

Made for Mission

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. So this is a sermon about the Great Commission, Jesus' command to make disciples of all nations.

! And I think it's a particularly relevant, a great opportunity for me as I begin here as your vicar, because mission is central to what I've come here to help facilitate amongst us.

It really is at the heart of our church, all churches' existence. Just over three weeks ago, when I was instituted, inducted and installed, a bit like a dishwasher, I think, I committed myself before God, together with you, to, and I quote, proclaim the faith afresh to each generation.

I love that phrase. And as the Diocese of Bath and Wales' strapline goes, we are to live and tell the story of Jesus.

So why am I sometimes so bad at it? Okay. Take last weekend, for example. I'm at a rugby festival with my eldest son, and I get talking to this other dad who works, look at that timing, who works in advertising.

[1 : 26] I have already revealed that I'm a vicar, so there's a slightly awkward look on his face. But the conversation turns, as it often does these days, to American Christianity and those born-again types.

But I'm thinking, here you are, Simon. Here's the open door for a conversation about Jesus. Let's go through it. There's plenty of options available to me. Option A, I ask him, are you born again? Now, I'll grant you that's a pretty direct approach, but I tell you, it gets a quite good reaction either way. That's my first option. So B, so is faith important, something that's important to you? Great question, by the way. Open discussion, you know, whether they're religious or not, it's a great opening.

Or C, mumble something about, I'm not a great fan of Christian nationalism anyway, what's the weather like these days? Which option do you think I took? Yes, it was C, folks. Yes, it was me. Why did I do that? Why did I do that? It's not that I'm not quick on my feet, or I don't have knowledge about the subject matter. Something else was going on that hindered me in that moment to talk about the very thing that I thought was central in my life.

[2 : 50] And of course, in a different setting, in this setting, I could talk for hours about, but don't worry, I'm not going to do that today. I wonder if anyone else here sometimes struggles to share their faith.

Or even that, another question is, who here struggles to live out their faith? By which I mean, you know, you know that habit, which you know in God's sight is wrong or unhelpful, but you just can't stop doing it.

Or that response you give when someone annoys you or upsets you, and you know it's not very godly, yet you can't seem to change it. Living and telling the story of Jesus is more difficult than we'd like it to be, isn't it?

And if we collectively, as a church, are seeking to share Jesus across Clevedon, as we've already been praying about this morning, if we struggle like that as individuals, then we have a problem. We have a problem. Now, there are plenty of resources and tips I could share with you about faith sharing, and I will, in good time, hopefully share those with you.

[4 : 03] But as my own failings showed, it's really a lack of knowledge that makes people poor at sharing their faith. Nor is it a shortage of knowledge or even willpower that prevents us from living the good Christian life.

The problem in all these things, I think, lies at a slightly deeper level. And as I've meditated on this famous passage that Marilyn read from the end of Matthew's Gospel, it's really crystallised something for me.

And it's really helped me know what is going on here. And I hope it will help you too. Because actually, at the heart of it, we all have an authority problem.

It's an issue of one of authority. What do I mean by that? Well, let's start with a definition of authority. And I'll just take a simple dictionary definition.

Authority is the power or right to give orders, make decisions, and enforce them. Okay, that's your general definition of authority. So let's examine what or who has authority in our lives.

[5 : 22] What do you think of when I say the word authority? Maybe some of you are thinking about government. You've just been praying about the recent elections. If you're of a younger generation, you might be thinking about teachers, because I'm sure we all used to obey our teachers.

People in power, we often think, don't we, about authority. But if you think a little bit further about it, as I have been, there are other things that also have authority in our lives.

Just think about how our culture has an authority in our lives, how it influences what we think, what we say, and even what we wear.

It's really dictated by how things are done around here in 2026. Consciously and unconsciously, we follow what others are doing.

We're being told what to do, and our behavior is being enforced. Who delivers those orders? I mean, we don't get it, you know, do we know? Well, all sorts of ways, through the media that we consume, through the people that we hang around with.

[6 : 30] It orders our lives for good and for bad. So my first question for you this morning, are you aware of those authorities coming from around you?

If you are, that's a good start. That's a good start. But we have to go, again, I think, deeper to a more powerful authority in your life and in mine.

And it's not an external kind of out there authority, but one that actually comes from within. What do I mean? Well, you and I have been receiving messages about how to survive and how to stay safe, basically since we were in the womb.

I'm told that by the age of five, 90% of our brain growth has already happened. So the messages and responses we learn at that time basically form the foundations of our messaging for life and how we get what we need.

So our parents and our early carers are huge authorities in our lives. They're setting the pattern for decision-making and behaviour throughout our lives.

[7 : 46] And of course, when this is done well, with love and good attachment and all the jargon words that I begin to get to learn, this sets us up really well for healthy responses through life.

We know where we're at. We've got a good sense of self. It's well balanced. And our relationship boundaries are usually healthy. But when we experience trauma or some kind of rupture at an early stage of life, and indeed any stage of life, this leaves us with different messaging, which unchecked can dictate our response to other situations throughout our lives.

Let me give you an example. Just this last Tuesday morning, we were meeting to pray as we do, quarter past nine on Tuesday, and we were hearing from Heather, who together with Jim and Sophie have been leading this course called The Bereavement Journey.

And what an amazing ministry that sounds like it is. And Heather briefly shared with us what they covered in the last week's section. And it so struck me, I thought, wow, I'd actually quite like to share that with the wider congregation.

So each week they have a video and discussion about a certain topic. And this last week was about loss in general. And what Heather was describing was that this process of how early responses to loss, whether that's the loss of a teddy bear or a loss of a person, lay the foundations for responding to other losses later on in their lives.

[9 : 24] So if someone, for example, was inhibited from being able to grieve as a child, maybe they were never allowed to cry or no one got alongside them, that grief would simply get stuck and carried with them.

So when they face other losses later in life, that would just kind of compound, condense the grief they already had. And of course, this, in many cases, results in all sorts of dysfunctional and destructive coping behaviours, such as addictions or avoidance, which in turn impacts relationships and all of life really.

So do you see how, in this case, loss, it can have an authority over someone's lives? Yeah? It's like it's giving silent orders and enforcing decision-making, actually not so much decisions, but actually

reactions through to other situations.

And it's often driven by deep fears and hurts. And if you're sitting there wondering, well, how do I know if I have that kind of authority?

That sounds pretty serious, Simon. Well, I just encourage you to look out for moments when you behave in a way that you think, well, that's not like me, or I wouldn't normally do that.

[10:50] Perhaps you might fly off the handle at something that seems trivial to most people or you're deeply distressed by a particular interaction by someone. That's just a little flag just to go, ooh, there's a deeper authority at work going on there.

And these are like wounds. And if we don't check out those wounds, don't get them tended to, it can cause us to react rather than respond. So to go back to my failure to share faith with the dad at the rugby match, even though I have the ability and the training to do so, what was going on?

Well, the fact is, and without a lot of time to go into it, a lot of my strong early messaging was that to get love and appreciation that I deep down desire, I often feel the need to get people on the side.

And that sometimes means I feel the need to conform to what I think their expectations of me will be. I'm a complex being. And it means when I get to those situations where someone might think I'm a bit of a weirdo or that I might be pushing them out of their comfort zone, I find that hard.

And so I duck out of it, I divert it, or I diffuse it. And in the case of last Saturday, all three. But do you see how there is an authority from within which is holding power for me in particular circumstances?

[12:20] And I'm sharing that with you because I'm on a journey with all this. And it's one of those kind of two-step-forward, one-step-back kind of journeys. But I know that the first step that I took, with help, I should say, was to get in touch with these wounds and be curious about what was going on for me.

I wonder if you're in touch with yours. So, if we've got these external and internal authorities influencing our lives, quite often in a way that leads us away from living and sharing the story of Jesus, what do we do?

What do we do about that? If we've got a problem, what do we do about that? Well, let's turn to the Bible. Finally, Vicar, come on. Let's turn to Matthew's Gospel.

If you've got it, if you've got a Bible there, it's going to come up on the screen as well. It will help you to know, just to set the scene, that Matthew wrote his Gospel with a particular readership in mind.

He was a Jew writing for a Jewish audience. So, as he gathered his materials and arranged these stories together, he did so in a way that would actually make most impact on his Jewish readership.

[13:42] And so, if you read through Matthew's Gospel, you'll see there are lots of Hebrew Bible, Old Testament references, there's prophecies being fulfilled all over the place, but even in the way that he's formed his Gospel, it's actually made to read a bit like a book of the Pentateuch, that is, the first five books of the Bible, which are the foundations for the Jewish faith.

And if you've got time to read those and Matthew's Gospel, you'll see what I mean. Because in the Old Testament, what do you see in those first five books of the Bible? You see the forming of the people of God, the twelve tribes of Israel, and their journey from slavery, preparing them for life in the promised land, led by Moses.

And you'll also find throughout the Pentateuch and the Old Testament, God often meets them on mountaintops, does he not? Gives the law on Sinai, et cetera, et cetera.

And you've got this pattern of the people of God either obeying those commands that are given or disobeying them. And in the final chapter of the final book of the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy, we find Moses blessing 11 tribes of the people of God.

That's 11, yes, there's one missing. And then he ascends to a mountainside overlooking the promised land for which the tribes are to claim as God promised that they would.

[15:14] And there Moses dies, failing himself to enter the promised land because of his own disobedience. Actually, Mike touched on this last week, if you were here. Fast forward, the final chapter of Matthew's gospel, what do we have?

You see on the screen there, Jesus gathers 11 disciples representing the people of God. He goes onto a mountain, he gathers them to a mountain, and what does he say to them?

He says to them, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, therefore go and make disciples of all nations. So can you see how, if you've got that kind of reading background, you see that Matthew is trying to emphasize here, this is the beginning of a new, renewed people of God.

These 11 disciples chosen as representatives for all God's people, and they're not just going to go out and claim the promised land, but they're going to bring all nations into the life of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

But unlike Moses, careful readers would observe, this great revered leader as he was, Jesus will go with them. He never disobeyed.

[16:36] Jesus, if you like, is the greater Moses. And Jesus, in fact, is the greater Joshua, who, if you remember, led the people into the promised land.

And I'm sure you know this, but Joshua, the Hebrew word is Yeshua. which is exactly the same name as Jesus was known as. He will lead them into an even better promised land.

In fact, he is Emmanuel, God with us. And by his spirit he continues to be until the end of the age when he will return to renew all of creation, uniting heaven with earth.

That makes my heart beat a little bit faster. God will be together. Let's look a little bit closer at these verses. It's really encouraging, isn't it?

He gathers them. Can we just go back one, Pauline? That would be great. He gathers those disciples. Now, were they perfect? Absolutely not. They saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted.

[17:37] Now, I hope that's encouraging for you. It's okay to have questions and not be sure and not get it right all the time, but what Jesus says to each and every one of them and to us, and this is the critical bit, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, Jesus says.

Jesus is the name above all names. It says in the book of Colossians, for in him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things have been created through him and for him.

He is before all things and in all things hold together. So he is greater, Jesus that is, than any ruler, any government, any cultural trend, any societal trend.

He is greater than any authority that might rule within you and within me, any past power, any present power, any future power. And his is a rule of peace, joy, and love.

Sounds good, doesn't it? Sounds good, but it also says, how's it actually going to help me overcome those other voices of authority in my life that seem to have such a sway on how I behave?

[19:07] How can I, as it were, transfer his authority into an authority that's in my life? That's the question I'm asking myself. Well, let's read on.

The answer is in the scriptures. He says, therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

The key for transferring the authority of Jesus into our lives is discipleship. Discipleship. Now, what does that word mean?

It's a word we use in church a lot. I think one of the most helpful descriptions I've heard of what being a disciple of Jesus means is that we become and make apprentices of Jesus.

Now, when you become an apprentice in whatever trade, let's say you're an apprentice furniture maker, you, obviously, you watch and you observe your master doing what they do, what they're skilled and experienced in.

[20:17] But if you're an apprentice, you don't watch what your master makes to sort of take it home with you. Oh, that's a nice sofa, boss. Oh, that's really nice how you've made that.

Let me just take it home and I'll go and sit on it. Is that how it works? Is that how an apprenticeship works? If you've been an apprentice and that's how it's worked, I'm wondering, probably not. No, an apprentice watches learn and does until she or he is also able to make sofas, for example, for others.

And in fact, is then in a very good position to teach others to make sofas. Are you following me? Sofa so good? Oh, terrible.

You see, becoming a disciple is about, well, it's not just about receiving the benefits of what Jesus has done for us, although we do do that. We receive the benefits of what he did for us, dying on the cross to release us from our sins, where he defeated the evil authorities that lie behind all other authorities that enslave us.

Yes, he did that, but it's not about us taking that and just going home and sitting on them. No, it's about becoming skilled, confident, and prepared to continually apply what Jesus has done and

does in our lives and into the lives of others.

[21 : 40] So if we want to transfer the loving authority of Jesus into our lives in a way that will speak more powerfully than any other voice that is telling us what to do, there are two things Jesus says here that we are to do.

And again, it's right here in the passage. Verse 19, we are to baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son of the Holy Spirit and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. Now, to be baptized is not just about getting wet one day and then ticking a box. No, it means to be immersed, doesn't it?

Think about what a baptism is. It means to be immersed into the life of the Trinity. Through faith, baptism is the gateway into the life of God.

We become united to the Father through the Son and the power of the Holy Spirit. Nothing can separate us. We are connected, we are bonded, we are wedded to God.

[22 : 41] That is the invitation Jesus is giving to his people. And just as each member of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, does anything for the glory and pleasure of other members of the Trinity, they're constantly laying themselves down in love for one another, in community.

So we too will also desire to do that. Our lives become all about God, not about me. So that's the first step, is to be immersed in God.

That's what's going to be the start of transferring that authority of Jesus into our lives. Next step, as I said, it's all there. How do we do that? How do we get immersed into God?

We are to be taught how to obey everything Jesus has commanded. A disciple, an apprentice, knows how to hear from God, they know his commands, but more importantly they know how to obey those commands, to put them into practice.

And that, of course, includes the command to make disciples. A well-made disciple, as it were, a well-trained apprentice, knows what to do, they know why they do it, and they can navigate the unknowns when they come to them.

[23 : 58] They're skilled, they're confident, they're prepared apprentices of Jesus. And this isn't just for the elite, this is for the worshippers and the doubters, this isn't just for the people with dog collars and degrees, oh no, this is for everyone, everyone here, and everyone around us.

Again, here's another definition of discipleship, I wonder if this makes your heart sing a bit. Making disciples introduces people to a God who loves them and understands them.

He helps them understand who they are and what they can be, and helps them apply his transforming truths and releases them as prepared, confident, and skilled to live the best life ever on earth.

Does that sound good? Yes. Does that sound good? Folks, if we want to experience that, if you want to experience this in our own lives and in the lives of our community, this is going to take more than just pitching up to a sermon every other week.

If you want to see that transfer of Jesus' authority into your life to bring freedom from all those other authorities, then you need to be immersed and you need to listen to and obey Jesus.

[25 : 17] this. In my previous setting in Harrow, I was part of a journey of making disciples. We did a lot of learning and experimenting and we landed on following a kind of simple, quite intentional, quite kind of counterintuitive method of apprenticing people to Jesus.

And over just a year, I saw a dad who was in my group overcome barriers to loving his kids. I saw wives learn to serve their non-believing husbands in such a way that husbands were like, ooh, I'd like a little bit of that.

I saw people overcome anxieties and habits that they'd been stuck in for years. What Jesus is saying here, if we really pursue discipleship, it is and it can make that kind of difference.

And it all flows from this great commission. The making of disciples immersed, obedient. Now, I'm out of time, but if that begins to put a bit of fire in your belly, as it were, if that's something that you're, oh, yeah, I'd like that, some of that in my life, and I know my family, my friends would like to see, well, more of that in me, but also in them.

Then, well, first of all, don't stop nagging me until we get something like this going in Christchurch over the months, okay? That's a sort of pledge from me. Discipleship is going to become a really key and important aspect of our life.

[26 : 55] Now, I know that that goes on, absolutely. I don't, I recognise God's absolutely at work, and many of you live transformed, and Jesus led lives, but we know we could all do with more.

And so that is something that's a priority for me. That's a sort of long-term thing, but even this morning, if to be a prepared, skilled, confident apprentice of Jesus is something that you want to do, then we just need to start by asking.

We ask. He already has you here this morning for a reason. And it's a first step to accept his invitation to follow him and to learn from him.

Now, many of you have been doing that for years. Some of you are fresh to this. But as we look at the Great Commission, and we'll just have a moment in a moment to recommission ourselves in the Great Commission, but it begins with us.

Where are we at in our apprenticeship to Jesus? It's going to leave some space. Think it through. Feel in your heart.

[28 : 07] Maybe you're feeling like you're miles away at the moment. Maybe this is kind of a new idea that we can apprentice ourselves to the Master, and that that is the thing that will bring freedom and life to its fullness.

And I also wonder whether, just as I started, just to literally lift the lid on this idea of those inner voices, those inner authorities that come from places of hurt and fear, I wonder if the Holy Spirit's just beginning to help you shine a gentle light on something for you.

And if so, just allow him. The Spirit is gentle. And where we're willing, he will just help us. He wants to bring healing, hope to those places, and to release us from things that have become authorities in our lives that he is a much better authority on.

So again, just leave some space, just trusting that the Holy Spirit is already at work. We need to bring healing to those wounds. And even with those wounds, God, or perhaps particularly those with those wounds, he wants to invite each of us to be those who live and share the story of Jesus, who takes part in this life-fulfilling mission.

And before I sort of invite whoever those who want to to be sort of recommissioned in that, each of us, every single one of us, may have an opportunity this week to either share the story of God's love or show it.

[29 : 58] And I just invite you, together with the Holy Spirit, just to maybe highlight that. Maybe just think ahead in the week who you're going to be meeting. Maybe you're anticipating a rather tricky conversation or encounter.

Maybe it's back in with family. And family can be sometimes the hardest people to talk to about faith. So if you would like the Holy Spirit's help in that situation, and in the rest of your life, and for the weeks and months ahead, and for the years ahead, to be apprentices to Jesus, making disciples of ourselves and others, can I invite those who would just like to receive some help for that?

To stand? Or if you're not able to stand, you might just want to raise your hand, or in some way indicate that you would like to be filled with the Spirit of God, to afresh, make disciples of all nations. Just put your hands out, hands up, stand up, whatever. God takes us in all shapes and sizes. Let's just hear those words again.

And just imagine that there's Jesus saying to you, all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded.

[31 : 38] Behold, I am with you to the very end of the age. Holy Spirit, come and fill your people afresh for the work and the life of mission that you have given us.

Not a place that's just contained in here, but our everyday lives where you have called us to be light and salt, to be beacons of hope.

And Lord, even, and perhaps especially in those areas of our lives in which we feel so wounded that there seems to be a sort of authoritative grip, Lord, I know that even the things that the enemy means for evil, he's working for our good.

They might especially be the places where God wants to use you to share his love with others. So wherever we're at on that journey, Lord, we ask for your Holy Spirit to fill us up, send us out in your power to live and work to the praise of your glory.

Amen. Amen. I invite the band to come.