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## *Moving Mountains: Mount of Commission* Matthew 28:16-20

Last month Cyndi and I were invited to attend the change of command ceremony at Naval Base Kitsap. One of our own members, Pete Dawson, is now the commanding officer of that entire base comprising five different installations, 10,000 acres and thousands of personnel. When you go to such an event, you cannot help but notice something: when the commanding officer speaks, stuff happens! Pete is **the** guy and when he says he would like something done... it gets done! With a snappy salute. Just like how I respond when Cyndi says she wants something.

At the very end of Matthew's gospel, a ceremony takes place on a mountain in Galilee. It is definitely **not** a change of command ceremony; Jesus makes it clear that he is **still** in charge and will be forever. But He is getting ready to move his headquarters back to heaven and he gives his disciples their marching orders. We call this the **Great Commission**. And I believe this text gives us **our** marching orders.

2007 was a tough year for Chapel Hill. We came to realize that we were becoming more and more focused on ourselves: our programs, our ministries, our needs. We realized that we had become somewhat self-centered and that we needed to turn our hearts outward again as a church—to remind ourselves that we exist to serve the world for the sake of Jesus. Our first move in that direction was to raise the temperature on mission... with the goal of actively involving **every** church member in mission. Since then, through Go Sundays and mission trips, literally thousands of Chapel Hill folks have gone beyond our walls to offer acts of mercy and compassion in the name of Christ. That missional focus has changed us. We are a different church because we started taking Jesus' "go" into the world more seriously and more personally.

But last year I began to ask the Lord, "Okay, what's next? Now where do you want us to go as a congregation?" This morning I'd like to share what I believe God said and where we are headed in the coming year. Here's what I heard from the Lord: "**Evangelism**. I want my people equipped to share the good news of what Jesus with others." Evangelism.

At the end of this service, more than 20 young adults will become members of this congregation. They will declare, "Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior." If you are a member, raise your hand. All 1700 of you spoke made the same vow. Great! We believe you. Now, what does that mean? Members? Can you explain why you think

you need saving? And why you think Jesus is the man to do it? Can you explain the difference that the Jesus has made in your life? Or why someone else needs him, too? Do you think that your neighbor, who appears to have it all together, really needs Jesus?

The other day I invited my physical therapist to come to church. She said, "I'm not a good Christian like others. I don't really belong in church." What would you have said to her? A few weeks back, a man told me he was dying and wanted to talk about religion. What would you have said to him? In Mexico last week, one man admitted to his tent mate that he wasn't a Christian but that he wanted to be. What would you have said to him?

Let's do an experiment. This will scare some of you, but hear me out before you freak out. Pick one person who is not the spouse or friend or kid or parent you came with. Go ahead. Now I want the person to the right to say the following to their partner, "I am ready to become a Christian. Can you tell me what that means and how to do it?"

Now, questionee, what would your answer be? I won't make you answer it right now, but does knowing that give you a sense of relief? And if you are the questioner, are you glad that you were doing the asking and not the answering? And let's admit it, we don't often get people asking us those kind of questions, right? So when was the last time that you **initiated** an opportunity to share Jesus with someone else? Not to pressure them or coerce them. Not to get another notch on your evangelistic belt. But because you have experienced something great that is worth sharing. And because you believe it would help them.

When Jesus stood on that mountain he told his disciples to go into the world and make disciples. "Go and teach them to obey the things I have taught you. Go and teach them that the only way to experience—here and in the world to come—is become my follower." Now, what is the word for that kind of sharing? Evangelism. I know... scary word, huh? But it doesn't have to be. Do you know what the Greek word "evangel" means? "Good news." It is good news that God loves us, good news that he sent his son to save us, good news that we don't have to earn his love by being really religious, good news that there is a way to live with Jesus' help that is better than the way we live without Jesus, good news that we can be with God for eternity. That is what most of you believe. But I wonder—how many of you really **believe** that it is good news? And are excited to share that good news with others?

Let me drill a little deeper. How many people have become disciples of Jesus because you shared with them? How many people have you talked to about Jesus in the last week? Month? Year? How many people at school or work or the club even know that you belong to Jesus? If we have good news, isn't that supposed to be easy to share? I was talking with a pretty new grandpa Friday. He couldn't help himself; he **had** to talk about those grandchildren. It was his good news. Good news bubbles.

How much about Jesus bubbles out of you? As a church over the last four years, we have become more willing to turn our hearts outward and serve other people with works of compassion and mercy and justice. Literally thousands have been involved in Go Sunday and Mexico builds and mission trips to Zambia, Swaziland, Romania, Cambodia, Burma, India, Guatemala and other places. And that is a good thing.

Now comes the next step. **Being ready to explain why you are doing it.** One of the Mexican fathers last week knew something about the geography of the United States. When he realized that our men had come from Washington State, he was shocked. "Washington?" he asked. Three times. He couldn't believe it and he wanted to know why in the world men would travel 1500 miles to build him a house. Good works of mercy and compassion are a great thing. They please God. Jesus told us to do them. **But they don't save people.** Only Jesus saves people. If someone asked you why you did something compassionate for them, would you be able to tell them about Jesus?

Some of you can. Some of you do. But most of us, I'll bet, struggle with evangelism. I do. It can feel pushy. Or arrogant. Or scary. Right? That's why I believe it is time for "**The Year of Good News.**" That's what we are going to call this initiative: The Year of Good News. We are going to spend the next year equipping this congregation to be "good news sharers." And here's what we pray and hope: one year from now, if you faithfully participate, you will have the "**reason, the will, the tools, the courage and the inspiration to share your living faith in Jesus.**" That is our end game: that every person here will have the reason, the will, the tools, the courage and the inspiration to share their living faith in Jesus.

The first thing we need to understand about evangelism is "the reason." Why should I share my faith in Jesus? Isn't religion a personal and private matter? Who says that I have to share? Professor John Lennox of Oxford, a world renowned evangelist and apologist, is going to spend three months with us starting in July. He is going to preach four times, teach classes, meet with leaders and conduct our third Oxford Northwest Apologetics Conference. I've asked him to focus his teaching on **the reason** for evangelism.

But after you understand the reason, you need the **will**. Some Christians know that they should share their faith; they just aren't willing to do so. How can we strengthen your will to share the Good News? Some people understand the reason and they are willing, but they just don't have the **tools**. We will give you practical tools to share the Good news. Some have the reason, the will and the tools, but they don't have the courage. Have any of you ever been afraid of talking about Jesus? That you'd say the wrong thing? That you'd look stupid? That you would be rejected by your friends or family? We will pump a little courage into you. And even if we have the reason, the will, the tools and the courage, if we don't have the **inspiration** of the Holy Spirit to prompt and guide us, we are doomed from the

start. We can't save anybody. Only the Holy Spirit can. All we can do is share the Good News of what God has done for us, and invite them to receive the same gracious gift.

So that's the vision for the coming year. What do you think? Could you get excited about a Year of Good News? That's the vision. Now, I want to share with you a couple of challenges that we face going forward. Our first challenge is **staffing**. As most of you know, Pastor Jim is going to be retiring October 1. The good news is: he and Carolyn will continue to worship with us. They love this church. The bad news is: we will be down one pastor. And the "badder" news is: we cannot afford to replace Jim at this time. Our income has dropped over the last four years by \$700,000. It looks like we will end our fiscal year in June \$100,000 below budget. And so, it appears that we will have only two ordained pastors on our staff next year for the first time since 1988.

Don't get me wrong. God has blessed us with unbelievable resources. And our budget cuts have actually been very good for us in some ways. We are leaner and meaner. We are learning how to do more with less; how to make better use of volunteers. I actually think we are in a better place because God put us on a diet. And we will figure out how to get on without a third pastor. But I don't believe it is sustainable. I don't know of another church our size that doesn't have at least twice that many pastors. It is a possible recipe for burnout. So, we have some financial issues—just like every family here.

But it's not all because of the recession. There are many who give very generously to this church. And there are some who can't give anything because they don't have jobs. But hear me on this: there are hundreds of members—not just attenders, but members—who do have a job, who haven't seen a drop in their income, but who give little or nothing to their church. If that describes you, somehow we have not done a good job convincing you that we really do need you to do your part.

One of our important challenges is to ignite and excite every single member to believe that our mission is worth supporting and to do so generously. We need to develop a culture of tithing, where more and more church members are committed to the biblical standard that the first ten percent of what they make belongs to the Lord. Did you know that if every person in this church was on welfare but we all tithed—gave ten percent of whatever we made—our giving would go up by about 20%?

We are enormously grateful for the generosity of this congregation. And your session and staff will be good stewards every dollar. But as I said, a two-pastor model for our church is not sustainable. So, that's one important challenge.

Our second challenge is **denominational**. Most of you have seen the letter that the session asked me to send. If not, it is on our website. Our denomination just approved changes to our constitution that are very disturbing to your session and

to thousands of sessions across the country. In our presbytery alone, seven other churches joined us in a signing a letter asking to meet with our General Presbyter to discuss our future because the change in direction of the PC USA is not acceptable to us.

The core issue is the Bible. Our denomination has existed for less than 30 years, but even during that short time there has been a continual erosion of our biblical moorings. We are people of the Book. We govern our lives and our church by what the scriptures tell us to do. And as we watch what we believe to be a denomination-wide drift away from the authority of scripture as it has been understood for 2000 years... that is a concern for us.

I know it is a concern for you, too. Many have sent emails of support. We have also received a few emails of concern and pain because they don't want Chapel Hill to become judgmental or holier-than-thou. We're with you! We don't want that, either. I am glad that we are a church that has always welcomed every broken person with the love and grace of Jesus. That is the heart of our ministry. But Jesus is in the business of redeeming and healing and setting us free from our sin. He is in the business of saving, and it is the Bible that guides us on that journey toward salvation.

So, another big challenge facing us is to figure out how we can continue to be the church we have always been. A church that is warm and welcoming and relevant to life. A church that holds up hope and forgiveness in Jesus. A church that seeks to follow the historical teachings of scripture. A church that holds its leaders to a high standard of integrity and behavior.

This will be a challenge. But—and I really mean this—it is also an exciting opportunity for us. It is always good for a church to reaffirm who it is, what it believes and where it is going. Over the next few months, we will be doing exactly that and we will invite you to join in that important conversation. That started today with our Town Hall meeting. This gathering was more about hearing your questions and comments than it will be offering a lot of answers. It's our first step forward together.

In a moment, we are going to welcome our confirmation class into membership. These young people—a product of our youth ministry—have spent the last year together learning, studying, reaffirming what **they** believe under the direction of spiritual mentors. They are ready to stand before this congregation, take their vows and present themselves as members of Chapel Hill Church. One of those young people will be my son, Cooper. The longing of my heart—my most fervent prayer as a young pastor—was that when we had children, they would love Jesus and love His Church. I had seen so many pastors whose kids resented and turned from the church and the faith; it was actually the most frightening thing about my becoming a pastor.

But God has answered my prayers. My college daughter Rachel loves the Lord and loves his Church. And today, my son will declare his love for the Lord and his love for the Church. And it is you, Chapel Hill, that Cooper loves. You, Chapel Hill, that taught him who Jesus is and led him to salvation. For as long as I have known you, Chapel Hill, you have been a loving, welcoming place of Good News for thousands of people. Now, you have shared the Good News with my boy. I will always be grateful. To God. And to you. Thank you.

I look forward to our journey forward together, wherever it takes us, as we continue to seek be faithful to who and what God has called us to be. It will be very exciting!

## **SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- **Read the passage out loud.**

- **Reflect & Apply Individually:** Each person take 5-7 minutes to circle words or phrases that jumped out at them; jot down your reflections; check the notes in your Study Bible for insight or help. Grapple with what the Spirit is saying to you, your group, the church—write down some applications.

- **Reflect & Apply Together:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.

- **Pray together:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for and lay one concern before the Lord.

- **Dig deeper**

1. Read our text as well as Acts 1: 1-8. This represents Jesus' "parting shot" to his disciples...the last things he said to them. What does that tell you about its importance to Jesus?

2. What are the various aspects of Jesus' Great Commission? How do they align with your own Christian life? If there are some gaps for you, where are they? Why, do you think?

3. What do you think it means to "make disciples?" How can the "average" Christian do that? Or is this call reserved for "professional" Christians?