

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on Matthew 28:18-20 on May 31st at Victory of the Lamb.

Series: Words With Friends
Today's Focus: "Go and Make Disciples"

"Jesus Gives *Groundbreaking* Words"

- 1. They are comforting words when experiencing change**
- 2. They are powerful words for creating change**

Nine years ago this week I met the people from the initial core group of our church for the first time. There were 7 people—well, 8 if you counted Pastor Peter Panitzke from St. Paul's in Muskego who was there to get things started until this rookie arrived fresh out of pastor school. Actually this week as I was planning for our Groundbreaking Celebration later this morning, I ran across some pictures and things from 9 years ago that I almost forgot existed. For example, here's a picture of my family and the initial members of our core group from that first meeting along with Pastor Pete {show pic}. Classic, isn't it? I think this picture was taken on a camera that still used actual film that you needed to develop! But that's how we started. Some faces I'm sure many of you recognize. Some you probably don't. And that's ok. Just think how much has changed. This was Victory of the Lamb church 9 years ago, meeting at Dick and Bonnie Chirkpa's living room. For Riley and Lara that was all 5 kids ago!



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Boy how things have changed! From a rather humble beginning, God has poured out humungous blessings, wouldn't you say? I mean, even if you weren't there, how many of you could look at this picture and imagine what you see today or what we'll be celebrating later this morning out on our church land at the construction site down the road? I'm not sure I even imagined it sitting there for the very first time as a rookie pastor meeting these 7 people in a living room here in Franklin.

I'm not sure that Jesus' 11 disciples saw it either as they met together on a mountain ridge in Galilee where they met up with Jesus for one of the last times before he ascended into heaven. But that's when Jesus gave them some *groundbreaking* words that are very fitting for us to consider today as have a Groundbreaking Celebration! **They were *groundbreaking* words that would comfort the disciples as they would be experiencing change in their lives. And they were powerful words that would create change in the lives of others.** We're going to see that the same is still true for us today! Here are Jesus' *groundbreaking* words:

¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Friends, how do you deal with change? Do you embrace it or do you resist it? I think most of us have a natural tendency to resist it, wouldn't you agree? I remember a conversation I had with one of my neighbors who no longer lives in our neighborhood so I'll share this story. I invited her to one of our church services one day and she said, "Oh no, I don't do change very well." As an example she said that at the time it was even hard for her to deal with the fact that Target was building a new store on Drexel Ave a couple blocks from our

neighborhood. She said she wouldn't be able to shop there at this new store because it would mean she would have to change what she was used to. This was her explanation for why she couldn't and wouldn't go to church too. A little extreme perhaps, but you all understand. Change can be difficult sometimes. And while some of us like a little more spontaneity than others, most of us prefer some level of predictability in our lives. We human creatures like to be comfortable.

But Jesus had been preparing his disciples for change—drastic change actually. So he didn't just spring these groundbreaking words on them all at once. He had been telling them that he would be going back to the Father. That would be a pretty big change. He had promised them that he would send them the Holy Spirit who would teach them what they lacked. That would be a pretty big change. They didn't even really know what that meant. But imagine how the disciples were feeling as Jesus came to them and said, "Now go and make disciples of all nations."

Can you imagine how those disciples must have felt? I mean first of all they had been on an emotional roller coaster the last couple weeks. They had experienced the trauma of watching Jesus executed only to then experience the dramatic reversal of his resurrection from the dead. Then over the last couple weeks as they were still coming to grips with everything that had happened, they bounced back and forth between fear and faith, sadness and joy, cowardice, confusion and courage. And now just when perhaps they were starting to think about getting back to a sense of things being normal and comfortable, Jesus gives them the *groundbreaking* words, "Go and make disciples of all nations."

I mean this wasn't just, "Wait for the nations to come to Jerusalem" like they were used to as Jews. This was the exact opposite. "Go. Get out of here. Get moving. Don't just sit around and wait for people to come to the temple. Go out and be my church. And as you go...make disciples. As you go to the market...as you go for a walk down the street...as you go about your lives...make disciples." A disciple by the way is someone who follows Jesus because they trust him for the forgiveness of their sins which he won in our place when he lived a holy, sinless life, and offered it up as a pleasing sacrifice to God the Father on the cross. A disciple is someone who recognizes that although they themselves don't have all the answers, they humbly want to continue to learn more and more from Jesus—his word, his teachings, his love. "Go and make disciples of all nations," Jesus said. Not just one particular group of people—not just Jews. But Gentiles too. All nations. All people regardless of what neighborhood they live in, what country they come from, no matter their skin color, economic status, educational degrees, cognitive and physical abilities, language, age, or background. Go and make disciples of all nations.

Friends, does it sound like the disciples were going to be experiencing some change in their lives? Absolutely. I tell you my life certainly changed when I graduated from the Seminary 9 years ago and I was ready to go anywhere in the world with my family. I had the attitude of the prophet Isaiah who, along with a profound sense of his being totally unworthy, eventually said, "Here am I, send me" when he realized it was God who made him holy. So I said, "Here am I, send me" ... and God sent me to Franklin, WI. Things have changed in my life and in our church over the last 9 years. A lot! And here's the thing, friends. They're going to continue to change. Our world is changing all around us for one thing. I don't even need to tell you that. The landscape of people across our country is changing. We live in a multi-cultural nation now. Also the landscape of religious belief across our country is changing. And those things don't even have anything to do with how things are going to change in our church as we build our first permanent facility down the road and move in and just

simply get used to being in a different place, our own place. Now how does that make you feel? Excited...or perhaps a little unsettled? A little nervous maybe? A little afraid. Well the good news is that **Jesus has groundbreaking words to comfort us when we're experiencing change too.**

Did you catch it? There are at least three things in Jesus' words that won't change even as the world changes all around us. You ready? The first is **our mission**. Think how cool this is. First that never will God change his mind and say, "Go ye therefore earn your own salvation." Hardly! Instead we celebrate that fact that Jesus has fully earned our salvation for us, that we receive his victory—the forgiveness of sins and eternal life itself—simply by faith in him. Ever onward we simply get to be a part of his plan to share his victory with the world wherever we find ourselves. It just so happens we find ourselves in the southwest corner of Franklin, WI but even in our capital campaign we're working together to carry out our mission. With Our More Than Bricks campaign, 20% of the offerings received is going to help share the victory of Jesus with other mission churches around the country and the world: from North Dakota, to St. Lucia, to Nepal. This isn't just about us. Never has been. It's about sharing Christ's victory with today's people. It's about making disciples of all nations. So even as we move down Loomis Rd, our mission isn't going to change. Jesus said until the end of the age our mission is to make disciples of all nations. That's a comforting thought.

The second thing that won't change is **our tools**. Jesus said, "Go and make disciples of all nations." But how, Jesus? How are we going to figure out to do this disciple making? How are we going to figure out how to reach more people and make 'em love you when more and more people don't want anything to do with you? What new tricks and technologies will we need? How will we reach the heart of millennials? -- Well certainly as the world changes there are things in our approach and attitudes we'll want to change to carry out our ministry better. And even just little things like I can't imagine how I started out my ministry without needing the tool of a smartphone for example. How did pastors ever get a meeting set up without text messaging?! So it's a no brainer that there are some things we can and should change. But our essential tools as a church won't change at all and this is super comforting. Because our essential tools don't rusty and they won't get out of date. And these tools are of course God's Word and Sacraments. Remember Jesus said, *Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.* So how do we make disciples? Baptizing and teaching. Using God's Word and Sacraments. Baptism and the Bible. These tools aren't going to change. People can read the Bible in a book or on an iPad and it's still God's Word either way.

And the third thing that won't change, the most comforting thing of all, is **Christ's presence and power**. "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me...And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*" You know what this means, right? You can go on vacation this summer and guess who's going to be there... Jesus. Our church can move ¼ mile down the street and guess who's going to be there... Jesus. And who is Jesus? He's the commander-in-chief of the universe! He is true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, who for a time kept under wraps the full and frequent use of his divine power as God so that he could come down from heaven, be born a human being like one of us, and then live to die in order to take all our sins of apathy and complacency, of fear and worry...away. To take our sins away! But then, in the triumph of his resurrection...now ascended into heaven...Jesus our human brother and our best friend, he exercises his authority as the God-man for our eternal good. No matter how things change, his presence and power will not change for he promises: "*And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*"

So let's be clear then about one last thing today. Jesus gives *groundbreaking* words. **They are comforting words when experiencing change. But they are also powerful words for creating change.** I don't know about you but I want to see a whole lot of change when we move into our new ministry center after it's completed! Here's what I mean. It's been incredible over the last month to watch the amount of earthwork done on our land to get it ready for our ministry center to be built. I'm talking about lots of dirt being moved around, a big hole being dug, a platform for our church being built up and then compacted down. You'll see just what I mean when you join us for our groundbreaking celebration after worship today. I have a whole new appreciation for what it takes to get one building built.

But you know something, what it takes to change the land so that one building can be built isn't even close to what it takes change the landscape of just one person's heart. As hard as clay can possibly be, so much harder is a human heart by nature. No one by nature belongs to Christ's church. No one of us by nature is a friend of the Almighty. Rather by nature we are called his enemies, hostile to God—unable on our own to love God or even come close to obeying him in a way that measures up to his unfathomably perfect holiness. This is the reason why people like my neighbor don't just naturally want to come to church, why people resist change, and that's not a generational thing...that's a human being thing. By nature we don't want to change. We don't want to love God. Nobody wants to believe that we have a sin problem, that we need to repent, or that we need a crucified Savior as an atoning sacrifice for our sins, or that the purpose of our lives now is to give God glory by obeying his word. And yet we do believe this! We do here at our church, Victory of the Lamb, because God has changed our hearts. Is this not a miracle? It certainly is because, you see, **Jesus has *groundbreaking* words. They are powerful words for creating change in people's hearts and lives.**

In my case, I don't even remember it, but when my parents took Jesus at his word to "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them" they didn't stop to try and explain why *all nations* includes everyone but babies. But instead they thought, "Here are the words of the Almighty God, commander in chief of the universe, who once created everything out of nothing, certainly he can create faith in our child's heart through this promise he makes in holy baptism." So that when the water was splashed on my tiny head and I was baptized into the name of the Triune God, God himself washed away my sins, adopted me into his family, and added my name to the list of those who will receive an inheritance in heaven. Friends, Jesus has *groundbreaking* words to create change. Remember those tools that I said won't change—God's Word and sacraments like baptism. Well they're still going to be powerful to create change in the future.

In fact, just as bulldozers and earthmovers are useful machines that have the power to break the ground and move dirt, God's Word and Sacraments are effective means of grace that have the power to change the landscape of sin hardened human hearts. And so I look forward to celebrating our official groundbreaking today with you out on our church land but the groundbreaking that I celebrate the most is whenever the Holy Spirit breaks the ground in another person's heart. Those are the victory stories I look forward to the most over the next 9 years because even as things will change, Jesus gives us groundbreaking words. They are comforting words when we experience change. They are powerful words for creating change. So let's look forward to it! Amen.