

## *“Making an Impact”*

*Matthew 28:16-20 • Acts 1:1-8*

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Dr. Charles S. Blackshear • May 12, 2024

I have to tell you, Baccalaureate Sunday is one of my favorite services of the year. For one thing, Presbyterians have always valued education. So I think it's important for us to recognize the accomplishments of our students and to encourage them at this time of major transition in their lives, whether they choose to continue their education or begin their careers. Graduates, this is an exciting time your life. The next few years will be like none you have experienced before and probably like none that you will experience again.

You graduates will be faced with more and more decisions in the days and weeks and months ahead, things you haven't even thought of yet. I think it's also important for all of us to be reminded of who we are and whose we are. This will help us stay focused on what's most important in life, our purpose, what God has called each of us to do.

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 our identity and what God is calling us to do with our lives. Take a look at this photo from Glacier National Park in Montana. This really is one of the most beautiful places in America.

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. 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.

At this point you're probably wondering what glaciers have to do with your life in South Texas. The first thing I want you to understand is that glaciers simply 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. And what is our purpose? What is the meaning of life? As we discussed last week, 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. Again in 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 you and I need to realize that God is in control and that His timing is perfect. The reality is that 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 in Glacier National Park, which were also carved by glaciers, are nearly 300 feet deep. In the same way, the world around us should provide evidence that the church was 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. In fact, science was originally called "natural theology." For those early scientists, science was a form of worship. For example, the 17<sup>th</sup> 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 wrote 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. You graduates who are going on to more education, find a campus ministry and get involved. 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. Anyone can do this. 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, let's be like glaciers.

*Amen.*