



Tracking the Spirit How do we count? What do we count?

Christ's final instruction is the Great Commission: Matthew 28:19-20

"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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age."

The understanding from this passage is that we are to reach and save those who are lost. That brings us to the dilemma.... "How do we do fulfill the Great Commission and how do count the "disciples." This also brings the question, " Who does the reaching and who does the saving?"

The difficulty arises when we try to define our role and the Triune God's role.

Through the Great Commission and Luke 19:10 "The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" we can determine that the purpose of Christ is to reach and save that which was lost.

Eph 1:9-10 states, "God did what he had purposed, and made known to us the secret plan he had already decided to complete by means of Christ. This plan, which God will complete when the time is right, is to bring all creation together, everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ as head."

So, in relation to Christ, God's purpose is to bring everything on heaven and earth under one head, even Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit participates in the three-fold purpose through empowerment: Acts 1:8 "But when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will be filled with power, and you will be witnesses for me in Jerusalem, in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

It is very clear what our role is: "You WILL be witnesses"

So what constitutes witness? The answer is really very simple –

Jesus reminds us in John 13:34-35 "I'm giving you a new commandment: Love each other in the same way that I have loved you. Everyone will know that you are my disciples because of your love for each other."

Therefore – being a witness is doing actions which show Christ's love to the world.

We can measure what we do but it is very difficult to measure what God has accomplished. Many times we have no idea what He has done in the hearts and minds of people – for example how do we know if someone acknowledges Christ as their Lord and Savior. But we can know if a Gospel presentation is presented.

The most challenging task is "How do we measure communion with God and one another?"

Is the measurement simply a count of communicant members, baptisms, and confirmations? This is the standard that is used on reports in the Lutheran Annual. If we use this standard then, by the statistics reported for the NOW District, we have failed to meet the goals set forth in end statement cited above.

Oswald Chambers' reflection on Matthew 28:19 – "Go and teach (disciple) all nations" reveals some interesting thoughts:

Jesus Christ did not say – Go and save souls (the salvation of souls is the supernatural work of God)

Note: Matthew 13:39 reminds us that the harvest is the responsibility of the angels.

Jesus said Go and teach i.e. disciple all nations and you cannot make disciples unless you are a disciple yourself. When the disciples came back from their first mission they were filled with joy because the devils were subject to them and Jesus said "Don't rejoice in successful service; the great secret of joy is that you are rightly related to Me." The great essential is that we remain true to the call of God and realize that His one purpose is to disciple men and women to Jesus.

Note: God's purpose is set forth in Christ by bringing creation together in Him – Ephesians 1:9

The challenge to the missionary does not come on the line that people are difficult to get saved, that backsliders are difficult to reclaim, that there is callous indifference to the Gospel; but along the line of personal relationship to Jesus Christ. "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" Our Lord puts the question steadily, it faces us in every individual case we meet. The one great challenge is – Do I know my Risen Lord? Do I know the power of His indwelling Spirit? Am I wise enough in God's sight and foolish enough according to the world to bank on what Jesus Christ has said, or am I abandoning the great supernatural position, which is the only call for disciples of Christ, viz., boundless confidence in Him alone? If I take up any other method I depart altogether from the methods laid down by our Lord – "All power is given unto Me..., therefore go."

Comments:

We have been struggling to wrap our minds around how to tally the activities that, in reality, live in the realm of the Holy Spirit's working.

The evidence of a personal relationship with Jesus is through the activities of a disciple. This is not a works related statement but rather a magnification of the motivation for sharing Jesus.

Tracking the Spirit training and other relationship building activities throughout the District have made it clear that disciples are not as motivated to share the Gospel message because of the eternal destruction of other souls. Rather they share BECAUSE of their personal relationship with Jesus Christ. They GO by praying to be aware of Gospel Opportunities that God places before them each day. And they GO with intentional tools for Gospel Outreach.

So what does this mean and what have we learned?

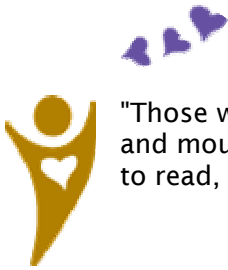
Although we cannot see the actual depth of relationship a disciple may have with their Lord and Savior, nor should we ever attempt to judge such a relationship, we can see the results of a close, growing relationship with Jesus through the activities of disciples. Below is just some of what we have observed:

- 1) Disciples are known to each other – by name.
- 2) Disciples willingly share of themselves for the encouragement and growth of the entire body of Christ.
- 3) Disciples are aware of their spiritual gifts and use them. They display the fruit of the Spirit.
- 4) Disciples pray daily for "pre-Christians" and for one another.
- 5) They are bold in sharing the Gospel, realizing that rejection will happen sometimes.
- 6) They encourage others to share the Gospel.
- 7) Disciples see themselves as integral parts of Gospel sowers their communities and missions throughout the world – supporting them through offerings, servant event participation, prayer, and much more.
- 8) Disciples have a clear understanding of the spiritual battle that surrounds Gospel sharing.

- 9) Disciples are not judgmental – they are “Christ’s love with skin on.”
- 10) Disciples are continually growing in their personal relationship with Christ.
- 11) Disciples love to plant “seeds of Gospel sharing” and are freed by the knowledge that they do not harvest – the angels do – this keeps them in mode of “GO.”
- 12) Disciples look for and often create “GO” – Gospel Outreach and Gospel Opportunities.

Therefore:

In addition to “standard counting methods”; Baptisms, communicants memberships, confirmations; we are also counting (by personal involvement or reports of others); any and all activities by which a clear Gospel message is shared with those who still need to know Christ as their Lord and Savior.



"Those who want to be Christians in earnest and who profess the gospel with hand and mouth should sign their names and meet alone in a house somewhere to pray, to read, to baptize, to receive the sacrament, and to do other Christian works."

- Martin Luther, Vorrede zur Deutschen Messe
(his preface to the German Mass and Order of Service)

This quote is also found in two books we currently recommend:

"The Second Reformation; Reshaping the Church for the 21st Century"
by William A. Beckham (TOUCH Publications, Houston, TX, 1995, 253 pp).

"Houses that Change the World"
by Wolfgang Simson (Reprinted 2003 by Authentic Lifestyle/division of Authentic Media
<http://www.paternoster-publishing.com>)