

**The Message for Jan 8, 2012**

**Matthew 28:18-20**

*Think Again*

**The Rev. Dr. R. K. Miller**

Today we begin a new worship series called, “Over the Fence.” We will look at how we are called to reach over the fence into our neighbor’s lives with God’s love and grace. Why? Two reasons: First: we have been blessed by God to be a blessing to others. Second: God is counting on us to continue doing what Jesus started.

In our Gospel reading for today Jesus gives us a new identity and a new purpose. We are to be disciples (that’s our identity) and we are to go make more disciples (that’s our purpose). We are God’s plan A to reach the world with God’s love and grace. There is no plan B.

Listen to how Jesus puts it in our reading this morning from Matthew’s Gospel the 28<sup>th</sup> chapter...

**(Read Text)**

We call this the Great Commission. And Jesus has given this to all of his disciples, not just a select few. Jesus expects all of us, all of his disciples, to live out this identity and this purpose. He is counting on us to go and make disciples.

Consider the powerful message in this YouTube video titled, “The Great Commission.”

**<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONROQBrbZU8>**

I watch that video and I wonder, why? Why is this so important? Why did Jesus give us this Great Commission? Here’s why. Here’s a letter addressed to me and to you.

Dear Pastor Miller and the People of Friedens,

I assume that based on what others have said about you and the faith family at Friedens you receive complementary letters all the time. I hope you will indulge me to write to you from a different perspective. My letter is more of a complaint or a warning. It is intended to enlighten you as to how your actions and teachings related to the Bible have been destroying my life and probably the lives of others too.

Let me explain... I was raised, unchurched, by loving parents who were perfectly content with their lives outside the church. The worldly perspective I grew up with allowed me to see the hypocrisy in the lives of the few church people I did know. As I grew up, I found myself on the path to live the American Dream.

This path, as far as I could see, did not go through or near a church. I went to college then married a beautiful woman and got a good paying job, which allowed me to make payments on things I wanted. My wife and I eventually started a family with two

beautiful children and a couple dogs. I was living the middle class version of the American Dream.

I was a kind and decent family man who was grounded in the realities of the world. I was perfectly content to work hard and provide the financial resources needed for my family: a 401(k) retirement plan, a college savings plan, a general savings account, and a vacation account. I focused on what I wanted and worked hard to provide for the necessities of my family, including a flat screen TV. My charitable giving was minimal at best and never to a church. I love my family and I love spending time with them but I was constantly distracted by the financial realities and needs in our lives. I looked to my financial balance statements for a sense of security.

Like many worldly men devoted to getting ahead in this world, I would find moments of joy when the quarterly 401(k) statements showed a profit. I also experienced periods of stress, disappointment, and anger when the 401(k) dropped or when we had to take money out of our savings to pay the bills. However, I accepted these ups and downs as the realities of life and convinced myself that we were doing okay.

One day my wife, who I thought loved me, said she wanted to raise our children in a church. She suggested we start visiting churches in the area. Up to this point I had avoided churches and the hypocritical Christians who attended them. I had always felt uncomfortable around faith-professing Christians because of my lack of biblical knowledge. I assumed they would look down on me.

Because I love my wife, I reluctantly agreed to go with her to church and added it to my list of dreaded weekend chores. Our trial run at visiting churches proved relatively painless. The people were nice enough but it had little impact on me and left me with no desire for more. My wife, who was also less than impressed with these visits, suggested we try Friedens because she heard good things about this church. I didn't want to go but as usual my wife convinced me, and we attended your church for the first time last fall. That Sunday something changed in my life. You need to know that you and the people of Friedens have been progressively destroying my life in this world ever since.

The message you shared that day was strong and pure not like the watered down versions I heard in other places. It had an immediate impact on my life and the music just grabbed me like an addictive drug and I wanted more. We started attending the 9:00 service regularly and when you offered a 40-Day-Devotional I found myself reading the Bible every day during the week. I wanted more. We joined a LIFE Group and my faith grew even more. All along I was losing my grip in the ways of this world, which had been my foundation, and I began to trust Jesus with my life.

I cannot believe how my life has been changed this past year. I used to avoid church altogether. Now I can't wait to attend every week. When I miss it, something is missing in my life. I find myself going to Friedens' webpage to watch the message again and to watch the ones that I've missed.

I stopped saving for a flat screen TV, which is just as well because I don't have time for it. I reduced my 401(k) contributions and stopped looking at the quarterly statements. I have gone from trying to save as much money as I could to finding ways to give it away in addition to my regular contributions to Friedens. This brings me even greater joy than I ever experienced with a 401(k) statement showing a profit.

What's wrong with me??? It's lunacy!!! What have you done to me???

I am not the man I was a year ago. I was a man then believing in the realities and ways of the world. I was living the American Dream, saving up riches for a comfortable life with a focus on a secure and strong bottom line. Now I believe in, pray to, and seek a deeper relationship with a God I cannot see. I've found a new life in Christ Jesus whom I cannot see. I find myself doing things for others I never dreamed I would be doing. I see life and people differently. I now look for security in my faith not in my finances. All of this would have sounded like foolishness to me a year ago. However, the man I was a year ago and the worldly life I was living then are being destroyed. This has obviously had an impact on me and on my family in a good way.

I want you and the people of Friedens to be aware of the role you have played in destroying my worldly life. I must tell you that if you continue teaching and preaching and doing what you are doing then you will most likely have a similar impact on the worldly lives of others like me. I hope you realize that you will have to live with the consequence of your actions and the affect you are having on the lives of people like me. You have changed my life for all eternity.

Sincerely,  
Your Brother in Christ.

This is what happens when we live out the Great Commission. Lives are changed for good and for all eternity. Jesus said, "Go and make disciples." Will you? Amen.