

**Matthew 28:16-20 (NIV)** <sup>16</sup> Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. <sup>17</sup> When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in {19 Or into; see Acts 8:16; 19:5; Romans 6:3; 1 Cor. 1:13; 10:2 and Gal. 3:27.} the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

**1 Peter 3:8-16 (NIV)** <sup>8</sup> Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. <sup>9</sup> Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. <sup>10</sup> For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. <sup>11</sup> He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. <sup>12</sup> For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." {12 Psalm 34:12-16} <sup>13</sup> Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? <sup>14</sup> But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; {14 Or not fear their threats} do not be frightened." {14 Isaiah 8:12} <sup>15</sup> But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, <sup>16</sup> keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

## “Things that Will Endure: Evangelism”

As you folks know I went to a Mennonite university, but don't let your imaginations run wild with that. We lived in dorms, dressed normally, and drove cars rather than buggies. Eastern Mennonite was a fine liberal arts university. The school was rather known for its emphasis on missions, cross-cultural experience, grappling with issues of peace and justice, and providing Christian community. When we talked about Evangelism there in the Biblical Studies and Theology department we were more apt to use the term evangelism "in word and deed" and yet focus more on "the deed" side of things. We also said that when it happened in "word" it should be within the context of friendship building. The professors there tried their best to get the students away from seeing evangelism as door-to-door cold calling in an effort to coerce a conversion out of people. Most of the students there in the Bible department had come from churches where that sort of thing was supposed to be what evangelism was but yet there wasn't anybody doing it.

One day my theology professor told a funny story that I thought was rather insightful. We weren't talking about evangelism that day, but rather about salvation. The story, which I believe is a true story, begins with an Old Order Mennonite gentleman standing at a bus stop in a major city back in the late 60's. I guess he could take the bus provided it didn't have a shiny bumper. While he waited, a long-haired Friends of Jesus fellow came up to him and asked, "Are you saved?" The Mennonite gentleman looked at him and began to stroke his beard as he thought about the question. Finally, he answered, "I suppose you should ask my neighbours." His definition of salvation included the aspect that the way he lived his life would reflect whether or not he was saved and therefore, his neighbours could answer that question best for him. The Friends of Jesus guy (the Friends of Jesus movement back in the 60's from which today's Charismatic movement originated), was asking if the Mennonite gentleman had had a born-again experience to confirm his salvation so that he knew he was going to Heaven when he died. The Friends of Jesus fellow was attempting to do what he

thought was evangelism where as the Old Order Mennonite gentleman had probably never heard the word evangelism at all. They Old order Mennonites do not go out and try to get people to join with them.

I think this story very well portrays the two polar extremes that the church faces when talking about Evangelism. It's either an in-your-face question or not done at all. Yet, both of these poles are as far away as they can be from the core of what evangelism is as Peter describes it to us in his epistle. He wrote, "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." (1 Pet. 3:15). Evangelism is a natural outflow of Christian hope. It will happen whether we want it to or not for where Jesus Christ is Lord in the heart, hope is visible in the way of life and that visibility in itself is a powerful proclamation of the Gospel. Our Christian hope is not some pie-in-the-sky wish or desire. It is that Jesus Christ is Lord and by his life, death, resurrection, and ascension he has saved his creation from Sin and Death; and, by the gift of the Holy Spirit he has reconciled us to God in himself and given to us new life that foreshadows the New Creation he is bringing about and will complete at his return on the day of resurrection. Where Jesus Christ is Lord in the heart, New Creation is visible.

Evangelism then is going forth into the world and being Jesus' disciples in such a way that it results in others becoming Jesus' disciples. In Jesus' commission to his disciples in Matthew, the Greek word for "make disciples," *matheteuo*, means both "be a disciple" and "make a disciple". Therefore, the way we live is key to the effort. Where Jesus is Lord in the heart not only is hope visible, not only is New Creation visible, but also Jesus uses us to draw people to himself to make more disciples. Maybe that Old Order Mennonite gentleman wasn't too far off after all.

It's hard for me to use myself as an example here because of me being a minister. As soon as people find that out I'm no longer regarded as myself and whether or not I'm really Christian doesn't matter. The conversation definitely changes. Sometimes people assume I'm a holier than thou judge with an agenda to get them in church so that their dollar will go into the collection plate. On the odd occasion, that little bit of information actually opens the door to a good conversation about things Christian. I really don't have the privilege of people noticing something different about the way I am and wanting to know what it is. Nevertheless, when I see what the Bible has to say about Evangelism it is that people will notice something different about those people in whose hearts Jesus is Lord and that attraction is what Jesus uses to call people to be his disciples. We are different because he lives in us. As Paul said, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor. 5:17).

Jesus here is telling us who are his disciples to go into the world as his disciples and wherever we are at we will make disciples because he is with us and through us, he is drawing people to himself to make them part of the New Creation. A disciple, as I have said on many occasions, is someone who is a student of another's teachings and way of life. In the case of Jesus' disciples things are different. Socrates had his disciples. His teachings persist to today and one could presumably take up his way of life. But you won't find communities of people personally committed to Socrates as if he were still around and in relationship with them. But, that's exactly what happens among the disciples of Jesus. Because he lives and is with us and has placed the Holy Spirit within us, we find ourselves sharing in a relationship with him and in his relationship with God the Father, a relationship that changes who we are in heart. Because of him we know the Father is steadfastly loving and faithful to us each personally.

Jesus says baptize and teach people. Baptism is the sign, the symbol, and our participation in Jesus' death and resurrection. Baptism is the event in which we say, "here is a new creation, the old is gone, the new has come." This person has died and is raised anew and is reconciled to God.

Jesus commands us to teach disciples to keep his commandments. Jesus said, "If anyone would be my disciple he must deny himself take up his cross and follow me." He also gave just one commandment, "Love one another as I have loved you, for by this people will know that you are my disciples." Sacrificial love, cross-bearing love is the way of

life by which people see that something different about us that attracts them to Jesus Christ. When we do acts of love or mercy, when we work for justice, when we strive to forgive, that's when Jesus is working through us to draw all peoples to himself. Friends, you are each a living proclamation of the gospel that Jesus is Lord and through him God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit has saved his creation and is making it new. Set aside Jesus as Lord in your hearts, so that others may see your hope and want to have it to. Amen.