

"To Teach, Baptise, and Nurture New Believers"

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[0:00] Let us pray. Father, we do want you to answer that prayer that we've just sung, that you would open our eyes to see you at work, that you would give us the words to say, that you would illumine our minds with your grace.

Thank you, Lord. Amen. Well, we've been looking at the five marks of mission, and a couple of weeks ago, Mike looked at the idea of going and telling.

And this week, we've come to the second mark of mission, which is shortened to teach. So we've got tell and teach.

And over the next few weeks, when Mike and I are taking the services, we'll be looking at the other three as well. But I think we all find the idea of mission something of a challenge, don't we?

But we can't avoid those standing orders of the Great Commission, go and make disciples. If telling people in the first place is a daunting prospect and enough to give us anxiety, although, as Cam will probably tell you if you ask him and Jen, that the ACORN approach is a very gentle approach and isn't anxiety producing.

[1:35] So I'd encourage you to look at ACORN or ask Cam and Jen what the ACORN approach is all about. If telling people is daunting, how on earth do we teach and baptize new believers?

How do we make disciples, not just new converts? You see, this teaching and baptizing and nurturing is also rooted in that Great Commission in Matthew 28, where Jesus says, Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

And teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. The mission, God's mission, isn't just about getting people to make a decision to follow Jesus.

That's great, and yet we want that as a, but that is only a first step. God is interested in what happens afterwards. How people progress, how they grow in faith.

How they're transformed from being babes in Christ to Christians of maturity and understanding. In the Marks of Mission graphic, it's summed up as teach.

[3:04] Yes, we do need to learn more about God. But we also need to put into practice what he requires. So perhaps if we want to keep this idea of everything beginning with T, this alliteration, we might use the word train as something better than the word teach.

Because training means getting alongside and showing people how to do stuff, not just telling them and appealing to the brain.

And you see, Jesus did teach. And he spent three years teaching. But even at the end of all that teaching, his followers, those fishermen and Matthew the tax collector and all the rest of them, they'd listen to him teach and tell them what was going to happen.

And they didn't get it. He tried to tell them repeatedly that he had to die. And they just didn't get that that was the way it had to be.

But when we see what Jesus did at the Last Supper, at that Passover meal, when he tied that towel around his waist and washed the disciples' feet, he taught them by example.

[4:29] He taught them that he wanted them to be servants, that he wanted them to serve one another, and that was how they showed love. What we need is an example to follow.

Well, we've got Jesus. But we've got another example in Philip, as we've had read to us. Philip provides us with an example of how to put into practice what Jesus says.

And the narrative that we've had read illustrates at least a couple of the points of the second Mark submission.

Philip explained, he taught to that man in the chariot, that Ethiopian eunuch, and he baptised him. So that's two of the Great Commission things done. But Philip was only fitting in with what God was already doing.

[5:35] God was already at work in that man's life. He'd brought him to Jerusalem. He'd enabled him to purchase a scroll.

Now, they were so expensive, they were so rare, that it was very unusual for an individual to have an actual copy of the Scriptures.

But this man had that. God was at work. God's provision was happening. And Philip just fitted in with what God was already doing.

In some ways, we might be thinking, well, this is more telling, isn't it? This is more spreading the good news, explaining who Jesus is.

But Philip is putting into practice what being a disciple is all about. He's learnt about God's ways. He's learnt what Jesus wants.

[6:34] He's learnt about how he should be loving other people. And he doesn't let any racial prejudice. He doesn't let any social prejudice get in his way.

He sees God at work. And when God says go, he goes. So, what has Philip learned? Well, he learnt to pray.

When the angel or the Holy Spirit said, go, he was in an attitude of prayer. He was listening for God's voice.

That's what prayer's all about. It's not just us talking to God or talking at him. It's a two-way conversation. So, when Philip, in prayer, heard what God wanted him to do, he went and did.

He had that relationship with the Lord that was founded on his prayer life, that intimacy of praying to the Lord. Philip isn't just left on his own.

[7:42] He's not going down the road, randomly grabbing people and asking the question, are you saved? He's not.

It's not like that. Because Philip has that prayer relationship with Jesus, he fits in with God's mission. And so, he is guided and encouraged.

So, as disciples, we need to learn to pray. And I know there's a lot of prayer goes on in this church, but we can always do more.

Philip learnt to be patient. While he was listening to what God was saying, he wasn't trying to fill in the blanks himself. He wasn't trying to, well, this is a good idea, I'll go and do that whilst God gets round to whatever else he wants me to do.

He was patient, and he listened. So, when God said, go to that chariot and stay near, that's what he did.

[8:52] Because the time had come. His patience was rewarded. And notice, he still isn't sort of, oh, God's told me to go, I must go and rush in with both feet.

God says, go and stay near. So, that's what he does. And so, as disciples, we need to be, we need to learn patience.

So that we can recognise God's moment in an individual's life. And, Philip also needed to be alert, didn't he?

He had to be listening, and when he heard, he had to be alert to that voice. Not his own internal monologue of voice, his own voice saying, oh, do this, do that.

He had to be alert to God's voice. You see, now Philip can see what God is already doing. As he draws alongside, and here's the man reading from Isaiah 53.

[10:05] God is at work. And Philip is attuned to God. And Philip hears this. So, as disciples, we need to be alert to those God moments when God says, go and do.

Philip needed to learn to obey God. Jesus tells us, whoever has my commands and obeys him, obeys them, he is the one who loves me.

That's how we show we love Jesus. we obey what he says to do. And we can only obey what he says if we're alert to what he's saying.

So, when Philip is alerted to God being at work in the Ethiopian's life, he still needs to obey. He still needs to go up to the chariot.

He still needs to ask the question, do you know what you're reading? And Philip learned to learn.

[11:21] He needed to know that he didn't have it all. He needed to learn more. And now, Philip is invited into the chariot.

The Ethiopian is welcoming and full of questions. Philip's part was to have got to know his Bible before he went out to that man.

So, he needed to be aware of the scripture. He needed to know what that passage from Isaiah was all about so that he could explain it. And we need to learn our scriptures.

We need to learn how to interpret them so we can pass them on as words of encouragement. Philip isn't doing anything pushy.

He's not rushing in in his own strength. He's not pigeonholing or cornering somebody who doesn't want to know.

[12:34] he's responding to what God is already doing. And so, he's the person on the spot that God can use.

We would love to be the person on the spot that God can use. And so, maybe we have things that we can learn too. So, why is it important to make disciples?

As I've said, it's not just about becoming a Christian. It's about being transformed, about growing in faith, about God working in us and bringing us to spiritual maturity.

Peter urges his readers to move forward in their faith so that they will be able to avoid being led astray. He says, or writes, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

He doesn't want his readers to remain static in their understanding. He wants them to grow in grace and grow in knowledge of their Lord Jesus Christ.

[13:57] you know, we can speak of being born again, but like any birth, it's a beginning. It's not the culmination.

It's not the end point. When we speak of being born again, people, it's people having a new way of thinking, new values, a clean conscience, a new conscience to start again, love, a new sense of what love really is, so that they have a new ability to love, a new hope.

You can put new in front of everything when we become a Christian. And here, discipleship is learning how to embrace and apply all this newness.

Yes, things are different, things feel different, but we need to work them out, and that's what being a disciple is. Sometimes we might need a bit of encouragement, a bit of reassurance.

That's not unlike those early disciples. Jesus needed to do a lot of encouraging and a lot of reassuring. But we do change, and we do start to look at things differently and become different people.

[15:26] Perhaps things that we've done in the past that were a bit, perhaps a bit iffy, suddenly we don't want to do them anymore.

And we wonder why we suddenly have a conscience about them. That's the Holy Spirit at work. That's the new life beginning to take root.

And it's important to make disciples because when we become Christians, we become part of something that is bigger than ourselves. We become part of the church, part of Christ's body.

Perhaps one of the first services I took here, I spoke on 1 Corinthians 12, that body, that image of the body of Christ. Where Paul writes, just as a body, though one has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.

Now you are part of the body of Christ and each one of you is part of it. That means I can say, I am part of the body and this is what God has called me to do as that part of his body.

[16:47] And you can say the same. You are part of the body and God has a function and a use for you within his body. some of the growing churches make it a priority to take new people and get them to do things.

It's not a sort of a reward for having been around for years, but find something that you can do as you become part of it.

It makes you feel part of this body that you've just joined. And I'm very pleased that the Church of Scotland is finally realising that everybody has a role to play, that there is something and a gifting that we all have and we can all bring that to being part of the body of Christ here in Invergordon.

We all have something that God has given us. And he wants us to use it, not for our own benefit, but for the benefit of everybody else.

That's why you've been given those particular gifts. And yes, we are all different and we do all have different personalities. And so God knows just how to use each one of us.

[18:14] God knows which gifts to give each one of us. He doesn't try and force square pegs into round holes. us. He puts us where he knows we will be most effective.

And there's no redundant parts of Christ's body. We just need to find out what he wants us to do. Now you might be telling me, oh, I can't do this and I can't do that and I just have to you know, the thing that we can all do is we can all pray.

But this is about training, this is about teaching, this is about what we should be doing. And I know Marina stands up here week after week and calls for volunteers and I know she doesn't get very much response.

Maybe it's because people lack self confidence. You don't want to push yourself forward because, well, it's just me and there's not a lot I can do.

Well, that IT desk up there, well, I really don't know one end of it from the other. what will I be asked to do? So, perhaps we don't volunteer.

[19:46] But I know that anything that you do do, that you have got a gift for doing, you can do better if you're trained in it, that if you sit with somebody and they tell you that at this point you need to press that button, you will learn to press that button and it will all go well, won't it, tech team?

Maybe it's making the drinks and you, well, I don't know where everything is in the kitchen, I don't know where to find the cups and I don't know where to find the biscuits and I don't, if you volunteer, there'll be somebody there to show you exactly where the biscuits are and where the cups are and what to put out and how to do it.

That's training, that's training in becoming a disciple. you won't be managing on your own.

But there's informal training or informal teaching too, isn't there? There's that chat over a cuppa where you say to somebody, well, I didn't quite get that in the service.

And then you can explain. Or you can say, well, I was confused too, shall we go and ask somebody else? But that's good because you're drawing alongside and you're helping and you're encouraging.

[21:11] Maybe it's providing a lift. Maybe it's giving to the food bank or taking the stuff that we've collected for the food bank down to Blitheswood.

We can be trained in practical things and we can also be trained in spiritual things. The important thing is that we are trained by God.

God leads that. God has a place and a role for each one of us in his body. So we've looked a bit at training, at teaching.

What about baptism? For years, church families have brought their babies to the church for baptism.

But you know, this is increasingly a rare event. And it was such a delight to baptise Dean out in the first last summer. And really look forward to having many more such opportunities.

[22:22] baptism. But Dean hadn't been baptised when he was a child, which meant we could have a service of baptism for him as an adult.

And there will be more and more people like Dean who haven't been baptised as children. So we need to have an increasing awareness of adult baptism, whether it's in a large body of water or whether it's here in the church.

We'll find that as people come to faith, that they haven't been baptised previously and they now want to be baptised as an expression of their newfound faith.

And that will be such a joy and that will be so uplifting and something really we need to look forward to. So, making disciples as a mark of mission, it's a challenge to us as the church.

But Jesus is with us. He has all authority in heaven and on earth. And it's under that authority, under the umbrella of his authority that we can make disciples.

[23:48] that we can reach out with the gospel, that we can bring others in. We're not on our own. This is God's mission. Making disciples isn't

about numbers.

It's not a numbers game. It's not bums on pews. It's about church life, it's about providing a home and a place to learn and grow so that everyone can find a role and feel comfortable and accepted. You see, we're all going to fall into that category of being disciples.

Each one of us is a disciple. It's lifelong learning, isn't it? But we need to see that we are active in our discipleship, that we continue to grow in faith, that we continue to grow in knowledge, and that we continue to increase our love for others.

And we also need to take on board that challenge. Do I play my part fully in the body of Christ? Am I doing that role, that thing that God wants me to do?

[25:17] I might have an awful lot to learn still. But maybe I can pass on what I already know. We need to remember that being a disciple isn't a self-improvement scheme.

But being a disciple is something we sign up to. Not for our own glory, not to bring attention to ourselves, but to glorify Jesus.

That's who this is all about. It's not about us. It's about him. And that's what God's mission is all about. Spreading the good news of Jesus.