

## “Making a Difference in the World”

Matthew 28:16-20

January 10, 2010

The Church is nearly 2000 years old now, and it has changed quite a bit over the years. The early church was focused on fulfilling the great commission, “*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.*” (Matthew 28:19-20) The early church went forth to win the world for Christ. That was a very dangerous mission, because in those days the world hated the Christians even more than they hated the Jews, and the world has never liked the Jews. But in spite of the danger, they took on the challenge, and after hundreds of years, they were successful. The world was changed, and Christianity became a major faith, particularly in the Western world.

Over the years the focus of many churches in America has changed, partly due to their success in the past. We still look to the great commission. But where the early church focused on the first part, “*Go and make disciples ...*”, the modern church has focused on the last part, “*I am with you always...*” It is the difference between “Onward Christian Soldiers”, a church marching off to a spiritual war, and “In the Garden”, where we have the comfort and assurance of Jesus walking and talking with us. The early church talked about the danger and excitement of taking on the world, the willingness to take a risk in faith, the thrill of self-sacrifice in the name of Jesus. The modern church speaks about comfort, safety, and acceptance, of nurturing relationships, of meekness and humility. And because the focus has changed, there are fewer men in the church, and we are having more difficulty attracting young adults, both male and female, because they want the excitement not the safety. They want challenge more than comfort. They are more interested in taking risks than building supportive relationships. To many, the church has become a place for women, wimps, and children.

Let me make this perfectly clear - the church is not for wimps. This is a place for people of strength and courage. This is a place for people who are willing to take a risk and step out in faith. This is still a place to be comforted, a place to feel the peace of standing in the presence of God; the assurance of knowing our life will be okay regardless of the chaos that might be going on in the midst of it. But more so, this is a place to be empowered by God so we can go into the world to make things happen. And we can make things happen. Much of the world has returned to a state of paganism from which it has come, partly because we, as a church, not necessarily this church but the Church Universal, has spent more time looking in rather than reaching out. But today we have a world that needs to be changed. We have a great work before us, to go into all the world to make disciples, and we are a people designed to do great things. We are the ones who are called and empowered to get it done. We have the tools. We have the talent. We have the Lord Jesus Christ. And we will make a difference in the world.

But how do we change the world? How do we make a difference? We are just a little church in the middle of York County. How can we make a difference? It’s been done before, you know. In 1776, colonists signed their names to a very radical document that would change the world. They knew that by signing the Declaration of Independence, they were putting a price on their heads and their lives on the line. We know how the declaration begins, about the God-given rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. But do you know how the declaration ends? “*And for the support of this declaration and with a firm reliance and the protection of the divine providence [that’s God] we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes,*

*and our sacred honor.*” That’s called commitment. They pledged their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor. Have you ever made that sort of risky commitment in your life? But now we see the power that commitment brings because we are the most powerful and influential nation in the world.

In 1943, 100,000 young Germans in brown shirts crammed into the Olympic stadium, the largest stadium in the world at that time, and with their bodies they formed the words, “Hitler, we are yours.” That’s commitment. And they took over a continent. They nearly took over the world. It took a world war to liberate and release the Europeans from the bondage of Nazism.

Nearly forty years ago a group of Chinese students focused like a laser on a little book called The Sayings of Chairman Mao. They memorized it and said that they were going to live by the book and die by the book and commit their lives to the book. In what is now known as the Cultural Revolution, the largest nation in the world, China, was in total upheaval and even today over one billion people - a quarter of the world -are under the domination of Communism because of the commitment of a few.

History teaches over and over again that it doesn’t take a lot of people to change the world. It just takes a committed few, a fully committed few. And I think that our nation, our world is in need of change. I believe that our culture, the American culture, needs a cultural revolution. In a time and place where the government is simply throwing money at anything and everything; where partisanship has soared to unbelievable heights; where politicians are more interested in power than principles; in a time and place where children, youth, and young adults, are killing themselves and others with drugs, weapons, oppression and violence; in a time and place where we watch the worst examples of humanity courtesy of Jerry Springer and a variety of reality shows that have nothing to do with reality, something is terribly wrong. We need a revolution in this land.

But I also deeply believe that the answer is not political. We cannot legislate people into being good. Nor is the answer education. It may be a part of things, but there is something so much more important. We need a spiritual revolution to erupt all over this land. Because change takes place in the heart and we change society one life, one heart at a time. The heart of our problem is a problem of the heart. And we have the answer that heals the human heart. That’s why we’re beginning a new series called “Making a Difference in Our World.” And it all starts with commitment. Because nothing happens without commitment. Commitment requires action. Commitment turns dreams into reality. There are a lot of great dreamers in the world, but nothing happens until we wake up from our dreams and begin to step out, to reach out in faith. It’s called commitment.

Commitments define our life. We are the sum total of our commitments. Tell me what you’re committed to and I’ll tell you the direction you’re headed, and I’ll tell you where you’re likely to end up. The weak are controlled, dominated and directed by their circumstances. But strong individuals are directed and determined by their commitments. So we must choose our commitments wisely because that’s where we’re headed, and that’s where we’re likely to end up.

The Bible says a lot about commitment. We are told that God is looking for people to use. God is looking for people who can make a difference in this world, who can make the world a better place. But there is one requirement. 2 Chronicles 16:9 “*The eyes of the Lord search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him.*” God is looking to use us, if we are fully committed. What does it

mean to be fully committed to Christ? Is there a difference between being partially committed, half-committed, casually committed and fully committed? Most definitely.

The United Methodist Church as a whole has proclaimed that we have made a commitment to “*make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.*” We believe that the heart of the problem is a problem of the heart and we have the cure to the world’s heart problem. His name is Jesus. He is the Son of God and the Son of Man. He died for our sins and rose again so we could start anew, as though the sin had never happened. As a congregation, we say that our number one commitment is “*to make disciples by sharing Christ’s love through worship, ministry, mission, and fellowship.*”

The commitment of St. Paul does not stop there. We talk about a commitment to certain core values. Prayer, Bible Study and Worship, Missions, Evangelism, Fellowship, and Stewardship. Now in some of those areas we have done very well. In the past year we have started a new Sunday School class, and we have added a Women’s Bible Study. In the past year we have partnered with the ministry of Servants, which enabled us to go into a number of places to share the love of God in very practical ways, and to improve the housing of those we touched. In addition to those new things, we have continued to reach out with the Clothing Bank and Angel Food. We have supported children with the Star Tree and Sunbeam Station. And we have supported all sorts of mission and ministries, near and far, with both our funds, and with the work of our hands. We have shown our commitment in a number of areas. But there is more we can do. There are areas where we can step up that commitment. To what are you committed?

Let me tell you about my commitments. I am committed to the United Methodist Church. That commitment has not always been there, at least not as it is now. I grew up the EUB Church, as many of you have, but then through the work of people I didn’t even know, I became a United Methodist. But as I have followed my calling, as I have looked at our history through the founders of our denomination, Otterbein and Boehm, Albright and Wesley, I have discovered a church that is built on the grace of God and the free will of humanity. I have found a people who are committed to grow close to God even as we reach out to those in need. We are called Methodist because we had a method, a plan to follow that would lead us closer to God. We have been United Brethren because we have come together in the knowledge and faith that Jesus died for our sins and rose for our sake. He died our death that we might live in Him. We are United Brethren, brothers and sisters together in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are Evangelical because we have the good news that this world needs. We have a message that has burned in our hearts and bones from the very beginning and we need to get that message out. I am committed to that idea and that theology.

I am committed to the Central Pennsylvania Conference, soon to be the Susquehanna Conference, because I have seen both in history and in the present day, the talented and grace filled people who have stepped out of the box time and time again that we might lead the denomination, that we might lead the church in mission and ministry. A conference that has been creative and committed. Oh, mistakes have been made along the way, but I will put the talent, the creativity, the commitment of these people up against most any in the world and I am proud to be a part, a member of this conference.

I am committed to the church called St. Paul. I am appointed to lead and serve this congregation. But that is not my job. A job I can walk away from. I can go home and leave this place behind. But much more important than an appointment by the Bishop is a calling from Christ. And I believe whole heartedly that I

am where God wants me to be so I can join my gifts, knowledge, and experience with your gifts knowledge, and experience. I am committed to helping this congregation to reach out to this community with the work of our hands and the love of our hearts. We have the most wonderful message that the world has ever heard and we have a responsibility to get that message to all the people around us that we might grow in number even as we grow in spirit.

I am committed to my wife and my family. For these are the people who have made a commitment with me and to me. We have shared the joys and sorrows of life together. And though sometimes those commitments have been challenged, they remain in tact. This is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. As individuals we are not complete in and of ourselves. God has given us counterparts that we might be whole. Nancy has helped to make me whole. And together we have built a family, both with the people from which we came, and with those we have created. We have built a family of friends about whom we care and who care for us. I am committed to my wife and family.

And most of all, I am committed to the Lord Jesus Christ. For while a was yet a sinner, he died for me. I was not, am not, will not ever be worth his sacrifice. But through His grace I am forgiven and set free. He accepted me just as I am but then He said that it was necessary for me to change, for His will to become my will; that He might live in me and through me. I have been bought and brought into the kingdom of God and in that I have been changed and hopefully, I am changing still. Ever moving closer to be perfected in love just as Christ is perfect love. And because I am committed to Him, I am ready to go into all the world to make disciples in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. I am ready to go forth to change the world, to claim the world in the name of Jesus. And I know it can be done. For we have a God who is committed to us. Are you committed to Him? Are you committed to Him? Are you committed to Him? Are you ready to change the world? Are you ready to claim the world for Jesus? Then let us go and make it happen. And in your life may it be so. Amen and amen.