

## **“Planet Fitness”**

Meditation on Matthew 28:8-20

Trinity Sunday: June 11, 2017

Merritt Island Presbyterian Church

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*<sup>8</sup>So they (the women) left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. <sup>9</sup>Suddenly Jesus met them and said, ‘Greetings!’ And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. <sup>10</sup>Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.’*

*<sup>11</sup> While they were going, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests everything that had happened. <sup>12</sup>After the priests had assembled with the elders, they devised a plan to give a large sum of money to the soldiers, <sup>13</sup>telling them, ‘You must say, “His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.” <sup>14</sup>If this comes to the governor’s ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.’ <sup>15</sup>So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story is still told among people in Judea to this day.*

*<sup>16</sup> Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup>When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup>And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’*

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My personal trainer persuaded me to go with him to work out at the gym on Monday. Usually, I come up with excuses why I can’t go with my husband to work out-- “I don’t have time.” “I’m busy.” “I’m tired.” But I

also know how good it is for my physical and mental health, my energy, strength, and state of mind. So Jim and I went to Planet Fitness together. Now Planet Fitness will tell you that there IS something different about their program; they proclaim a different message than other fitness clubs. Their logo is, "Planet Fitness, home of the Judgment Free Zone." At the entrance to the Rockledge club, a sign commands us to "leave egos here"--meaning outside the building. The message of welcome, belonging, and acceptance of all people no matter where you are on your physical fitness journey--or how much money you have--is proclaimed in all their advertising and on the inside and outside of their facilities. You can't go to a Planet Fitness without getting the message--no matter if your workout is 20 minutes on a treadmill going turtle speed or 2 hours lifting, running and laboring at weight machines.

The Planet Fitness target customer, a *Business Insider* article says, is someone just getting used to working out--or people who "really, really hate exercising." Hence, no frills. No classes. No yoga, Pilates or Tai chi. No free weights above 80 pounds. There's actually a "lunk alarm" when people exert themselves with too much *machismo*. A "lunk" is defined as one who "grunts, drops weights or judges."

Planet Fitness understands that even though people want to get healthy and lose weight, they also like eating. And I think they understand that when people eat together, relationships are built. They serve free pizza on the first Monday of every month and bagels on the second Tuesday.

I haven't made it for the free pizza, yet, or the bagels. But I have visited the Tootsie roll bucket a few times. I always leave with a smile

on my face from this welcoming, accepting, informal and diverse environment. I think to myself, “I want to go back again,” though it is hard to find the time and energy to go very often.

I leave Planet Fitness marveling at the number and diversity of people who will get up early to drive to a fitness club and work out, sometimes before they go to a job or school. And I wonder how we can better communicate the joy, welcome, love and acceptance of Christ so that more people would want to get up early and come to our church for worship and fellowship on Sunday mornings. And our church would GROW!

I know the answer. We need to GO!

We need to go and make disciples!

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We return to the empty tomb in our gospel reading today and the risen Christ commissioning first Mary and Mary Magdalene and then all of his disciples, when he appears to them on the mountain or “in the hills,” as some translations say, of Galilee. Jesus is back to his home territory, where his own ministry was launched. This isn’t the first time he has sent his disciples out to minister in his name. He sends them out in Matthew 10:5, with these instructions, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.”

But before the women reach the other disciples to pass on Christ's message, we read about a priestly conspiracy that only appears in this gospel. The guards posted at Christ's tomb return to Jerusalem to report "all that had happened" to the chief priests and scribes. The religious leaders respond to the news by attempting to conceal the truth of Christ's resurrection from the people --for fear they will lose their powerful positions. They offer the soldiers a "large sum of money" as a bribe and tell them to lie! "Say, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep,'" they say. They tell the soldiers not to worry if the governor finds out, for they will "satisfy him." What does that mean? They will pay him off--another bribe! The confidence they have that the governor won't be upset by their lies, bribes, and deception, as long as he receives his payment, paints a picture of rampant corruption among political and religious leaders.

What do the guards do? What would you do? Probably, they would be killed if they did not obey their orders. Verse 15 tells us, "So they took the money and did as they had been taught." Matthew adds, "And this story has been spread among people in Judea to this very day."

So you get an idea of what the disciples are up against--the lies and bribes of political and religious leaders--and certain persecution if they try to share the truth of Christ's resurrection.

Then, we are in the hills of Galilee with the disciples, waiting for the risen Christ. Some worship him, when they see him. But others are hesitant to believe. Does it surprise you that even amongst Jesus' faithful disciples, there are seeds of doubt?

Jesus doesn't call attention to those who doubt; he seems to expect

them to react that way. He proclaims all authority “in heaven and on earth” that has been given to him, presumably by the Father. He commissions all of them--even those who may have doubts-- with, “Go!” For their mission will require leaving Galilee and what is familiar and comfortable. The mission extends beyond but also includes “the lost sheep of Israel.” Jesus says now, “Make disciples *of all nations.*”

Jesus defines making disciples with 2 participles. “Baptizing” is the first. This is not John’s baptism of repentance, a symbol of new beginning for Israel. This is a baptism of power from above! Baptism will now have a Trinitarian formula. Father, Son and Spirit are one “name,” as we say when we baptize, “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Curiously, this is the only place we see a Trinitarian formula for baptism. In Acts, the apostles say, “in the name of Jesus.”

“Teaching” is the second part of “making disciples.” This is also new; Jesus has been *their* teacher up to now. They will share “all” that Jesus has taught them about living as God’s people, loving God, loving neighbor and one another, challenging the arrogant and powerful, speaking up for the oppressed, caring for the sick and needy, feeding the hungry, and bringing “good news to the poor.” Teaching requires a commitment of time and heart, as Jesus loved his disciples and called them his children.

Then, we come to the end of Matthew and Jesus promises his presence, just as God in the OT promises the patriarchs and prophets who feared what God was calling them to do.

“Remember, I am with you always,” Jesus says, “to the end of the age.”

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Friends, Christ's commission to his first disciples is our commission, too! Let us go and reach out to our neighbors, near and far, as the Lord commands us to do. Don't wait for people to come to church. Go and find them! Be courageous! Go beyond what is comfortable and familiar. And remember, discipleship takes a commitment of time and heart!

Look for ways you can get more involved in your communities so that you may form new relationships. Share your faith. Tell people what you like about your church and what activities you are involved in. Invite them to come with you and maybe enjoy a meal together afterward. Most people who are members now will say that they came to MIPC because a friend, neighbor or colleague invited them or that when they visited the first time, someone reached out and befriended them. They felt welcomed, loved, and accepted, no matter where they were on their spiritual journey.

We should always feel comfortable being ourselves here, too, and not be afraid to be vulnerable. Transformed and empowered by the Spirit, we are a "lunk-free," "judgment-free zone." We are all sinners, in need of God's mercy and grace. There's no place for egos at the foot of the cross as we worship the Lord, grateful for all that He has done.

Go! Make disciples! Don't be afraid!

For Christ is with you, to the end of the age.

Let us pray.

Holy One, thank you for sending Jesus to show us the way back to you when we were lost in our sins. Thank you for your sacrifice of your Son for our sakes and your gift of faith that has brought us into right relationship with you. Thank you for Christ's promise to be with us always and his assurance that we need not fear for the future. Forgive us for our excuses why we don't need to cultivate new relationships to share our hope with those who don't know you. Draw us nearer to you and stir our hearts to compassion for people who haven't yet heard your voice. Lead us to go beyond what is comfortable and familiar. Empower us by your Spirit to go, as you urge us to do, and share all that you have taught us. And keep on teaching us your ways. Grant us wisdom to discern your will for our congregation and courage to obey. Help us to grow in faith, Spirit, and number. In Christ we pray. Amen.