



President Walton's July 2020 Message

A Focus on Discipleship



The other day I was going through some old digital photographs on my computer. It is amazing to me how quickly they multiply. It seemed like a walk down memory lane, going back many years with people and places I had forgotten. In fact, some of the people in those pictures now live in the presence of Jesus. As I searched for a specific photo, I came across some photos of my first trip to Israel in 1995. It was really the first time I had been out of the country, at least across the ocean.

The trip was a gift from a congregation member, and it was with a group of about 40 pastors from all over the United States. A highlight was when we visited the Sea of Galilee and had the opportunity to go out on the sea on one of a number of “Jesus Boats.” These vessels are allegedly a facsimile of the kind of boat that Jesus would have been on with His disciples as they fished. Ironically, our guide referred to it as the “disciple ship.” We had gone around the large lake for about two hours, learning about different sites along the way. We learned how the anglers cast their nets to catch fish as the sky overhead quickly became cloudy. It was then that our Israeli guide began sharing the story of Jesus sleeping on the boat when a storm suddenly arose, preparing us for what was ahead. It did not prepare us!

Matthew reports, “And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but He [Jesus] was asleep. And they went and woke Him saying, ‘Save us, Lord; we are perishing. And He said to them, ‘Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?’ Then He rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.” Matthew 8:24-26.

I understood that story so much better after this trip! What started out as a beautiful day quickly changed as the sky grew dark and the winds began to whip the water on the Sea of Galilee. The little boat rocked fiercely as our guide told us to remain calm, that the captain would take good care of us. It started raining, and thunder and lightning seemed all around us. You never saw 40 pastors fall to their knees quicker, while our Israeli guide laughed. By the time we got to shore, which was only about 10 minutes away, the storm had passed and the sun returned. Our guide told us this is normal because of the way the mountains surround the sea. It’s the perfect setting for a storm.

I have been back to the Sea of Galilee several times since, but never experienced that again...thankfully! However, the corporate reaction of those pastors in the midst of the storm has never left me. At the time, after we reached shore, the situation was somewhat humorous. Since then I have often reflected on how it

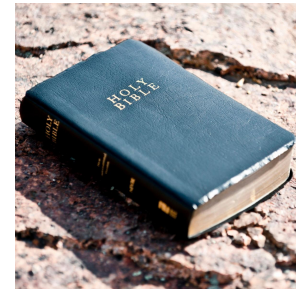
must have appeared to our Israeli guide, that men of faith covered just as the disciples did. So much for disciples on the disciple ship!



The season of Pentecost is marked by the color green, indicating our growth as disciples of Jesus. Discipleship is defined narrowly by the Oxford Dictionary as, “a personal follower of Jesus during his life, especially one of the twelve Apostles.” We understand it as much more than this. In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus said, **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. 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.”** It almost seems cyclical. Jesus sends His disciples to make disciples by baptizing and teaching them. Those who were baptized and taught were to also go and make disciples. This is how God’s Church grew as sinful people heard the good news of forgiveness and salvation in Jesus and began to follow Him. The word disciple comes from the Greek word that means “to learn.” A disciple was a life-long learner! Jesus wasn’t the only one with disciples. Even today, people who devote themselves to something are often called disciples. Whether it is cooking, golfing, fishing, or even exercise, there are those who may not call it discipleship, but it actually is.

Jesus, Himself, shows us what discipleship really is. He pours Himself into those twelve men, teaching them and unfolding God’s Word, building relationship with them, sharing stories and experiences together. He invested in them, loved them, trained them, sent them and trusted them. On the night before Jesus was crucified, as the guards came to arrest Jesus, those very disciples who Jesus had invested so much time in, scattered. One betrayed Him, they all, without exception, abandoned Him. Following the Resurrection, Jesus re-gathered the remaining disciples, and when His Spirit was poured out upon them, they began to grow in new ways. In fact, each of them willingly gave up their life out of love for Jesus.

You and I are called to a life of discipleship as those baptized and taught God’s Word. God has poured His Spirit out lavishly on each one of us, and with great purpose. Even during this time of pandemic, there are so many opportunities to learn and grow in our faith in Jesus. Maybe you are already back worshipping in a church building. Even if you are back to every Sunday being in a building, there are also plenty of additional worship opportunities, Bible Studies, and courses to grow in Jesus available online. We no longer live in an “either/or” world. Instead it has become more of a “both/and” time. Spiritual growth opportunities are all around us, and from very solid LCMS preachers and teachers who have learned how to be part of the digital age. Years ago an older pastor advised me, “When someone comes to you and says, ‘Pastor, I just don’t feel like I’m being fed here,’ your response should be, ‘You’re old enough to feed yourself!’” I have never used the line, but have thought about it, even for myself. We have the greatest access in the world to resources to help grow and sustain our faith. We are blessed people.



However, as blessed people, we have a responsibility to share that blessing with the world around us. When Jesus instructed His disciples post-Resurrection, He never intended them to confine it to themselves. In fact, some translations say, “As you are going, make disciples...” The implication is that wherever we are, whatever we are doing, we need to be aware of the opportunities to not only display Jesus, but to tell others of His love. Peter wrote, **“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.”** And Jesus assures us that we don’t need to worry because the Holy Spirit will give us the right words to say!

Each of us has the opportunity to make disciples the same way Jesus did! It does have a cost associated with it; as Jesus invested Himself into His disciples, so we also need to invest in those around us. We don’t have to know all the answers, we just have to be

willing to find answers. Each of us can encourage someone to become a life-long learner for Jesus. How we live, what we do, where we go, all will impact the want-to-be disciple as they continually experience and encounter Jesus through you! Who is it that you can help grow in their faith in Jesus? I can almost guarantee, if you look with the eyes of your heart wide open, you will find plenty of opportunities to make disciples.

When you embark on discipleship it's not always smooth sailing, but the rewards are eternal—not just for you, but for the one who comes into a relationship with Jesus through your life. Just as the stormy Sea of Galilee quickly quieted down, the Spirit is at work in us to bring us to our knees, literally, so He can use us to make disciples. In John 13:17 Jesus said, **“Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”** How will you live up to the challenge?

With you on the journey,

Greg



**ONE BODY
MANY PARTS**

florigeorgia district
President's Equip Conference
September 24-26, 2020 Orlando, FL

The President's Equip Conference for all church workers AND laity, offering practical, strategic resources for congregations to learn and grow, will be held September 24-26, 2020. The theme is "One Body, Many Parts," from 1 Corinthians 12, and we desire to bring together the whole family of God in the Florida-Georgia District. In addition to useful workshops, we will have

David Kinnaman, CEO of the Barna Research Group, **Donna Snow**, and for entertainment, **The Skit Guys**. More information can be found through our website - <https://flgadistrict.org/pec/>

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Reaching Many in 2020
for Jesus!