerful influence on those closest to us. When our highest purpose in life is to be like Jesus and to help others be like

Jesus, God fills our life with a Fruit and Joy. When we live our lives looking for ways to “Go” to those that most desperately need His love and mercy, we become people that others want to be around and want to be like. And those most powerfully impacted will be those closest to us – our family and dearest friends.

3. What else changes as we “Go”? My neighbor. The world around me begins to change as my love for Jesus begins to infect my neighbor. As we live our life to be more like Jesus and as we seek out relationships with broken and forgotten people, we become contagious. Our neighbor who was never interested in church and religion and denominations, begins to show an interest in Jesus. They never wanted to come to church on Sunday but they begin to show a growing interest in being with those people at the Deer Flat Church because we are so focused on being like Jesus. We don’t talk about our pastor, we don’t talk about our programs. All we want to

talk about is Jesus. And they want to hear more. They want to know more about Jesus. And eventually, it is inevitable, so many of them are going to want to become more like Jesus.

4. And finally, what changes as we obediently “Go”? Our church. The Deer Flat family will be changed. With Pastor Doug and all of our leadership staff, we want to invite every person who calls the Deer Flat Church their home to engage with us in three ways. First, to join us in the weekly experience of inspiring worship. Second, to join us in knowing life transforming community as we learn to become more like Jesus through a strategic group – either a Sunday class, a Life Group or a Support Group. And finally, we want to invite every person who finds a home with the Deer Flat family to “Go”. We want to learn together how to simply “Go” across the room to love our neighbor and to invite them to be like Jesus. We want to learn together what

it means to go across the street to love our neighbor and to invite them to be like Jesus. We want to learn together what it means to go across town or across the world to love our neighbor and to invite them to be more like Jesus.

Truth be told, so many of the churches in the world today could be closed tomorrow and very few people in their neighborhoods would even notice. We are not here by accident. God birthed the Deer Flat Church out of the obedience of a handful of pioneers. But their faithfulness will come to nothing unless we rekindle and renew their pioneering spirit and rediscover who we are and why we are here. Friends, I hear the voice of God. He is calling to us once again, promising Fruit and Joy. God is calling us to enlarge our tents to make room for more of Him; to make room for more of His people – the ones that He will entrust to us. But this all begins as we unite around the heartbeat of the Deer Flat family. As our hearts begin to passionately beat together with an unquenchable desire to be like Jesus God will bless us today and tomorrow as He

did in our yesterday. As we unite the beat of our hearts to “Go” into all the world helping others be more like Jesus, God will pour out a new blessing for our day and our time. God has a blessing that will be so strong that it will impact the lives of our children and grandchildren if we will only respond in obedience. Hear the words of the Lord – “Whom shall I send? Who will go for us? Will you go with us? Will you join me?”

Pray and Closing