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Bush Hill Presbyterian Church  
Alexandria, VA 22310  
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Men's Sunday

Matthew 28:16–20

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John Killinger is one of my favorite writers. I know those of you who have one of his books see him more as a homilistician than a novelist but I think he writes really well, often because he refers to some truly great novelists like Harold Robbins, a salacious novelist to be sure, but one that I would like to share.

I like to follow in Killinger's example of this Men's Sunday—this Father's Day, and more importantly this Trinity Sunday— because he exegeted this passage, Matthew 28, while he was ministering in Lynchburg, VA. Now, imagine a reformed theologian at a staid established main line church, an evangelistic church in Lynchburg, exegeting the great commission: "Go make disciples of all nations. Preach the gospel in my name, baptize in the name of the father the son and the Holy Spirit and teach them to observe all I have commanded you." Killinger, down in Lynchburg, was courageous enough to ask what does that really look like, what does that mean? He even went so far as to challenge his listeners to say, "Do you think Jesus could have imagined how differently people would go about the process and the practice of preaching the Gospel? Do you imagine today when you think about all people gathered in congregations across this globe, how differently they are hearing the good news?"

I do think Jesus could have imagined Augustine writing *City of God* as the barbarians were assaulting Rome. I don't believe Jesus could have imagined those who love the gospel ridiculing one another simply because of the way they pronounce Augustine's name: it's proper both ways my son taught me – Augustine and Augustus are both phonetically and historically correct, and yet often, people of faith do little more than correct each other on the pronunciation.

Jesus could have imagined his followers translating the Bible into the language of the people rather than passing out scripts of paper which excused them from some sins and not others. Jesus could have imagined making the word of God available to everyone but he could not have imagined restricting it to only those who could read Greek, Hebrew, or even Latin.

I believe Jesus sent those eleven followers down that mountain, envisioning that they would become his disciples—his followers—not superlative theologians or just academics or even just frontier evangelists. He intended for us to be more than spiritual mystics using the slight of tongue to hide the manipulation and the legalism that is so often just beneath the surface in religious circles.

I wonder if Jesus knew he would turn our struggles—to be reshaped by the Good News— into something other than caring for God because God desires so much to care for us. And God invites us to follow the example of his Son, the example of God himself to forgive as quickly as we have been forgiven and to care for one another the way in which Christ cares for his followers—always present—always there to hear where his followers were before he responded.

Killinger goes on to say that God is working out the establishment of God's Kingdom even today when God asks us to be a part of that. So what does that mean? How do we participate? Men and women of the church—brothers and sisters in the body, fellow disciples of Jesus—are we participating, or are we spending most of our time as spectators, Monday morning quarterbacks, critiques? I think we can be involved participants in what God is doing in God's Kingdom. I look around this morning looking for some of my Navy veterans—this next illustration is just for you.

It's a story about a sea captain who had a very competitive chief engineer. And it illustrates our problem, I think. It seems the captain and the engineer often argued over who was more important to the operation of the ship. It sounds like two men struggling over who will lead and who will follow, if you ask me. In any given situation or circumstance, they would bicker about who would be leading and making the ultimate crucial decision until finally one day, an ensign suggests they swap places. And so that chief engineer ascended from the bowels of the ship to the bridge, and the captain climbed down into the engine room. After a few hours, the captain suddenly appeared on deck, His white uniform covered in oil and grime, he yelled up, "Chief! (All the while waving a monkey wrench wildly over his head.) "Chief! You've got to come here – I can't make her go." And the chief yells down, "Of course you can't, she's aground."

We're of equal importance in God's Kingdom, Scripture teaches us. Yet our gifts always lie in fulfilling different functions. I wonder if Jesus could have ever imagined that we would follow his authority to share the Good News by ranking one gift over another, as if some how administration would have been more important in the last month of Bush Hill Presbyterian Church than hospitality, or healing less important than a generous spirit from home after home as we have responded to all the losses in our congregation. Would the miracle of compassion have been more important than the miracle of learning from one another how to simply be present—his prophesy to be exalted over mercy? I warned you this summer is about spiritual gifts, and those of you who are wise will go ahead and look at 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, and 1<sup>st</sup> Peter, and you will memorize those gifts so you won't be bombarded every week by questions about whether we are apostles or prophets, evangelists or pastors, teachers or those with the gift of knowledge or wisdom or exhortation or serving or helpers, or mercy or giving or leadership or organization or hospitality or faith or discerning of spirits. You can't tell me you don't have one of those—I see them in abundance in so many of you.

Jesus said, I think this is a more accurate rendering of the verbs there. He says, "After you go down from this mountain, make disciples, direct people toward me and my likeness." And so I ask you this morning, are our spouses more like Jesus because of us,

are our closest friends more Christ-like because of our cooperation with what God is doing in God's kingdom. Are our children more Christ-like because of our witness to Christ in our lives. Are our co-workers, our friends, our neighbors, our extended families more drawn to the life of Jesus because of the way we live?

Fellow followers of Jesus, we are indeed privileged to share in what God is doing. There is not one of us here today that didn't pass numerous churches on our way to this Sanctuary. So isn't it time for leaders to lead and for followers to learn to follow? Or are we like that sea captain and his chief engineer—we haven't decided which is more important. We haven't been able to ascertain when we are to follow and when we are to lead, and so we step all over ourselves. And our prayers and our perspectives, our budgets and our purposes fail miserably to reflect our deep desire to be part of what God is doing. When we are interested in allowing worship to stretch us, when spiritual growth is our greatest longing, when we are uncomfortable when we are not spiritually growing, then we will be part of what God is doing. And finally, when prayer is the ultimate decision-maker in our congregation, we will be most Christ-like—most likely to fulfill that commission we have been given to be about the business of making disciples by the strength of the Holy Spirit and teaching one another with the gifts that we have.

If I could close this sermon with one thing today, I would like to challenge you. If you are functioning in some capacity at Bush Hill Presbyterian Church, where you know you don't have that gift, switch with someone, please. Let your gifts and your passion meet our needs. If your gift just isn't hospitality, stop doing it so reluctantly and begrudgingly, and give it over to someone who does it second nature. If your gift just isn't generosity, that's just not who you are, then stop trying to encourage generosity among brothers and sisters and do what you are gifted at doing. I promise, if the same people weren't here to usher each week, God would call someone new to fulfill that function. If the same people didn't stand up and beg us, however apologetically, to support our community, God would call someone else in their place. And the kingdom would become so clear that we would never again doubt our purposes, we would never again ask what does God want me to do to fulfill God's vision of God's congregation.

I suspect next year there will be another guest for Men's Sunday. But I look forward to sharing next week and following. Amen.