



March 22, 2015  
Ellis White, Pastoral Intern  
Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

*Disciple-making 101: A 90 Day Challenge*  
*Sinful Things*  
John 3-9

I know many of you have asked me lately, 'Has the visa thing been sorted out?' And I just wanted to let you all know that we are still here... and we are still waiting to hear back on our change of status application. My wife, Rachel, and I are still in the same missionary visa category as when we arrived—we are still missionaries to Gig Harbor, WA. It's a funny thing really, unless you think we are here to return you all to the sovereignty of the British Crown and Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. No, it's funny because Rachel and I always thought we would be missionaries to some nation in Africa. I mean, they are the ones who really need missionaries, right? But here we are... missionaries to beautiful Gig Harbor.

The truth is, Gig Harbor and the whole of the US need Jesus just as much as any other part of this world. And even if America was a Christian nation in the past, things look a little different today... there are less and less people who live their lives according to traditional Christian morality. This week on my Facebook feed, a quote popped up from a church leader named Ed Stetzer. The quote was from his blog the day after the election in 2012. He said this:

'We must face the reality that [Christians] may be on the losing side of the culture war... While this certainly does not mean we should stop legal or political efforts completely, it does mean that we should begin thinking about what it looks like to be the church in a "post-culture war" era.'

Whether you agree with him or not, I hear the stories all the time of parents and grandparents in this congregation talking about their kids and grandkids who are living with their partners, having children outside of marriage, smoking pot, coming out as homosexual. And it's not just kids and grandkids, it's neighbors and work-colleagues and school friends. Every day we interact with people who reject Christian moral values.

Yet, Jesus calls those of us who follow him to make disciples of all peoples. We are not called to only make disciples of those who live good lives, only of those who go to church, only of those who have already given their lives to Jesus. Saints, we are called to all peoples, because God loves all people. So how then, should we make disciples of those who refuse to live moral lives? Well, I'm going to suggest we learn from the master disciple-maker: Jesus.

For over two months, as a church we have been reading together through the accounts of Jesus' life in the Bible—the gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And we have been learning about Jesus and how he made disciples. Many of you have been reading along, and if you have not started or you have fallen behind, I want to encourage you, just start tomorrow with John chapter 10 and read one chapter each day along with us. If you're struggling to keep up, why not ask someone to check in with you every day to see if you did it, or even send them your thoughts about what you learned about Jesus?

Two weeks ago, we learned how Jesus made disciples in the ordinary things of life, through stories about lost coins and lost possessions and lost kids. Last week, we learned how Jesus made disciples in the awful things, through denial, betrayal, and death. This week, we're going to explore how Jesus made disciples in the sinful things—how Jesus made disciples of those who in his day were called 'sinners'.

There are a couple of stories this week—from John chapters 3-9—that stand out in particular in this regard. I'm going to tell you one of them, about a woman at a well, and I want you to sit and listen. Don't read along with me, just listen. And as you do, ask yourself this question: how did Jesus interact with this woman who was not living a moral life? This is the story from God's word.

Jesus had to pass through Samaria and stopped at a well right in the heat of the day... 'A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." <sup>8</sup> (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) <sup>9</sup> The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) <sup>10</sup> Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." <sup>11</sup> The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? <sup>12</sup> Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." <sup>13</sup> Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, <sup>14</sup> but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." <sup>15</sup> The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."

John 4:16 Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." <sup>17</sup> The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; <sup>18</sup> for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." <sup>19</sup> The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. <sup>20</sup> Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship

the Father. <sup>22</sup> You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. <sup>23</sup> But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. <sup>24</sup> God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." <sup>25</sup> The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." <sup>26</sup> Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

This is the story from God's Word.

So what did you notice? How did Jesus interact with this woman? It's really interesting isn't it? He doesn't condemn her for what she has done. In fact, in another story from this week, of a woman caught in adultery, Jesus literally says, "I do not condemn you." The woman at the well is a serial adulterer, moving from man to man to man, and is right now with an unmarried man. Yet, Jesus does not condemn her. Yet, he clearly implies that he disagrees with her actions. He tells her the plain truth about her dating and marriage history.

But this is so different to how Jesus interacts with his followers when they sin, isn't it? Remember when the disciples were afraid in the boat? What did he call them? 'O you little-faiths!' That's pretty condemning. What about when Peter takes him aside and has a word with him about how this suffering and death thing is really not how it is going to go down? What does he say to Peter? 'Get behind me Satan!' Or what about in John 6 this week where he calls Judas, the disciple who would betray him... he calls Judas a devil. Jesus seems to respond totally differently to sin in his followers than in those who don't follow him.

I think the key to understanding why Jesus and Pastor Mark respond differently is given by another story that we read this week. This time, a man, a respected religious leader called Nicodemus comes to Jesus in the middle of the night. He is interested in Jesus, but still isn't ready to follow him. And Jesus says something fascinating to him. He says, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.' Unless you are born again, you cannot see God's kingdom.

I believe Jesus is giving us the answer here as to why he interacts differently with sin in those who aren't following God, and those who are. He seems to be saying that there are two types of people: those who haven't been born again, and those who have—those who are spiritually dead and those who are alive in God's kingdom. He draws a line in the sand with this comment, dividing all people into one of two categories: spiritually dead, or spiritually alive.

Have you ever seen a dead animal? When I was preparing for this sermon, my dad was visiting his mom who lives on a farm in Ireland. The day before he arrived, her dog ran away. He sent me a text the following day telling me that he had found her dead. He knew that he had to get rid of the remains quickly, and not just because

my Grandmother was sad. Why? Because dead animals begin to stink very quickly. It's just what they do, right? We don't expect anything different. They stink. Dead people stink too, as we will read in the story of Lazarus this week.

I believe this is the reason why Jesus does not condemn either of the 'sinful' women he interacts with in our readings this week... because Jesus knows that, spiritually, they are dead. And because they are spiritually dead, why should he not expect their lives to stink? That's what dead things do. They stink. We shouldn't expect anything different. Jesus doesn't need to tell a spiritually dead person who is flagrantly sinning that their life stinks: they know. They can smell it. They know other people can smell it too, because they keep being rejected and cast aside.

So what does a dead person need? Think back to the woman at the well. How does Jesus start off this conversation... by talking about ordinary things: water. He tells the woman that if she never wants to thirst again, that if she wants life, then she needs living water that only he can give her. He knows that she is at the well in the heat of the day, rather than in the cooler morning or evening, because she is shunned by her community. He knows that she needs something more than behavior modification for her to experience life. She needs living water, welling up to eternal life, and the only place she can find that is Jesus.

And this isn't the only time Jesus has claimed to bring life. We read this week Jesus saying: I am the bread of life. Next week: I am the resurrection and the life. I am the way, the truth and the life. Jesus is making a strong point. What spiritually dead people need is life, and that life is found in him. They don't need to be told "your life stinks, you better clean up your act". They can smell it, and no matter how much perfume they put on, the smell keeps coming back. Their actions are not the problem, they are just the symptoms. They don't need behavior modification, they need life transformation, and that comes in Christ alone.

So what does this mean for those of us who follow Jesus? If Jesus calls us to make disciples of all peoples—including those spiritually dead people who live immoral lives—what does that look like? I think there are several things it can look like, and I want to share a couple of stories with you now... one from my own life, and, one from the life of one of our members.

When I was in college, I played on a rugby team that was full of spiritually dead people. In fact, out of the 25 or so people on that team, I was the only one who knew Jesus. I don't know if you've ever met a rugby player who doesn't know Jesus, but if you have, you know that one thing they can do is drink. I have never seen a group of people drink as much as they did, and I have had the privilege of being around a lot of drunk people.

For me I knew I was called to be a part of that team, and I was called to develop friendships with them and to share Jesus' love with them. But I also knew I was not to get drunk. So I had to walk this fine line between being a part of the team where

drinking is a huge part of the culture and abstaining from the drunkenness surrounding me. It was hard. But the opportunities it provided to speak into their lives were incredible.

I remember walking with this big, ugly, Yorkshireman to practice one time, and him asking me, "Err.. Ellis, so why don't you drink?" Immediately it opened up the opportunity to share Jesus with him. Another time, while on a trip, I was reading a book on God's view of sex, and as I went to bed I went to grab it from my bedside table. It had disappeared. I asked my roommate where it was, and he kind of sheepishly said, "Well... I might have borrowed it because I was interested in what Christians thought about sex. Here it is." I told him, "No. You keep it." So he did. And he kept reading it.

You see if I hadn't chosen to live life amongst these people and live it in a way that represented Jesus—that loved them like Jesus loves them, that didn't condemn them for their actions—then I would not have had the opportunity to have those conversations. We are called to share our lives with those who are spiritually dead, to bring them to Jesus, to show them his love. Not to condemn them for their sin. Why should we expect them to act differently? Here's another story:

There is a lady in our congregation who is involved in a ministry reaching out to women in the sex industry. I got the privilege of chatting with her on the phone as I prepared this message. It was incredible to hear her heart for these lost women. She is desperate to see their lives transformed, but she knows that the only way that is going to happen is through an encounter with Jesus. So she goes into the clubs where they work and distributes gifts to them. She builds friendships with them and seeks to get to know them. She tries to love them like Jesus would.

She told me of one woman who for months and months she had seen in the club but who wouldn't come and talk to her. However, because of the gift bags they give out, this woman had our member's number. One weekend, out of the blue, our member got a call from this woman who said: "I'm done. I've given my life to Jesus, and I'm getting out of this. I saw you coming in week after week, and I didn't speak to you. But I knew who you were, and I saw the way you loved us girls. Thank you."

This member of our congregation told me about one time there was another church picketing outside one of the clubs as she was going in to visit the women. She said it made her so angry. She recalled how she had a conversation with a girl that night telling her, "If Jesus was here, he would be here speaking to you right now, telling you of his love for you, and not outside telling you that you are a sinner who needs to clean up your act."

But this ministry is hard... so hard. She says she spends so much time crying for these women. She is desperate to see their lives change, but time and again it

doesn't happen. As I was preparing for this message, she got the news that one of the women she had been reaching out to had been murdered by her boyfriend.

Time is short saints. People are perishing. People need life. People need Jesus. I don't know who those spiritually dead people are that God is calling you to. Maybe it's women in this industry. Maybe it's not. Maybe it's your kids or grandkids. Maybe it's your neighbors. Maybe it's your work colleagues. Maybe it's your workout buddies or sports teammates. Whoever it is, we need to remember that they need life, and that that life comes in Christ alone.

We're spending three months reading all four gospel accounts of Jesus' life; we're getting to know Jesus better more and more—his love, his compassion. But the reality is that the only gospel many spiritually dead people will read is you. We are called to be Christ's ambassadors in this world, and we must bring Jesus to those people who need him. Are you up for the call?