



Beacon

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WHERE IS THE HARVEST?

BY RON EMBLETON

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In a post-pandemic society packed with anxiety, many obligations, commitments, and the escape that entertainment provides, where is the harvest of souls in North America? Jesus once told a story that possibly resembles our setting today. Jesus said: A nobleman invited his friends to a banquet, when the banquet was prepared, he sent his servant to invite his friends to the banquet. Each in turn replied, “I cannot come.... I’ve got more pressing things to attend to” (Matt. 22, paraphrased).

Were these friends truly the nobleman’s friends or were they confused in their own minds as to what friendship really was all about? Where was the “harvest” of the nobleman’s extension of hospitality to those he considered his friends?

Could it be that allowing for and giving to “Missions” has become the substitute for following the mandate of Christ’s great commission?

Jesus, towards the end of his ministry, told his closest disciples, “I no longer call you servants, I call you friends.” In the previous sentence I used the words *disciples*, *servants*, and *friends*. A contemporary worship song* invites us to declare repeatedly, “I am a friend of God, I am a friend of God, He calls me friend.” Are we truly friends of God? If so, how did that friendship begin?

We certainly want friendship with God to be the case, but let’s follow the progression backwards to when Jesus first called Peter, James, and John. In Jesus’ initial encounter, he called to these fishermen and invited them to come and follow him. But let’s not stop with that part of Christ’s kind invitation to those men to “come and follow him.” That would be “top line theology,” and Jesus didn’t stop there.

Jesus continued and said, “and I will make you fishers of men.”

It was not an option; it was a promise. This was the bottom line of Jesus’ call to those hard-working men of the sea, the boats, and the fish. The disciples became more than mere followers. They immediately left their boats, nets, family members, and ultimately became “fishers of men.”

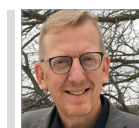
Toward the end of Jesus’ earthly ministry, he declared to the crowds who were made up of all kinds of people from all walks of life, “unless you deny yourself and take up your cross and follow me, you cannot be my disciple.” Although great crowds followed him, and many believed in him, only some became his disciples.

David Platt says: A disciple is somebody who feeds on the scriptures, it’s somebody who follows the Holy Spirit, it’s somebody who denies himself... it’s somebody who forsakes whatever hinders their follow. A disciple is somebody who fishes for souls, meaning they win souls, and finally, a disciple makes disciples.

True disciples make disciples. Do we, the average person who sits in the pew most Sundays, even want to fish for souls or know how to make disciples? In our tradition, we have made room for “Missions” which is quite noble. We offer programs, opportunities, summits, solicit funds, and give greatly to the cause of missions. Could it be that allowing for and giving to “Missions” has become the substitute for following the mandate of Christ’s great commission—to go and personally be involved in making disciples?

Friend, do you know how to or want to be a disciple that is personally involved in making disciples? Do those who

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Ron pastors Cornerstone Community Chapel in Hartville, Ohio, and also serves as an overseer within CMC. Together with his wife, Wanda (Swartzentruber), he has served in missions, church planting, and pastoring for the past 37 years.



Who Is Influencing You?

BY PRESTON YODER

As a child, I admired my dad's ease in striking up conversations with strangers. "How does he do that?" I wondered. For my entire childhood and youth, I watched my pastor move about as he preached. Today, I enjoy striking up conversations with strangers, and I can't stand still when I preach. Clearly, I've been influenced.

When we open the pages of the New Testament, we find much about Jesus to influence us. We find Jesus talking to all kinds of people: rich, poor, educated, uneducated, healthy, sick, adults, and children. While his methods with various audiences change, his message is singular. Change the way you think and live—the kingdom of God is near! He tells stories and gives illustrations, that relate to his audiences' experiences, to make the mystery of the kingdom of God knowable to any who have ears to hear. He speaks as one who has authority. (See Matthew 7.)

When he invites some fishermen to follow him, he explains that while they sought fish before, they would now seek new recruits for God's kingdom. The fishermen respond to Jesus. They accept the influence of Jesus above that of their father (who taught them to fish). They sacrifice friends, family, and vocation to follow Jesus. Their friends likely thought this was a foolish choice. But in light of eternity, it was a no-brainer—in the words of Simon Peter to Jesus, "To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68 ESV).

Jesus even goes as far as to say that his true family consists of those who do the will of his Father in heaven. (See Matthew 12:50.) I wonder if we have fully grasped what this means. Jesus, by his grace, welcomes us into his family! How much influence from Jesus does that put in our lives? Enough that we make it a habit to do the will of our heavenly Father. That's what we do wherever we go, since Jesus is the #1 influencer in our lives!

When Jesus conquers sin and death in his own betrayal, beating, crucifixion, and resurrection, we see clearly that he is the King of this Kingdom he proclaimed! But when we read past the Gospels, we understand that other influencers would soon distract God's people. In one city, the wealthy people exerted more influence on the believers than Jesus himself! (See Revelation 3.) People started looking at the rich, wanting what they had, doing what they were doing, and finding comfort in luxurious living.

Jesus warns wealthy believers that when they remove him from the primary place of influence in their lives, they actually become blind beggars. If they keep this up, they will not be a light for God's kingdom! He offers to restore their sight. He reminds them that God's kingdom is pure gold! He reminds them he alone can give the white robes of righteousness to wear in the King's palace. How could they trade their priority of God's eternal kingdom for possessions on earth? He urges them to invite him again to have a primary place of influence in their lives. "Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends" (Rev.3:20 NLT).

In contrast to the search for comfort as king, Paul sought only to keep Christ as King. He willingly suffered for Jesus as he shared the gospel. He even rejoiced to do so! (See Colossians 1:24.) How could he rejoice? Well, he expected to share in Christ's resurrection (1 Corinthians 15). He knew the resurrection follows suffering, from learning about Christ's life! There is no other way out of this life except death. There is no hope after this life without resurrection. Paul had glimpsed a vision of the risen Jesus. It was a no-brainer for Paul to sacrifice so much to tell others that Christ was Lord. Comfort never became a goal for Paul, yet contentment came as a by-product of his obedience to Jesus. How do we find this contentment?

We find it when Jesus is the primary influence in our life. We need Jesus at our table daily! We need the good news of his Kingdom as our first love. We need self-sacrificial obedience to be normal. We need the family of God (local church) to be our place of belonging. We need a vision of Jesus as the King of all eternity! Then we can gladly sing, "All to Jesus, I surrender, all to him I freely give. I will ever love and trust him, in his presence daily live. I surrender all!" 🕊



Preston is pastor of Shiloh Mennonite Church and moderator of CMC. He and his wife, Liz, serve as pastoral marriage counselors, and enjoy volunteer work and outreach in their community. They have three young daughters and live in Plain City, Ohio.



“Mistakes Were Made...” (Part 9)

BY PHIL WEBER



When Christians Gain Political Power

I was happily test-driving our newly repaired little 1994 pickup when I was distressed to hear a radio preacher state that the earliest Christian creed—“Jesus is Lord”—is a political statement.

The preacher went on to say that attempts to separate Christian faith and politics are misguided. He believes that the church needs more people like Peter Muhlenberg, the Lutheran pastor from Virginia, who concluded his January 1776 sermon by stripping off his clerical robe to reveal a militia uniform. By the end of the Revolutionary War, Pastor Muhlenberg had become Major General Muhlenberg!

What the first generations of believers were NOT doing was offering their loyalty and support to any of the competing leaders who wanted to be Caesar.

In contrast to the radio preacher, I believe it is a significant error to characterize “Jesus is Lord” primarily as a political statement. To call the statement political rather than theological separates it from an affirmation about where final authority lies. It separates the kingdom of God from the biblical story of God bringing eternal salvation to people from **every nation** who submit to his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus did not seem confused about the nature of his kingship. Under questioning by Governor Pilate, he would not confirm or deny that he was “King of the Jews,” but clarified that his kingly domain was “not of this world” and “not from the world” (Jn 18:36 RSV).

As people who belong to Jesus, we are reminded by Paul that our citizenship (a word with definite political significance!) is “in heaven.” Peter urges that our collective identity be that of a “holy nation” giving witness to the marvelous light of God’s mercy not as citizens enmeshed in political allegiances, but as “sojourners and exiles.”

But I also believe it is naive to think that saying “Jesus is Lord” has no political implications. Of course it does! The authority

to demand obedience and loyalty is foundational to effective government, and a political system unconcerned about authority is hard to imagine.

This is precisely the point at which I think the early Christian creed was correctly understood to be political: it frustrated the leaders of the Roman Empire in their goal to unite society around a loyalty to Caesar that was both civic and religious. By refusing to offer sacrifices to the Emperor, Christians were making a statement of dissent from what those in authority expected of good Roman citizens.

What the first generations of believers were NOT doing was offering their loyalty and support to any of the competing leaders who wanted to be Caesar. Their political statement was, in essence, a refusal to divide their ultimate loyalty between the Kingdom of Christ and the Empire of Rome. Or even, at the price of their lives, to make those loyalties one and the same. That confusion came soon enough.

If we see the creed—“Jesus is Lord”—as a political statement, it can easily be tacked on to any number of political ideologies and can serve (like Muhlenberg’s vestments) as a religious cloak for political or military campaigns. When this happens, it leads inexorably to the church fully supporting or even fomenting political violence in the name of God.

This happened early on after the first Christian emperor, Constantine, died, and his sons engaged in civil war to determine who would succeed him as emperor. All three competitors identified as Christian, but the eventual winner subscribed to the Arian heresy, and his experience of violence from orthodox believers apparently encouraged him to use the power of the state against them.

The start of the Crusades is often pegged to a 1095 speech in which the French people were challenged as “a race chosen

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Phil served as academic dean at RBC from 2008-2022 and currently teaches History of Christianity at RBC. He and his wife, Twila, have three children and several grandchildren.



Departures and Arrivals

BY MADALYN

As summer turns to fall, God continues to call workers to the spiritual harvest. Rosedale International (RI) is excited to introduce Esperanza and Courtney, two new workers who recently departed for their locations overseas.

Esperanza's first experience with overseas missions came in 2016, when she served as a REACH team leader. She credits this experience with stoking her desire to pursue long-term missions. "My time in REACH sharpened my trajectory and sense of calling. Afterward, I pursued my degree in social work, with a strong desire to advocate for children to thrive in families."

Other experiences drew her heart specifically towards the Mediterranean. While in college, she minored in Intercultural Studies, learning about the Muslim faith, and even traveling to the region. Through the Perspectives course, she learned about unreached people groups and the urgency of reaching them. In addition to this formal education, she also gained hands-on experience by working "in refugee resettlement in Lancaster, welcoming many new neighbors to my home area. At my most recent job, I worked alongside some brave refugee women, who became good friends."

As an associate worker with RI, Esperanza is also partnering with the sending organization Pioneers, joining one of their teams in the Mediterranean. In her first two-year term, she will focus on language and cultural acquisition. "Because it's essential for me to communicate well in the heart language of the people, devoting two years to 'learn to be a learner' is well worth it."

After this term, Esperanza will join another Pioneers team in the Mediterranean, "with long-term church-planting goals. I envision using my social work skills to bless refugees who have little access to the good news. I am praying to see hope and healing sparked through relationship with Jesus and for movements of Muslims toward him."

Courtney's arrival in Thailand is the culmination of nearly three years of prayers and planning. As a REACHER in 2019-20, Courtney traveled to Thailand and quickly caught a vision for returning long-

term. But when COVID-19 sent her team home in the middle of outreach, Courtney put her tentative plans on hold.

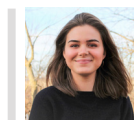
While waiting for borders to re-open and God's direction to become clearer, Courtney returned to the Rosedale International Center (RIC) as an intern for Short-Term Programs. Not long into her internship, God rekindled her desire to return to Thailand. She began pursuing the steps to become an RI worker, and arrived in Thailand in July of this year.

In her two-year term, Courtney's main focus is to support RI's long-term team in Bangkok. She will also dedicate time to language study, and take opportunities to work with the many refugee and migrant populations in the city. "I'm excited to watch relationships form and grow as time goes on."

Although Courtney has spent less than three months in Thailand, her short time has already shaped her. She shared that she's learning to step out of her comfort zone, and has grown deeper in trust with God. "Thank goodness we have Jesus as our Teacher! I'm learning how to follow the instructions of Jesus amidst Thai culture, trusting that he'll show me how to love and encourage and speak truth. He knows their hearts and ways of life. He will teach me about what my purpose is here and what it means to follow the call to make disciples."

Rosedale International is grateful to witness God working through these young women to bring the gospel to the unreached. As Courtney and Esperanza live out their callings, please lift them up in prayer. Pray that they would keep a learner's spirit; that they would hear God's direction; that they would persevere in language learning. Ask that they would find connection with those around them and would convey the love of Jesus in every interaction, no matter how great or small. 🙏


Some names and locations have been changed for security.



Madalyn serves as Media Coordinator for Rosedale International. She lives in Rosedale, Ohio, and attends Shiloh Mennonite Church.

Where is the Harvest? *continued from page 1*

go through our mission programs sometimes battle with discouragement and aimlessness when they return home? Is it because locally we are far removed from intentional disciple making?

If we are to be a maturing and multiplying network, on mission with God, passionate for the harvest and for evangelism, then let's get back to personally responding to the call of Jesus, both top and bottom line. Yes, let's follow him, take up our cross, deny ourselves, and ask him to make us disciples who make disciples. May our love and friendship with Jesus grow out of our commitment to first become his discipling disciples. 

* "Friend of God" by Israel Houghton, Michael Gungor
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Mistakes Were Made... *continued from page 3*

and beloved of God . . . set apart from all nations" to wrest Palestine from "the wicked race and subject it to [them]selves."

What followed included the pillage and slaughter of Jews, Muslims, and even fellow Christians. The response of the crowd to that inaugural speech that launched the first of many Crusades was "God wills it!"

If we listen to the rhetoric throughout Christian history where violent aggression has occurred, we often find that people wedded their national and spiritual identities, confused loyalty to Christ with loyalty to country.

For example, we find little objection from German Christians in the 1940s to Nazi soldiers wearing belt buckles declaring "Gott Mit Uns" (God with us).

Jesus is Lord of all things and all peoples for all time. To make the declaration of his lordship a territorial or political statement trivializes and distorts it at best. My hope is that God's people in our time will not make that tragic mistake. 