

## IT'S AN HONOR JUST BEING NOMINATED

Erin Kesterson Bowers

*Psalm 8*      *Matthew 28:16-20*

June 11, 2017

First Presbyterian Church      High Point, NC  
Service for the Lord's Day

---

Psalm 8 is one of my very favorite psalms because it does such a beautiful job putting the human being into perspective. It is very clear that we are not God. It is a psalm that emphasizes the majesty of God, the excellence of God, the complete otherness of God. It makes it clear that God is the creator of all that is. And that in terms of majesty and excellence and creative force, we are not God. That there is an infinite difference between God and us. A difference in kind. A difference in being. That we are not and will not be God.

And yet. At the same time. There is a special dignity afforded to human beings. A special status given to human beings. “*Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.*” It’s a beautiful psalm to put ourselves in perspective. To remember that we are important, but that we are not the most important. To have a high view of ourselves, but not the highest view of ourselves. To think of ourselves as worthy, but not as the most worthy.

But there’s one more thing about our special status. Psalm 8 also points out that we have this status for a purpose. And that’s why Psalm 8 fits so well with the reading from the Gospel of Matthew, because that reading talks about our purpose, too. Our Psalm 8 purpose is about dominion, stewardship, care of all of the animals and everything on earth. It is a psalm that hearkens back to the creation story and how our special dignity as human beings means that we are caretakers of creation along with God. That we share in that with God. You know the phrase, your parents probably said it to you—with privilege comes responsibility—and that’s sort of what this is all about. Our privileged status as human beings means that we also have some responsibility toward creation.

Our reading from the Gospel of Matthew includes the very last words in the Gospel. Now, of course, we ought to take the entire Gospel seriously, but you’ve got to imagine that the gospel writer Matthew intended these words to pack an extra special punch. He put them here for a reason, he closed out his telling of Jesus’ life with these words for a reason. They were really important. He even puts Jesus and the disciples on a mountain when Jesus says these words. We are meant to pay attention to them. These words both sum up the Gospel and lead to the future. They are the closing line of the Gospel, like the closing lines of so many famous movies—do you recognize these: “There’s no place like home.”<sup>1</sup> “Roads? Where we’re going we don’t need roads.”<sup>2</sup> “That’ll do, pig. That’ll do.”<sup>3</sup> “I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship.”<sup>4</sup> “After all, tomorrow is another day.”<sup>5</sup> Closing lines. They sum up what’s come before and they open possibilities for the future.

And speaking of movies, the idea of the honor bestowed on human beings and call on our lives got me thinking about the Oscars. Whenever Oscar season comes around, or any award season like the Tonys which will air tonight, a common experience is to see celebrities on the talk show circuit, celebrities who have been nominated for awards. And the conversation on the talk shows always seems to go the same way. Talk show hosts ask the actors how they feel about their nomination, and what they think of their chances of winning. And

---

<sup>1</sup> *Wizard of Oz*

<sup>2</sup> *Back to the Future*

<sup>3</sup> *Babe*

<sup>4</sup> *Casablanca*

<sup>5</sup> *Gone with the Wind*

the actors always answer the same way, either because they are trying not to jinx the outcome, or most likely, because they are trying to be gracious and unassuming, they usually say something like, “it’s an honor just being nominated.” It’s a boring and predictable, yet appropriate response.

It may be a less appropriate response, though, for those of us who are taking part in the Kingdom of God. Just this week, someone was in my office, and the question that kept coming up for this person was what is this all for? All the Bible study, all the gathering together in groups that we do? For what? It’s all well and good, but what is it we are preparing for? What do we do as a result? Just gathering together and studying, but not doing anything as a result is sort of like saying, well, it was an honor just being nominated, because we want to be cautious, not knowing if our name will really be called to come up on that stage.

But the thing is, it has been called! We’ve all won the big prize! All of our names have been called! That’s what both Psalm 8 and the Gospel of Matthew are telling us. That by virtue of our special dignity as human beings and our calling as disciples, we have all that we need to be a part of God’s work of making disciples in the world.

Both Psalm 8 and the Gospel of Matthew are verses that tell us who we are. And we are those who are given the honor to participate in building God’s kingdom by making disciples. These verses from the Gospel of Matthew are commonly called the Great Commission. “*Go therefore and make disciples...*” Somebody, somewhere, followed Jesus’ charge so that you and I wound up sitting here today. Somebody, probably more than one somebody, participated in the work of making you a disciple, and perhaps is still participating in that work today. Chances are, if I asked you to name the five sermons that had the greatest impact on your life of faith, you’d struggle to come up with them. Maybe you’d remember one or possibly two really significant ones, but I would bet that would be it. But I imagine if I asked you to name the five people who had the greatest impact on your life of faith, that wouldn’t take you any time at all.

And one thing we need to remember about making disciples is that it’s a little more like making a rose bush than it is like making a fidget spinner. Disciples take tending and need nutrients and pruning to grow and they have good and bad years. Disciples are not things that get manufactured and then we can say, yes, check, there we have one more!

Making disciples is both the simplest and the hardest thing in the world to do. In the different committees I resource, in the Diaconate and the Session, from members of the congregation, I hear ideas constantly thrown out about how we might attract people to us. And that’s okay. Creative thinking is good, and I am interested, too, in trying things to attract people to First Presbyterian Church. But that’s really second order thinking. If we want to make disciples, our first order is to follow the Great Commission, these super-important words of Jesus, and it is just not that complicated. It is simple, but that doesn’t mean it’s not difficult. This is it: Step One—meet people who don’t know Jesus. Step Two—tell them about Jesus. That’s all you and I have to do.

Because the Great Commission doesn’t say anything about getting people to come to you first. It doesn’t put the burden on others to come find you. In fact, it says the opposite. It says “Go.” And the hard truth is that you and I simply cannot expect our church to make new disciples if we do not go into the world and make it a habit to talk to people about our faith, people who do not know Jesus. There is no program shiny enough, no service snazzy enough, no building beautiful enough to substitute for people in relationship to other people. This is how God set it up from the beginning, creating human beings with a peculiar dignity, human beings who are relational creatures. And this is how Jesus set things up before he left this earth, that by the power of the Holy Spirit, we might be the vehicle through which this movement is carried out.

So you and I are called to go—to our places of work, to our kids’ teams, to our teams, to the golf course, to the barber shop and hair salon, to our clubs, to our volunteer organizations, to our swimming pools, to the

restaurants we frequent, to our schools, to our neighborhoods and communities, to any place where we can get to know people. Go.

And then talk to people. Find out about their lives and share your life with them. And this is not about giving people prepared speeches or four step plans. And this is not about beating anyone over the head with the Bible. And this is not about discussing weighty doctrinal matters. It does not mean we have all the answers or have our whole belief systems worked out. This is about getting used to talking about your life in such a way that your story and God's story are interwoven—as, in fact, they are. Because at the end of the day, even though today we are talking about making disciples, the goal of making God-talk a practice in our lives is not even really about evangelism, though that will happen. But it is about telling the truth. It's about not hiding the biggest part of ourselves as we live our lives. It's about living authentic and free lives. Making this a practice. Practice narrating the story of God's activity in your life. I know it's not the most comfortable thing in the world for all of us to do. For some of us it comes more naturally than it does for others. But, friends, I will tell you that I believe that quote so often attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, "Preach the gospel at all times, if necessary use words"<sup>6</sup> is dead wrong—and isn't even what he said, anyway. We have to use our words. And here is a surprising benefit: your own discipleship will grow as you use your words. Your life of faith will grow into and towards the words that you use.

Telling others about times when God has been with us, explaining why we do what we do, expressing what we find so compelling about Jesus—it doesn't take a preacher or a theologian—in fact, it can't be a preacher or a theologian. It can only be you—because it requires your experience, and your relationship with the person at hand. God has chosen all of us to be co-workers in building the Kingdom of God. "*Go therefore and make disciples.*"

Or we can do nothing, and say, "Well, it was an honor just to be nominated."

---

<sup>6</sup> The actual quote from St. Francis has to do with keeping one's actions consistent with one's preaching. It can be found in "The Earlier Rule" Chapter XVII in *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works, Classics of Western Spirituality*, p. 122. A portion of it reads like this: "No brother should preach contrary to the form and regulations of the holy Church...All the brothers, however, should preach by their deeds."