

***Message: “Intentional Discipleship”***

**What’s the mission of the church?**

It’s not complicated. It’s not rocket science. It’s easy to say. The mission of the church is something everyone in the church does. No matter whether you’re young or old, new to the church or a lifelong member, we have the same mission. Race and family type don’t matter. Language doesn’t matter. Gender, sexual orientation or relationship status doesn’t matter. Everyone shares the same mission.

**How are you part of the mission of the church?**

**Here’s a clue: look our reading from Isaiah 6:1-8.**

Isaiah had an amazing, life-changing experience in the temple one day. He was transported to the throne room of God in a vision. Isaiah saw that he was in a holy place, a place where God was present. God’s messengers were flying around shouting, “*Holy, holy, holy is the LORD ... All the earth is filled with God’s glory*” (v3).

Isaiah was brought to his knees by the sobering reality of who God is. As unworthy and awestruck as he felt, Isaiah knew he had seen a glimpse of God Almighty. And it touched him deeply.

**Isaiah heard the Lord’s voice saying,**

***“Whom shall I send and who will go for us?”***

**And he found himself saying, “Here I am, send me” (v8).**

**What’s our mission?** It’s simple.

**We are to be the ones who volunteer to go where God sends us.**

Wow! There’s no standing on the sidelines, couch potatoes or long distance relationship here. It means we’re an important part of God’s work in the world. I don’t know about you, but I find it amazing, daunting and scary all at the same time.

**Hearing Isaiah’s call to serve the Lord is good, but it’s actually not the definitive word on the matter.** If we want to know our mission, all we have to do is listen.

**Jesus tells us.**

**Where?** Our second scripture reading for today, Matthew 28:18-20 tells us exactly. If you’ve been around the church for a little while, you know the name for these verses. They’re called the Great Commission. This narrative tells us what Jesus said to the eleven disciples – the apostles, after his death and resurrection. Jesus gave them this mission, *“go 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 obey everything that I’ve commanded you”* (vv19-20a).

**The same commission is recorded by Luke** in Acts 1:8, *“you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

**There’s no doubt.** It’s clear. Everyone who follows Jesus receives the same blessing, the same gift of the Holy Spirit and shares in the same mission. We’re to make disciples for Jesus Christ. That’s the first part. The second part is just as amazing and marvelous. It’s the power of the Holy Spirit working in, through and with us that makes us witnesses. We make the introduction and the Holy Spirit takes care of the rest.

**All Christian churches - the church universal, share the mission. All Christians, whether they’re affiliated with a church or not, share the mission.** That’s it. Period. End of sentence. Drop the microphone.

**Our mission** – personally and as a member of the community of faith, is to help other people become exactly what we’re meant to be: those who follow Jesus, living, working and loving as he taught us. And then we’re to pass that way of life and belief on.

**With that kind of clarity, things should be easy and smooth, right?** I invite you to watch this short video (“Mission Impossible Squirrel”).

**It’s amazing what God’s creatures can do.** What I find interesting is that we didn’t see all of the obstacles at once. The squirrel tackled them one at a time until the end goal was achieved. That’s the way life is for us. That’s what making disciples is like. It’s not easy. It seems like there are always obstacles hidden along the way.

**Do you know what the greatest challenge to making disciples is?**

It’s our own self-doubt. We talk ourselves out of it. We’re afraid we’re going to be rejected, embarrassed in public and have everyone call us out. Next thing we know, we’ll be “unfriended” on Facebook, at the center of a Twitter war or have our picture used in an unsavory manner on WhatsApp.

**I have three words for you: get. over. yourself.**

If you think you’re the only one who has it hard, think again. Let’s turn back to the words of Isaiah, written 2,600 years ago. We don’t often read the verses following Isaiah’s inspiring call, “*Here I am, send me*” (Isaiah 6:8).

**Here’s what God says to Isaiah after he volunteers, (vv9-10)**

“Go and tell this people:

*‘Listen hard, but you aren’t going to get it;  
look hard, but you won’t catch on.’*

*Make these people blockheads,*

*with fingers in their ears and blindfolds on their eyes,*

*So they won’t see a thing,*

*won’t hear a word,*

*So they won’t have a clue about what’s going on*

*and, yes, so they won’t turn around and be made whole.”*

**God never promised it would be easy.** Our creator knows humanity would prefer to lead, not follow. Yet Jesus calls us to follow.

Jesus said these words to Nicodemus,

*“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won’t perish but will have eternal life. God didn’t send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:16-17).*

**Accepting God’s grace is the greatest gift we will ever receive.**

**Knowing our lives have been made better by Jesus’ love inspires us to join in the mission possible.** We know God will help us to reach the goal, even on those days when we feel like ... a squirrel in a maze.

**The question I pose to you is this:**

**“How do YOU make disciples?”**

**Over the next three weeks, I’m going to share how you can be part of Jesus’ mission.** We’re starting a series on intentional discipleship. That theme fits with the season of thanksgiving. It’s the culmination of two year’s worth of prayer, preparation, training and work by the church leadership team. I’m thankful for their faith, love, dedication and support over these past months and years.

**The church leadership began meeting as a small group in 2017.**

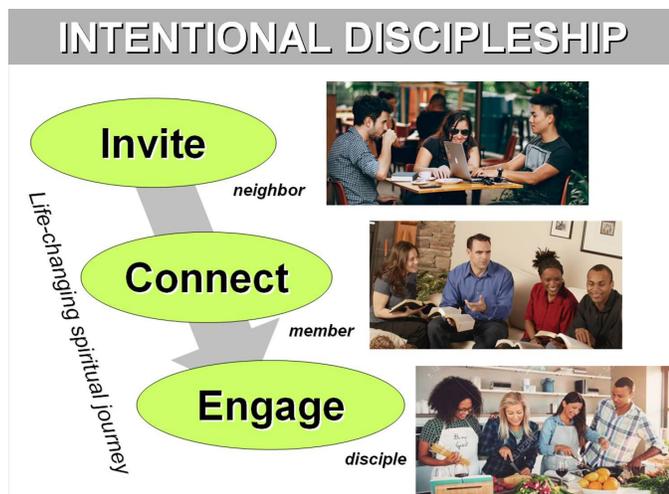
The reason we did so was because we realized things needed to change. The trajectory of mainline churches, including the Methodist church has been downward for 40 years. The trajectory of our congregation has also been downward for the past 10-20 years. There are a lot of factors and reasons – external and internal. We understand some of them. Others are harder to grasp. One thing we know. The path of faith is leading us to new places and ways of serving the Lord.

**We’ve made changes.** We’ll make more. We need you to do your part.

**I applaud the group.** It takes courage to say, “I don’t know.” It takes courage to say “I don’t want to be part of a dying church,” and then roll up your sleeves and go out on mission. So we spent the last two years reading, studying, praying and, yes, on occasion arguing with each other. That’s what happens when you’re in a real relationship. Brothers and sisters argue, but they love each other.

**We discovered some things.**

I’m going to share them with you. I highly recommend Brian Park’s class on “Know Your Why” – it goes deeper into detail. The figure captures our way of making disciples: Invite-Connect-Engage. Over the next three weeks we’re going to unpack what each of the elements mean, looking at



scripture and talking about how we can make a difference in the lives of people in our neighborhoods in a new and more loving way.

**I want to offer one, final thought** from author and pastor Mike Breem’s book Building a Discipling Culture, “If you make disciples, you always get the church. But if you make a church, you rarely get disciples.... Effective discipleship builds the church, not the other way around. We need to understand the church as the effect of discipleship and not the cause. If you set out to build the church, there is no guarantee you will make disciples. It is far more likely that you will create consumers who depend on the spiritual services that religious professionals provide.”

**There’s another way, a better way. Let’s find it together.**

**I hope you will come and invite people as we embark on this spiritual journey together. Jesus is calling. Let us hear and follow.**

**Isaiah 6:1-8 (9-10) (CEB)**

In the year of King Uzziah’s death, I saw the Lord sitting on a high and exalted throne, the edges of his robe filling the temple. Winged creatures were stationed around him. Each had six wings: with two they veiled their faces, with two their feet, and with two they flew about. They shouted to each other, saying:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of heavenly forces!  
All the earth is filled with God’s glory!”

The doorframe shook at the sound of their shouting, and the house was filled with smoke.

I said, “Mourn for me; I’m ruined! I’m a man with unclean lips, and I live among a people with unclean lips. Yet I’ve seen the king, the LORD of heavenly forces!”

Then one of the winged creatures flew to me, holding a glowing coal that he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips. Your guilt has departed, and your sin is removed.”

Then I heard the Lord’s voice saying, “Whom should I send, and who will go for us?” I said, “I’m here; send me.”

God said, “Go and say to this people:

Listen intently, but don’t understand;

look carefully, but don’t comprehend.

Make the minds of this people dull.

Make their ears deaf and their eyes blind,

so they can’t see with their eyes or hear with their ears,

or understand with their minds, and turn, and be healed.”

I said, “How long, Lord?”

And God said, “Until cities lie ruined with no one living in them, until there are houses without people and the land is left devastated.” The LORD will send the people far away, and the land will be completely abandoned. Even if one-tenth remain there, they will be burned again,

like a terebinth or an oak, which when it is cut down leaves a stump. Its stump is a holy seed.

**Matthew 28:18-20 (CEB)**

Jesus came near and spoke to them,

“I’ve received all authority in heaven and on earth. 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, teaching them to obey everything that I’ve commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age.”