

Sunday, May 27th, 2018
Sermon Summary
Pastor John Stephenson

Our mission is to make disciples. We make disciples by inviting, connecting, apprenticing, and sending people out to transform the world.

Feeling connected and included is a wonderful part of life. One of the things I look forward to every year is attending “Annual Conference”. It’s an annual meeting of all the pastors and an equal number of lay delegates representing all the United Methodist churches in a particular region. The Texas Annual Conference is a region that covers the eastern portion of Texas. What I look forward to the most is seeing friends and catching up. But, it was not always that way. When I first started going, I often felt isolated and lonely in the crowd because I didn’t know anyone and I would watch people enjoying each other.

Loneliness is not of God. In Genesis 2:18 we read that after God created the first man, Adam, He said, “it is not good that the man should be alone,” and he then created the first woman. It was not God’s plan that we would live in loneliness. And yet, there are many who are lonely in the world.

Many people will experience loneliness when they first attend a church. They experience the same kind of thing I did in those first few years of going to Annual Conference. They will observe people who are very very friendly - to each other. It’s one reason that Bill Easum and Bill Tenny-Brittian have written that most people who visit a church will not return. This makes disciple-making very difficult. It is vital that people stick around long enough to be discipled. The good news is that people will stick around a church if they connect.

Connecting people with others is essential for making disciples. The Apostle Paul seemed to understand this. In Acts 16 we read about how Paul and his traveling companions traveled to Philippi. When they got there, they sought out the place where Jews would gather for worship and prayer. In most places this would be the synagogue. But in Philippi, it was down by the river. So, they went to the river and there they met a woman named Lydia. They shared the gospel message, inviting the people into relationship with God through Jesus. Lydia believed. Then, she invited Paul and his traveling companions to come stay with her at her home. In verse 15 it says, “she prevailed upon us.” They accepted her invitation and they stayed with her because they knew that connecting new believers with other believers is what God wants to see happen. The God who did not create us for loneliness wants his people to be connected with each other.

If we are to succeed in making disciples. We must do all we can to help people connect. How we operate together on Sunday mornings can have a significant impact. When those who’ve accepted the invitation to come to our church show up, we want to make sure they have a positive experience. We can do a number of simple, practical things to help. We can **park** our cars away from the building to create space for guests. When we come into worship we can **sit** in the middle of row, so as to leave the edges open for others. We make sure to **talk** with people we don’t know. We can invest our energy into worship by **singing**, which encourages others to sing, which enlivens worship. We can **pray** for those God will bring as guests before they come, pray with them when they do, and pray for them the next week. We can **follow up** with people we meet with a phone call. We can **introduce** those we meet to our friends. All of this can help us to be successful in our mission of disciple making. Doing these things creates avenues for the Holy Spirit to change lives. And when lives change, the world changes. When people turn toward the Lord and their hearts are opened to his presence, there is an increase of joy, an increase of peace, an increase of grace, faith, and love.

Our mission is to make disciples. We make disciples by inviting, connecting, apprenticing, and sending people out to transform the world. We can do this.