

Our Mission (Commissioning Service)

“Multiplying Disciples” by the Rev’d Adam Lowe

Bible Passage: Matthew 28:16-20

Gracious God, thank you for the privilege it is to know you, be recipients of your grace, and participants in your mission. Please help us—in the very power of your Spirit—to be a community with long vision: active in nurturing disciple-making disciples, along with other communities who are committed to the same. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

When Bettrys and I lived in Durham, one of the great joys was hearing the bells of the cathedral and our local church — ringing out. The bells have been in their towers in the same spot for centuries, but when they are rung, the sound is unleashed far and wide. It echoes, reverberates, bounces within the town, over hills, permeating every corner of the surrounds. I loved it! I loved it, because:

- **To me: that’s what it sounds like as the Gospel goes out and the church grows.**
- Acts 2 (47) ... *the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*
- Acts 4 (4) ... *many who heard the message believed...*
- Acts 5 (14) ... *more and more people were added to the Lord...*
- Acts 6 (1) ... *the number of disciples increased.*
- Acts 6 (7) ... *the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly.*
- Acts 6 (7b) ... *a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.*
- Acts 9 (31) ... *living in the fear of the Lord, encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.*
- That’s only the first nine chapters of Acts!
- The gospel goes out *and* the church grows!
- **Maybe as you hear that it excites you!** *You might be attracted to the spectacular, the seemingly successful, the loud + the large, you long for revival on mass: go big or go home.*
- **Perhaps you’re cynical or suspicious:** *thinking, ew, Christianity grasping for more, longing for supremacy—you might be suspicious of any movement that attempts, aspires, or appears to be growing.*

- **Perhaps you're overwhelmed**, even downcast, thinking—ugh—I can't do this. Where do we begin? We feel small, I don't have the skills, we're in a culture that simply doesn't seem interested.

We don't pursue growth for growth's sake. *Else we'll be serving the wrong master.*

And we shouldn't feel like failures if things don't reach the lofty heights we imagine.

We must simply be faithful to the mission that the Lord Jesus has given us.

That's what we hear in Matthew 28.

That's what we embrace at St Bart's as we seek to *make, mature, and multiply disciples of Jesus.*

We pray for multiplication — not because it's some large church mantra, or prosperity growth agenda! But because the only reason that we can be here today, commissioning a lead minister for this church plant, is because the Gospel rang out 2000 years ago, kept ringing out, AND reached us, *so that we might believe and take our part in the Gospel continuing to ring out.*

- So as we think about that today, and begin a whole new chapter in the life of St Bart's, and this congregation, let's simply consider:
the principle, practice, and power of multiplying disciples.

THE PRINCIPLE | MATTHEW 28:16-20

First, the **PRINCIPLE**: *multiplying disciples is focused on forming disciple-making disciples.*
Matthew 28, verse 18...

[Jesus said] "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising 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."

Our mission as a church — to make, mature, & multiple disciples, is straight out of Jesus' commission!

- **Make disciples:** of course, Jesus dispatched the disciples to proclaim the Good News. On the very authority of Jesus, every disciple shares—in varied ways—part of that call.
We're passionate as a church in praying for and seeking to help people to become followers of Jesus.
- **Mature disciples:** yes — for Jesus' command was not only to *make disciples*, but that they would be taught to obey everything that he has commanded us.
We're passionate as a church in praying for and doing everything we can to grow in maturity.
- **Multiply disciples:** *It's easy to miss, but if Jesus' commission was to go and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey ALL that he had commanded them, then that therefore must also include this very command, to go and make disciples and teach them to obey everything including to make disciples!*
- Not everyone is *shaped, placed, and called* to do that in precisely the same way.

- But every disciple takes their place as a disciple-making disciple. /
- We do not exist just for your own benefit.
- When you take your part in discipling someone, praying for someone, inviting someone, sharing the good news with someone, teaching them, showing them the love of Christ, as incredible that is—as extraordinarily privileged as that is—you're *not just discipling them*.
- It's multiplying out to whoever they disciple, and—in turn— whoever that person discipled, and the one after that.
- Just think, *if you disciple one person every year, in ten years you will have discipled ten people*. But: if each year you disciple *one* disciple, *who then discipled someone else*, who then discipled someone else, then that number of multiplies out, so that by: in year 5: there are 16 people being discipled; in year 6: there are 32 people being discipled; in year 10: there are over 500 people being discipled; cumulatively over 1000 people will have been discipled.
- That's a simple formula but this is anything but formulaic. This is the very way that God—in the power of his Spirit, through the prayer and gifts of his people— has chosen to spread his Word and grow his church.//
- God can and does take even our most meagre of efforts and multiply it out. That's the principle.

THE PRACTICE | ACTS 6:1-7

Second, how do we do that? The **PRACTICE**: in communities of disciple-making disciples.

We get a glimpse of that in *Acts 6*. *Let's pick up from verse 1...*

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

The early church was made up of communities of *disciple-making-disciples*.

But as the church grows at a phenomenal pace, new issues and challenges surfaced.

- The *Hebraic Jews* are likely those from the immediate region. *The Hellenistic Jews* are Greek speaking, *who may have lived away from Jerusalem*, had been part of Jewish diaspora (that is, dispersion) around the Mediterranean but are now back.
- *The church is growing, backgrounds are varied, needs are diverse, AND the demands are compounding.*
- This is real life. As they work the issue through, it's like a case study of the sorts of practices that shaped the **inward** and **outward** dimensions of their community.

Inwardly, we see everyone has a role to play.

- As the Apostles—*along with the community*—try to figure out how best to address their growing pains, it's critical that they don't *dismiss* or *diminish* the issue in any way.
- They know that teaching the word of God must be their priority, their focus, *That—verse 2—“it would not be right for us to neglect the word of God,”* but they also know that it would not be right for them to neglect the ministry, in this instance, of care.
- It's really significant that the word used to describe those who serve at the tables and who serve in teaching, *is actually the very same word in the original language.*
- The point is that: not only does everyone have a part to play, but that every part works towards the Word going out.
- Whilst of course the *ministry of the Word* is not just limited to a sermon on a Sunday, *—it involves many parts of our service in what we pray, hear, read, sing, and proclaim—* I'm really conscious that the only reason that Michael, I, and all who preach, can be privileged to stand up on a Sunday to unpack God's Word together, *is because there's a whole body participating in the life of our church in a multitude of ways.*
- As we seek in practice to be a community of disciple-making disciples: that involves us deploying our prayer, finances, gifts, time, hospitality, and witness.
- Every part of the body matters, because God is the source of what we have, and it's his purposes that we ultimately serve.

But note, that as these early communities took their part in God's mission, *they did so not only by nurturing the inner life of their **community**, but also outwardly nurturing the life of others.*

- As we read of the history and practice of the early church, we see *time-and time again*, that not only were they passionate about nurturing the health of their community of disciple-making disciples, but they were also committed to: *praying* for the spread of the Gospel; *training* Gospel leaders; *sending* Gospel leaders out; *planting* new communities of disciple-making disciples. //
- As a church we have so much to give thanks for as God has been so faithful to us.
- We have witnessed incredible fruit in the making and maturing of disciples, but God—in his kindness—has also multiplied that out in some extraordinary ways.
- How amazing would it be, if in a decades time, if it wasn't just our communities in Toowoomba and Brisbane still faithfully committed to our mission, but if there were five new Gospel-shaped communities that had been planted; and 20 full-time ministers and missionaries who had been sent.
- We're not just making disciple-making disciples. *We long to plant church-planting-churches.*
- It is costly! With our prayer, our finances, our gifts, and our time. It's even uncomfortable? *It will stretch us and keep bringing us to our needs in our prayer.*

THE POWER | MATTHEW 28:20

*But just look at the **POWER** of what is possible. Back to Matthew 28... Jesus promised...*

And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

This isn't the formula for success, it is the **power** of God at work *by his Spirit*. //
God has been so faithful.

- a) It was almost a century ago that the very first service of the Church of England was held at Middle Ridge, TWB.*
- b) We had no idea how to do it, but In 2020 we launched the mission goal to plant a new community in Brisbane.*
- c) Last year on October 26, a very faithful group of believers got it going.*
- d) Today we celebrate that God has answered our prayers and a new chapter has begun.*

I am so thankful for those who have been committed to the call of Jesus to not only make and mature disciples, but also to nurture new communities of believers to take their part in making disciple-making disciples from one generation to the next.

- *But even that is not our beginning. // Because—in one-way-or-another—each one of our stories, and the story of every Christian community, finds its origin, right back some 2000 years, to Jesus, who continues to be with us today.*
- *Imagine if you could hear the stories of every person and every community, who has influenced you, and those who influenced them, and those who influenced them.*

- *Jesus spent most of his time with only a small group of followers, but from one generation-to-the-next it has multiplied out, and to us. /*
- *If the Lord has not yet returned in 100 years, who will know the Lord and what communities will exist because of us.*
- *Our mission is to make and mature disciples of Jesus Christ for God's glory.*
- *But that is not just for those who we see, but also for those who are *not yet*.*
- *That the word of the Lord will ring out, until our Savior returns.*