

# The Critical Juncture of

# Evangelism

# Disciple-Making

*Aimée Twigg*

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The ministry of the Church is succinctly stated in *The United Methodist Book of Discipline*: “The Mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ.” (§120)

Matthew 28:19-20 is a biblical mandate for this mission: “Go therefore 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 that I have commanded you” (RSV).

Discipleship is a living, breathing process of confirming/nurturing the relationship of an individual’s life with the God of all Life in and through Jesus Christ! It begins with awakened awareness of the “good news” and a response to Christ beginning a life-long spiritual journey of nurtured learning within the Body of Christ.

More specifically, the evangelizing part of this process is described in §122: “We proclaim the gospel, seek, welcome and gather persons . . .” and “lead persons to commit their lives to God through baptism and profession of faith in Jesus Christ.” To “proclaim” is as much being a living example as a spoken word and is “caught” as much as it is “taught.” But only after one professes faith in Christ (at whatever age) can one begin the discipling process to learn of and follow him.

It is exactly at the juncture of profession of Christ and the ensuing life of discipleship that the relationship of evangelism and the mission of disciple-making is critical. Evangelism is the portal to a disciplined life. Evangelism occurs whenever the good news is proclaimed. Without being evangelized, hearing and responding to the good news, the soil of the heart is not primed and ready to give root to the seed of God’s word. The parable of the sower in Luke 8:4-18 tells us, “. . . as for that in the good soil, they are those, who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bring forth fruit with patience” (RSV). The word is proclaimed. The word is heard and “held fast.” Then, it follows, they “bring forth fruit . . .” The resulting “fruit” is the product of discipleship and, I submit, is not possible without the initial evangelistic planting of faith by the word.

It is fascinating to consider that humanitarian good may be a product of the Church in many places, but the “fruit” of a disciplined life is far more abundant and effective. Whenever our disciplined, but undisciplined lives produce humanitarian deeds, but not fruit, we need to reflect upon the critical juncture of evangelism and discipleship. A checklist for reference at that point:

- **Predominance of the Mission:** Do we believe and are we equipped in order that making disciples of Jesus Christ is our primary calling?
- **Person of Jesus Christ:** William M. Easum’s powerful article, “The Scope of Our Mission,” in the May 2002 issue of *NET Results* cautions, that “forty-one percent of the adults who attend Christian Church services in a typical week say they have not embraced Jesus Christ as their Savior.” This is the evangelism piece of the discipling process gone awry. No Jesus Christ, no power and no fruit!
- **Presence of the Holy Spirit:** Jesus promises His particular presence with us in our obedience to keeping the mission primary. At the end of Matthew 28, Jesus says, “And lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”
- **Putting Pride Aside:** Thinking we can do anything as Christians apart from the power of the Holy Spirit, we are both fools and fruitless failures.
- **Plumbline of Prayer:** A plumbline is true. Prayer protects us from going off in well-intentioned but dangerous directions. We disciples must be kept on a short leash!
- **Partnering of Lay And Clergy:** We give this lip-service, but clergy must partner with lay people in more effective ways to fulfill our mission together.

I passionately believe the Church must intentionally live out our missional mandate. But only as we rely upon the mysterious, miraculous power of the God of Jesus Christ will we be fruitful in doing so. □



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