

“Called for a Purpose”  
1 Samuel 3:1-10; Acts 11:19-30;  
Matthew 28:16-20

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I stand before you today having held many roles in this congregation-- I've been on staff here twice (long ago as the director of youth ministry), I served as the praise team director, I currently serve as an elder, I'm a mom of two little ones and a member. And yet, this morning I want to talk to you with a title that's outside of the congregation-- Area Ministry Director for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship.

As some of you might know, my full-time job is with InterVarsity. InterVarsity is a national interdenominational campus ministry that has over 1015 student groups on 687 campuses across the United States. InterVarsity exists to see students and faculty transformed, campuses renewed and world-changers developed. Here, in the Inland NW, we have three student groups at Whitman College, Washington State University and Gonzaga University. We are dreaming of planting a few more next fall at places like Lewis and Clark State College, North Idaho College and Walla Walla Community College.

That's the big picture overview. Sometimes, after I share that overview, I feel a bit like when I read Matthew 28. Inspired but not very clear. I love the idea of teaching everyone I meet about Jesus. I believe that Jesus goes with me in that process. But, how does that practically work? It feels like the charge to “go and make disciples” interferes with the daily tasks of my life like going to the grocery store, folding laundry, and taking my kids to the park. And, I wonder if Jesus' disciples felt similar. This passage comes at the end of Matthew's gospel—the disciples had seen the miracles, the crucifixion, and experienced Jesus in his resurrection. But, in all of that, did they understand how to do with others what Jesus had done with them? They might have felt (like I often do) that I'm just starting to get this Jesus way of life; how do I train others?

I can't vouch for the disciples (although the fact that they passed on these gospel stories to others who wrote them down tells us something...) but I can tell you something about my story and where I'm seeing living the Jesus life intersect with teaching the Jesus life.

I decided to follow Jesus my senior year in high school. Before that, I didn't consider myself a Christian. I would probably have put myself in the “spiritual but not religious” category. Both my parents grew up going to Catholic churches and schools, but I only remember going to church on Christmas Eve. My grandmother (whom my mom and I lived with for the first seven years of my life) has very strong spiritual beliefs that I've never quite figured out how to categorize—New Age is probably the overarching term but that's so broad that I'm not sure it's helpful so let me break down some of the specific beliefs. I grew up believing in a very general conception of God. I grew up believing in some sort of spiritual world (a reality that I couldn't see but was active) and, this last one is important, I grew up believing that evil didn't exist. I knew that bad things happened but there wasn't evil in the universe. So no devil, Satan, etc. I had a vague notion of karma (and yes, my grandmother's worldview included reincarnation) but she explicitly taught me that evil didn't exist.

It was a confusing set of beliefs for a kid. I felt like life should be good all the time and yet, my experience was that most of the time life did not feel good. The things of my life were fine—I had a roof over my head, food to eat, good schools and friends. And yet, I didn't feel fine. Instead, I felt twisted, turned around, unsure what I was supposed to be doing. If all was good then why didn't I feel good all the time?

I developed a coping mechanism that some of you might be familiar with—perfectionism. I found that doing well in school made me feel good inside so I started being the best at everything. I wish I could say that the system failed me—it didn't. It worked pretty well for a long time. And so, I lived with a confusing set of spiritual beliefs and a pretty good coping mechanism until high school when there was just too much to be good at. I began to feel like all I did was keep plates spinning and I began to discover that I had limits. I couldn't study enough to get straight As, practice enough to be the best trumpet player in the state and have enough time to lead in other clubs, have good friends and date. I was limited. And that rubbed against my perfectionism. My coping mechanism started to fall apart.

For the first time, I was open to something new. I was open to Jesus. I discovered God who loved me just as I am, God who extended grace and forgiveness to me when I made mistakes, God who never needed me to be perfect.

I'm thankful for the ability to speak now about my worldview then. I have so much clarity about what I did believe and what I didn't like about those beliefs that I'm usually pretty quick to notice when those old beliefs pop into my life.

One piece I love about today's text is the inclusion of the word "baptize." That might be a pretty common word between these four walls, but what did it mean to the hearers of Matthew's gospel? When I did some research of the Greek origin of this word, I learned that this use of *baptize* does not simply mean "to dunk in water" but actually to cleanse by dipping. These might not sound so different until you consider this: *[In] a text from the Greek poet and physician Nicander, who lived about 200 B.C. It is a recipe for making pickles and is helpful because it uses both words. Nicander says that in order to make a pickle, the vegetable should first be 'dipped' (baptô) into boiling water and then 'baptised' (baptizô) in the vinegar solution. Both verbs concern the immersing of vegetables in a solution. But the first is temporary. The second, the act of baptising the vegetable, produces a permanent change.*

In college, I began to experience this permanent change. I was amazed by this God that I had found, and the ways that God re-oriented my internal life. I knew I needed a Christian community in college so I could continue to learn. At my small, private, liberal arts campus InterVarsity was the only choice. I signed up for the group on my first day on campus, went to the first small group and found the community that would shape my life for the next four years.

Here's what I appreciated about InterVarsity as a student:

- Scripture study. I studied scripture and I learned how to study scripture. For someone who didn't grow up in the church, scripture was the primary way I learned who God is and what God wants for the world. I didn't just have others tell me these things, I saw them for myself.
- Community. I watched older students to learn what it meant to follow Jesus at college. I saw the choices they made and the difference it made in their lives. In the early days, this was very practical, like the senior who turned a paper in a day late because he decided to stay up all night caring for his drunk fraternity brother. Perfectionism me couldn't believe he would willingly take a whole letter grade lower just to take care of someone else. I later watched older students lead small group bible studies, sacrificing time, which might be a college student's most precious resource.
- Mission. Instead of being motivated by my own perfectionism, I was learning to live my life for the kingdom. By my senior year I would repeat to myself "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well" from the end of the Sermon on the Mount. What did it mean to seek first God's kingdom? Love God and love others. And through InterVarsity, that calling didn't start when I graduated. It started when I decided to invite my roommate to small group or walk around the hall of freshman dorm passing out chips and salsa trying to start spiritual conversations with students I didn't know (which was surprising successful). I was asked to lead others, first in small ways and then whole groups of people. I learned that my life is not for me, but to give away. I'm still learning how to do that on a daily basis but I have not wavered in that call to mission.

I've now been out of college 15 years (!! ) and I've watched a similar pattern of transformation happen in the lives of hundreds of students working for InterVarsity. Students encounter God through scripture and community. They experienced 'baptism'—a permanent internal change that has had an external ramification: students are called to mission, to a purpose greater than themselves.

I wonder if we, within the church, often look for the external signs before the internal change. It's easy to see if someone is 'acting' the right way, the Christian way, the moral way. It's much harder to see what is happening on the inside—much harder to see that permanent internal change.

Which brings me back to mission, to giving my life away. In InterVarsity, we'd use the term student leadership development—a key InterVarsity distinctive from the very beginning. I always tell staff in the area that they are trying to work themselves out of a job. Why? Because they are developing students to take over for them. And not just students to lead a small group bible study (that's a great first step), but students who can develop other students who can lead small group bible studies or pray with others or lead a team on a summer project. Staff are developing partners.

I've begun to wonder if that type of development is kind of like what Jesus is asking his disciples to do with others, a beautiful merging of teaching/modeling and doing. A type of development that builds upon that baptism, that permanent internal change, because that type of development fights against one of humanity's greatest temptations—to keep oneself at the center. It's so tempting to build something that depends upon you, that would fall apart if you weren't around. It's much harder, much more humbling to seek to empower, to give away power and authority. Here is Jesus modeling giving away power and authority to his disciples so that they can give it away to others.

In the past 18 months, I've been seeing something new, a picture of giving away power and authority that is bigger than what I knew before. Instead of focusing on how InterVarsity had and can change the lives of individual students on individual campuses, I've begun to think about how God might want to reach whole communities through work on college campuses. I've begun to think about how Christian communities can inspire new communities, not just students inspiring and leading other students.

I look around this area and see campuses with no student-led Christian communities, mostly community colleges or schools that are off the beaten track. I've begun to wonder—is this the end of the earth—the place that Jesus has called me to go and make disciples? I look around this area and think of schools like Walla Walla Community College and Big Bend Community College in Moses Lake and wonder how do we start communities that follow Jesus there? I've noticed my own temptation to go to campuses where I get the culture, that are similar to where I've worked before, so I know what works and I know what might work if we started something new. And yet, I hear Jesus' call to go where others aren't going, to give away power and authority, to see permanent internal change in others and to empower them to lead.

I wonder where Jesus might be calling you to go? Where are the 'ends of the earth' for you? The places that seem out of reach, but you know Jesus wants to see renewed from the inside out. Maybe, for you right now, that's not an external place but somewhere inside—a place inside your soul that feels dead. Maybe Jesus is asking you to let Him bring a permanent change inside your heart—almost like a second baptism.

Lastly, if you felt your heart beat a little quicker when I shared about InterVarsity and the vision to reach schools like Walla Walla Community College and LCSC, I'd love to talk with you more. We have ways to partner and volunteer and I love to have more partners in seeing God's kingdom come here on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen.