**Him We Proclaim**

Text: Colossians 1:28a

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**Scriptures:** Matthew 28:16-20; Ezekiel 33:1-9; Colossians 1:15-29

**Series: Disciple Making** , Sermon A of a two part series

**Theme:** The Apostle Paul describes the ministry which he and his fellow gospel workers have as being the proclamation of Christ

**Proposition:** In order to make disciples, we must proclaim Christ

**Introduction**

In our weekly Reformed Church of Christchurch bulletin, near the top of the first page, underneath the words “Christ’s church on Cornwall, newsletter of the Reformed Church of Christchurch, just below ‘Worship on the Lord’s Day” you’ll see the words “Our mission” then the phrase: “*To make and equip disciples of Jesus, our Saviour, who joyfully serve and glorify God*”.

The call to engage in this important task is grounded in the words of Christ in Matthew 28:19 **“***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*”

The basic meaning of the word “disciple” is a ‘learner’ or ‘pupil’. In Bible times, it was the task of the disciple to learn, study and pass along the sayings and teaching of the master. We know that when on this earth Jesus called his disciples to “Follow Me” (Luke 5:27). We know that He has continued to issue the same call to follow Him through his disciples who, by God’s grace and strength make other disciples who themselves follow Jesus Christ (e.g. 1 Cor 11:1).

This morning our focus is on the first part of Col 1.28: “*Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom*”. We’ll see firstly the focus of disciple-making, secondly the call to disciple-making and finally the way of disciple-making.

1. **The Focus of Disciple Making**

There is a solar power station is located in Morocco near Ouarzazate (featured in the movie ‘Sahara’). There the energy of sunlight is reflected by about half a million parabolic mirrors spread out over an area of about 500 hectares. That’s a very large array of mirrors – capable of capturing 540MW of power.

Well you say, that’s kind of interesting, but what on earth has this got to do with making disciples? The answer is found in one three letter word ‘Him’. ‘Him’ is a male pronoun and here refers back to a person, to Christ. In the letter to the Colossians, the Apostle Paul has been writing about Jesus Christ, explaining in 1:15 that: “*He is the image of the invisible God”.* Ifwe liken all the light which is emitted from the sun to the glory of God, that is His brightness, splendour, magnificence, majesty, and power, then Christ, in His humanity, is like a mirror reflecting the glory of God. Christ is like a huge, all encompassing, mirror which completely encircles the sun, capturing all the radiated light and perfectly reflecting the image of the sun in all it’s entirely and enormity.

The Bible expresses this much better than my weak illustration: “*He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature*” (Heb 1:3); **“***And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth*” (John 1:14); Jesus said “*Whoever has seen me has seen the Father*” (John 14:9); Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God. He is “*the firstborn of all creation*”.

For those of us who are parents here, if we refer to our ‘firstborn’ we mean our eldest child. We can remember back to a time before that child was born, before he or she was even conceived. However, this is **not** the meaning of ‘firstborn’ in v15. In OT times, the firstborn son would be the principal heir of the estate (e.g. Deut 21:17). He would have a particular honour in the family.

So it is with Christ, who is God’s ‘beloved Son’. We can see very clearly that there has never been a time when Christ did not exist. He is not created. As God, He has always been. He is both the ‘agent’ and the goal of everything which has been made: v16 **“***For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities- all things were created through him and for him*”.

Imagine that your next-door neighbour notices you come to worship here every Lord’s Day and comments ‘well that’s nice for you, but I’m not religious’. This person thinks that Jesus Christ has no relevance for them, but they are not correct. The world in which they live, of which they are a part, was made through Christ, for Christ. Not only is this astounding reality true, but this next-door neighbour (and everybody and everything else) can only exist for as long as Jesus Christ keeps them being.

As Paul writes (v17): “*And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together*”. There is not a single person, creature, object, galaxy, star, atom, or sub-atomic particle which is not continuously sustained through Christ. Christ Jesus is relevant and important to absolutely everyone, whether or not they know or acknowledge this reality. That is why:

Jesus Christ – ‘Him’ – He is the focus of all disciple-making. Many people do not know that this universe was once a very good place - without any death, decay, pain, suffering or distress. Many people do not know that our first ancestors from which the whole human race is descended, Adam and Eve, were created by God as perfect people. **“***So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them*” (Gen 1:27)

It’s like God made Adam and Eve to be mirrors, perfectly reflective so that they would radiate his glory, his brightness, his splendour, his magnificence, his majesty and his power both individually and collectively in their relationship with one another. In Psalm 8, David expresses this truth in these words: (v5) “*You have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour*”

Many people do not know that Adam and Eve rebelled against God, they eat fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They wanted to be their own masters, to live independently of God. As a result they created a rift between themselves and their Creator. The image of God which they were designed to bear was marred, broken. Like mirrors which have been shattered and tarnished, they now very dimly and incompletely reflected the glory of God.

Today the whole world marvels at the achievements of mankind; the scale and complexity of the structures we design and build – like the Solar Power Station in Morocco, the speed, strength and agility of athletes. the beauty of some art and music. Yet many people do not know that all that is good in the achievements of mankind are but a dim reflection of the great glory of God.

Because the image of God is damaged in mankind, death, brokenness and sorrow have entered this world and all of creation groans. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love (from Eph 2:4) has not left everything to remain broken. He has worked through His Son Jesus Christ to restore this world back to perfection, rebuilding his relationship with a group of people He has chosen for Himself. Paul expresses this glorious repair work this way in Col 1:20 “*Through him (Christ) to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross*”. The broken relationship with God is repaired through Christ. Damaged mirrors now able to be restored to reflect the glory of Christ more and more.

Paul writes to the Colossians about the mystery of Christ now revealed “*which is Christ in you, the hope of glory*” (v27). Here is the certain hope of the gospel: the transformation of broken people like you and me into repaired image-bearers who brightly reflect the glory of the divine majesty. That is why:

Jesus Christ – ‘Him’ – He is the focus of all disciple-making.He is the bright and morning Star, the Good Shepherd, the Lamb of God, the Light of the World, the Mediator between God and men, the Power and Wisdom of God, the Prince of Life, the Righteous man, the Resurrection and the Life, the Beloved Son of God, He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords’ He is the focus of all truly Christian preaching, teaching and living, He is the focus of all disciple making. He is the One to whom God the Father has given ‘*all authority in heaven and on earth*’ (Matt 28:18). It is with this supreme divine authority that Christ issues the call to make disciples.

Which brings us to our 2nd point:

1. **The Call to Disciple Making**

In our Waldron family household, we have a ‘chore chart’ or roster for domestic duties like loading the dishwasher, cleaning the bathroom, vacuuming the lounge. Why? So that everyone is clear about who is responsible for these tasks on any particular day.

As we consider the making of disciples from our text, an important question is: who exactly is called to make disciples? Who is going to do this important and necessary work?

The second word of our text is another pronoun ‘we’ -2nd person plural. This pronoun clearly has a direct reference to the Apostle Paul and to Timothy, both men being mentioned in the first verse of chap 1. However, the group of people included in ‘we’ is larger than just these two: The ‘we’ here includes **all** people who are called to ‘proclaim’ Christ. My aim is to prove this to you know from the Scriptures.

There are a range of Greek words which are translated ‘proclaim’ or ‘preach’ in our English translations. There is one word group in particular (kayrux) which is used 57x, but **never** in a general sense for all believers. This word indicates the public verbal proclamation of the gospel. It is only used of those who have been set aside, commissioned, appointed specifically for this work.

This was certainly the role of the apostles whom Jesus commissioned to officially herald the good news of His coming: **“***And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to* ***preach***” (Mark 3:14). The official public proclamation was the task of pastors like Timothy, to whom Paul wrote: **“*Preach*** *the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching*” (2 Tim 4:2).

We recognize the specific role of gospel preachers who are set apart to publicly proclaim the gospel in the ordination of Ministers in our churches. This is a good and thoroughly Biblical practice, but there is a risk that we may think that **all** the work of gospel proclamation is to be done by the minister/pastor/domine – and maybe a bit by the elders.

I said earlier that there are a range of Greek words which are translated ‘proclaim’ or ‘preach’ in our English translations. Apart from the narrower term ‘kayrux’ there are a number of broader terms (e.g. euangelidzo, katangello, exangello) which include both the public and privateproclamation of Christ, his person and work. In our text the word ‘proclaim’ (katangello**) is** one of these broader terms.It literally means to "declare down"- to announce, to declare plainly and openly.

This is a task for all those who are disciples of Christ, who are described this way by the Apostle Peter: **“***But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may* ***proclaim*** *the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9).* The call to make disciples is a call to every single believer in Christ, without exception. Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, you and I are part of the ‘we’ of our text!

But perhaps you protest: “*I am not comfortable talking to other people I don’t know*”. Jesus never promised that His call for you to make disciples was going to be comfortable! It wasn’t comfortable for the Apostle Paul, who suffered much and struggled in his weakness with a ‘thorn in the flesh’ (2 Cor 12:7) an unimpressive personal presence (2 Cor 10:10) and with many sufferings (2 Cor 11:23-28).

Perhaps you think “*Making disciples is not my gifting*”. Jesus never presents this task as being of restricted allocation only to those to whom specific gifts have been given. As we’ll see, God willing, next week from Col 1:29 the power and ability to make disciples comes from Christ Himself.

Perhaps in despair you plead “*I am in no position to disciple other people…my own life is a mess!*”. I say to you ‘yes I know it is’. Not one of us truly ‘has it all together’. We are all experience some degree of brokenness in this life. Not one of us perfectly reflects the image of God…yet! If you are in Christ today, do not allow the messiness of your life to prevent you following His call for you to make disciples. Christian ministry has been accurately described as ‘broken people helping broken people to find Christ, the Healer’.

Perhaps you may even try this excuse: “*I don’t know enough about the Bible to teach other people anything*”. Really? Do you actually think that? Have you been asleep when you hear the Word preached twice every Lord’s Day? When you read the Scriptures privately do you learn nothing? The problem in many of our Reformed Churches in New Zealand is not that people like you and me don’t know enough about the Bible, but that we are unwilling to attempt to teach others. Why is this?

One possibility could be pride. As soon as you try to teach somebody something, one of the first things that may happen is that you realise that you don’t know the subject as well as you thought you did! That is no problem if you are willing to keep on learning!

Perhaps you say, “*I have difficulty forming close relationships with others*”. I want you to know that I understand. Many of us have been hurt, wounded, scarred in life. Getting close to other people means you run the risk of being hurt again. We naturally want to protect ourselves from being wounded. Think of Christ. He was in close relationship with Judas Iscariot. How deeply He was hurt by the betrayal. Psalm 41:9 “*Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.”*

Perhaps you’re thinking “*I’m just too busy with my work/family/church life/other interests to add another item to my ‘to do list’!*”. Here’s the thing: we all find time for the activities and interests which are most important to us. This is always true for everyone. Busyness can mean you are just trying to do too much.

Finally you say to me (I hope that you’re running out of excuses!) “*I’m not sure that I really understand what ‘making disciples’ is, or how to go about doing it*”. My response to you is – you’re in the right place! Come next week and listen to the 2nd sermon in this preaching ‘series’.

We’ve heard about ‘Him’ – Christ Jesus, the focus of all Christian disciple-making. We’ve heard about ‘We’ – the call to all disciples of Christ to be disciple-makers themselves.

Now let’s look at the way in which disciples are made…our 3rd point.

1. **The Way of Disciple Making**

Before studying for the ministry, I trained as a scientist, my first degree is in theoretical physics and mathematics, my second in Geophysics. I ran my own businesses for 20 years as a younger man. All this to say: I like formulas. I like numbers. I like to follow a set pattern which will result in a particular outcome. So I might ask the question: which formula should I use to make disciples?

Here are some suggestions: Attend a 12-week Bible study course and invite others to come; Help organise some community events like a BBQ here at the church building and invite non-church attending folk to come. These are helpful suggestions and may provide useful opportunities for disciple-making, but they are not the central way by which disciples are made.

We can summarise the Biblical method, or way of making disciples with the word ‘proclaim’. This proclamation, this declaring openly and plainly is to be in **both deed and word**. Our participation in the sacrament of Lord’s Supper is an important aspect of this proclamation: *“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you* ***proclaim*** *the Lord's death until he comes.” (1 Cor 11:26)*

Making disciples also involves modelling faith and godliness in our lives. As Christ’s disciple Peter exhorts fellow disciples: **“***Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation*” (1 Peter 2:12). As Christ, the Master Himself said “*Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven*.” (Matt 5:16) This truth is helpfully expressed in the Heidelberg Catechism LD32 under the 3rd section “Man’s Gratitude”: “We do good….so that by our godly living our neighbours may be won over to Christ”

There is, however, a danger here, especially in confessional reformed churches. The risk is that we think our proclamation of Christ is **only** to be through our lifestyle and therefore **not** through our words. To believe this is to be in error. Let me show you this just briefly from two Scriptures:

Paul writes to Timothy **“***what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men* ***who will be able to teach others also***” (2 Tim 2:2). Disciples of Jesus Christ pass onto others the teaching they have received. This cannot be done through actions alone. We must also use words!

The Apostle Peter writes about this verbal proclamation saying: “*In your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you*” (1 Peter 3:15).

Brothers and Sisters, we cannot make disciples in silence. Words are essential!

There are two ways in which we are to use words in proclaiming Christ which are identified in our text: warning and teaching. Let’s look at each of these briefly in turn:

Firstly **warning**: Cities in many parts of the ancient world were encircled by walls which were designed to protect the inhabitants from their enemies. Watchmen were appointed to stand guard on the high walls. There they could see any enemy approaching in the distance and then warn those in the city so that they would be prepared to take action to prevent being captured. In Ezekiel 33, if a man was made a watchman, he would be held accountable for sounding a warning.

Just as Ezekiel was appointed ‘a watchman for the house of Israel’ (Eze 33:7), So we, brothers and sisters in Christ, are each appointed by Christ to be ‘watchmen’ and ‘watchwomen’ over those around us - as part of our broader call ‘to make disciples of all nations’.

The aim of this admonition/exhortation/correction is to align the heart attitudes and resulting direction of life with the Word of Christ. Fathers in particular (Eph 6:4) and Elders (1 Pet 5:2; 1 Thess 5:12) are called by God to the task of warning those under their care like watchmen on the walls of an ancient city.

However, this ministry of warning is not just for fathers in their homes, or just for elders in the church, but also for all believers e.g.  **“***Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and* ***admonishing*** *one another in all wisdom*” (Col 3:16a)

There are various reasons why you and I may shy away from correcting those to whom we are proclaiming Christ – whether they be inside or outside the church. These reasons may include:

1. **Worldliness.** It’s easy for us to be affected by the world’s wisdom which in our post-modern culture of ‘tolerance’ and individual human rights sends out the message ‘who are YOU to tell ME what to do?’
2. **Fear.** We worry that people may get annoyed or angry with us if we warn them or that there may be some ‘unpleasantness’. We may desire peace at all costs.
3. **People-pleasing.** We may have an ungodly desire to please others. We may want to be liked and accepted by others too much.
4. **Lack of love.** We may have lack of understanding that warning others is a clear indication of our love for them.

If we see someone following a pathway of sin and/or unwise behaviour, then surely we demonstrate our love and concern by warning them. Would you agree? You see someone about to walk out in front of a bus they have not yet seen…surely you call out ‘STOP!’ Not to do so is immoral.

However, themanner in which we issue the warning is very important. I once took a brother from one of our churches to see a next-door neighbour I had got to know over the years. This man was dying of cancer, his life was a mess, and he did not know the Lord. Upon meeting this man for the first time my fellow church member’s second sentence to him was ‘you must repent or else you will be going to hell’. I could not fault my brother’s theology, but the way he conveyed his warning came across as being devoid of any evident love for this fellow dying image bearer.

Brothers and sisters, harsh warnings, austere admonitions, critical correction a judgemental tone and./or a superior manner…these are not the warnings we are called to give as we proclaim Christ... **“***Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ*” (Eph 4:15)

Let’s now move to the 2nd word which denotes instruction: teaching

The word used in our text for **teaching** is the work of imparting both practical and theoretical knowledge to a pupil. The teaching here it is not human philosophy or tradition (Col 2:8), but the apostolic teaching, the truth of the Word of God (e.g. 1 Cor 15:1-4). The Colossians believers themselves had heard this word of truth, the gospel (1:5). They had understood it (1:6), having learned it from Epaphras (1:7).

The Christian faith isknowledge-based. We must know about Christ in order to enter into a living relationship with Christ. We must know Him upon whom we have believed. Paul’s prayer for the Colossian church was that they “*may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God*” (Col 1:9-10) God’s good will for us all is that we are to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. (2 Pet 3:18)

Why? Firstly, because this gives glory to Christ; Secondly, as we proclaim Him through our deeds AND words, God is pleased to use this ‘fruit bearing’ to make disciples of others.

If you are not a disciple of Christ today, allow yourself to be discipled by one of the followers of Christ here in this church. You may not have known, or you may not acknowledge the truth, that you were designed by your Creator to reflect the brightness, splendour, magnificence, majesty and power of God. Today, admit that you are broken and come to Christ – He will rescue you and progressively repair you so that one day you will be completely whole, shining like the sun in the kingdom of your Heavenly Father (Matt 13:43)

Have you found this sermon on disciple making challenging? Overwhelming? You say to me ‘where am I going to find the time and the energy to ‘make disciples of the nations’, to proclaim Christ, warning everyone and teaching everyone?

Well I’ve got some good news for you. Everyone is not everyone! Let me explain! How do you and I generally use the word ‘everyone’? e.g. “*Everyone’s going to the wedding*” “*Everyone owns a cell phone*” “*Everyone knows that!*” Seldom, when we use the word ‘everyone’ do we mean every single person on the planet... all 7.6 billion of us.

It was the same for the Apostle Paul when he wrote: Col 1:28: “*Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching* ***everyone*** *with all wisdom”.* ‘Everyone’ here was not everyone in the world at that time (estimated to be somewhere between 150 and 330 million). No, everyone means ‘all kinds of people’ Jews and Gentiles alike.

Our ministry of proclaiming Christ is that of making disciples of all kinds of people: e.g.

1. Those who already know the Lord and those who do not,
2. Those inside the church community and those outside

We know that God has promised to save all kinds of people, as Paul reminded the Galatian church: “*And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed*." (Gal 3:8)

The work of making disciples is the work of proclaiming Christ so that by God’s powerful enabling grace, those who come to Christ in faith can be repaired like fractured, tarnished mirrors. Who are we to proclaim Christ to? Everyone we come in contact with, believers and non-believers. Each person is an image-bearer of God, whether or not they know this, irrespective of whether or not they have a relationship with God through Christ.

Our task is to make disciples of the nations (of all peoples) who reflect the glory of Christ. Our task is to exalt the name of Christ, to promote his fame to reflect his glory like a clean shiny mirror. As we enter into relationship with others (both Christians and non-Christians) we are used as instruments in the hands of the Great Physician to bring healing, to begin to repair the brokenness which pervades all human lives on this earth.

Notice the last three words of our text today

Col 1:28: “*Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone**with all wisdom”.* There is a practical wisdom which we are called to apply to our disciple-making.

Consider, as a suggestion, being intentional about discipling one person in this congregation by meeting with them once every two weeks for 45mins in order to proclaim Christ to them. Also, consider meeting with someone outside this covenant community, e.g. a non-believing work colleague, friend or neighbour, again you could aim for 45 mins every other week. Ok, that’s a practical suggestion. I hope you find it a wise one☺

Now let’s consider the other aspect of wisdom: Christ Himself. Christ is the wisdom of God in flesh, He is the ultimate healer, the generous Giver, the faithful Son, the pure bridegroom, the true Friend, the good Worker, the radiance of God’s glory. In order to make disciples by proclaiming Christ, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, **We must point people to Jesus to the Wisdom of God.** Our task is to make and equip disciples of Jesus, our Saviour NOT of disciples of David, John or Jane! So Jesus Christ, His person, His Word, His wisdom, his love, his kindness, his compassion, his mercy, his glory must underpin all our proclamation, all our warning and teaching. Remember it is **Him** we proclaim when we make disciples.

How is your relationship with Jesus today? Are you living day by day trusting Him alone as your Lord and Saviour? If you cannot wholeheartedly answer ‘yes’ to this question, then you are someone who would greatly benefit from being discipled.

There’s a real sense in which we all need this ongoing warning and teaching in all wisdom. **Just as** the 500,000 mirrors of the Moroccan solar power station require regular repair and maintenance to remain reflective… **so,** do God’s people as they grow to bear the image of God more fully in their lives. When we proclaim Christ to one another we help in this ‘repair and maintenance’ work in each other’s lives. ‘Repairing mirrors’ is part of making disciples as we proclaim Christ

The Moroccan solar power station is also being expanded so that more sunlight can be reflected from more mirrors. Just as more mirrors are being added, so Christ is adding more people to His church as his disciples faithfully engage in making more disciples so that His glory may be more widely reflected. If you are a disciple of Christ today, you are called by your Lord to make disciples.

In order to do so **we must proclaim Christ**. We must warn and teach others. Remember disciples make disciples. This is how Jesus builds His church, gathering his people to her, strengthening them by His Word and Spirit. Will you join Him in His work and make disciples of the nations, proclaiming Christ, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom”?

AMEN