

St. Matthew A.M.E. Church
Bible Study
Monday, September 22, 2008
St. Matthew 28:19,20, 6:10, Galatians 5:17-21

In the Great Commission Jesus was talking to those who were already disciples. His charge to them was to “go and make disciples.” In other words they were to go and make other disciples. This is the only way the mission of the church can be fulfilled. The mission of the church is to “win the world for Christ”, to make the kingdoms of this world the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ. (St. Matthew 28:19) The mission of the church is kingdom building. This will only happen if the church, “the body of Christ” fulfills its mission to make disciples.

We often talk about making the world better or “turning the world upside down” for Christ but that will not happen if people aren’t changed. The world is the way it is because of people; many of whom are unrepentant and practicing sinners. They have no relationship with Jesus and live as they will.

Church Crisis

The Christian church today is in crisis. Many of us believe the crisis is that the church is not growing. The evidence is right before us. Most churches are half empty and people are not joining. They not only are not joining but many are leaving. There are a host of reasons we give for why people aren’t joining or leaving:

1. The people in the church aren’t right
2. Problems with the leadership (pastor and lay)
3. Church isn’t doing anything
4. Church always wants money
5. Don’t enjoy worship
6. Other

But church growth is not the cause of the crisis facing the Christian church, it is the evidence that the church is in crisis. The cause of the crisis facing the Christian church is that we are unable to make disciples. We are unable to do what the Lord Jesus has commanded the church to do, make disciples. The result is we are unable to be the church that the Lord intended it to be, the instrument by which His kingdom would come on earth. Hear His words in the Lord’s Prayer, “thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” (St. Matthew 6:10)

Look again at who disciples are. Disciples are those:

1. Love God
2. Obey
3. Bear Fruit
4. Live with Joy
5. Glorify God

The fact that we are unable to make disciples only enlarges what the crisis facing the church is. We are unable to make disciples because many of us are not disciples. In order to make disciples we have to be disciples.

We want to be disciples but we don't want to move out of our "comfort zone" (membership). To put it another way we want discipleship on our terms. Which is why Jesus says, "we must be born again." (John 3:3-7) No one can be a disciple unless they are born again. Or to give a parallel example why Jesus says, "if any man will come after me must first take up his cross and follow me." (St. Matthew 16:24-25) We follow Him to our own crucifixion. (Romans 6:6-10) When it talks about us being crucified it means the desires of our flesh have been crucified. (Galatians 5:17-21)

If the flesh has not been crucified, or in other words if the desires of the flesh still control and dominate us then we have not been born again (converted, changed, saved) because we have not surrendered ourselves to Christ and we are not "following Him." When Jesus calls us to "follow Him" He invites us to come and die. The old us, our old nature, our fleshly ambitions are crucified and we rise with Him to new life. It is only then that we can become His disciples. Many of us are not disciples because we are not willing to die in order to live a new life.

Denial

Discipleship is "the" most important issue facing the church, yet for most churches it is not only not "the" priority it is not a priority at all. The church does not want to face it because it is hard and troubles those who want to stay in their comfort zone who are content and satisfied being members. The great tragedy is that the leadership of the church, primarily pastors allowed them to become comfortable when they joined and have not taught and trained them what it really means to be a disciple or to be a Christian. And so many have become like cement when it is poured, they have become settled, hard and fixed and it is now very, very difficult to change them. All they know is what they know and it is a lot to ask them to change. Many pastors will dread judgment for failing to do what Jesus commanded us to do in the Great Commission. Listen again to what He said, "go therefore and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you....." (St. Matthew 28:19-20) Teaching must be at the heart of the church. Any church without a strong Christian Education ministry is not a healthy church. People don't believe because they don't know what to believe, people do what they want because many don't know any better and they don't grow because they aren't provided or taught the Word to grow on.

Consequences

The consequence is the product that the church is producing. It is not producing people who love and obey God. We cannot love and obey God if we are still controlled by our flesh. We are not producing people who are bearing fruit. The fruit of the spirit cannot be produced when we desire the things of the flesh. We are not producing people who live with joy. Joy is of the Lord and is unconditional. We are not producing people who glorify God. For God is glorified by the lives we live. We honor and bless God by living lives that please Him and enable others to see Him in us.

However, the greatest consequence is that the church fails to do what the Lord has commissioned it to do, make disciples. Disciples reproduce themselves. The church should have a passion for bringing others to Christ. Answer these questions, "how many people have you

spoken to about Christ this year?” “How many people have you invited to worship this year?” Most every Sunday we end up by ourselves because we have not reached out to anybody to seek to get them to worship with us, study the Word with us, pray with us or talk to them about Christ. We invite family, friends and people to all kinds of other events but not to Christ or His church. Most of the time when we talk to people about our church is when we are critical of the church, pastor, congregation or something we don't like.

A poll taken by the Gallup Organization of more than 22 million congregants found that only 2% had introduced another person to Jesus Christ. “Making disciples” is simply not on our minds, it just doesn't matter. How can we be so passionate and on fire for God in our worship, praise, and testimonies in the sanctuary, and have none at all when we leave? How will we win the world for Christ if the Christian army is getting older and smaller and not producing more disciples? Most churches today grow more by transfer rather than conversions. The trend today is rotation of the saints, not the making of more disciples.

The New Testament Church grew because disciples reproduced themselves. They evangelized and spread the Word (good news) about Christ. It was not something they just did on Sunday for the Word says, “the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” (Acts 2) As the disciples reproduced themselves their influence increased resulting in the official religion of Rome being changed from worship of the emperor to Christianity. With all the churches we have does the church have the influence today to change the communities where they are located?