

## Introduction

Surprise parties are fun right? At least, fun for everyone except the person being surprised, right? Usually, in my experience, the surprised person has a hunch of what's going on. You can tell the surprised knows the surprise when they walk in and act surprised. Have you ever seen anyone actually get surprised at a surprise party? They look more confused than surprised.

I once had a surprise party thrown for my birthday, and I had absolutely no idea it was happening. I was told that we were on our way to Benihana's, one of those Japanese restaurants where they cook the food in front of you and put on a show with it. That was the place in our family for special things like birthdays. So I'm really excited for Benihana's. But, my family says, we need to take a detour first. We stop at a friend's house, and SURPRISE! It was a birthday party. When they yelled surprise, I just stared blankly. I was actually surprised, you know, because I trusted my family and expected they wouldn't ever lie to me, so my brain took a bit of time to process what was going on. I had two immediate thoughts as I scanned the room. First, and I'm a little ashamed to share this with you, was "I wouldn't have invited some of these people to my birthday party..." and second, and I think I said this one outloud, was "Is everyone going to Benihana's?" My mom said no, we got pizza! I couldn't hide my disappointment. Pizza instead of Benihana's? C'mon now.

I'm not just telling you this to dissuade you from ever throwing my a surprise party - please don't - but this idea of a blank stare

surprise, of pizza instead of Benihana's, came to mind when I read this morning's text. Today's text is called the Great Commission, as Jesus commissions the disciples for their final and biggest task yet: to spread the Good News, the Gospel, of Jesus.

Today we end our time in the Gospel of Matthew in a similar place as where we started with it: surprise. Recall that we opened this series with the genealogy in Matthew, that it would have been surprising to hear the names of women, Gentiles, and less-than-ideal relatives and situations listed in Jesus's genealogy. Just as Matthew opens with a surprise, the book now closes with one. Imagine you're a disciple of Jesus, one of the eleven left now that Judas is out of the picture. Think of the emotional roller coaster you've been on over the last few days. Your teacher and Lord, the one you think is the Messiah, is arrested, tried, beaten, crucified, and laid in a tomb. Then, you hear from the two Mary's that he's alive. Then you see him, and it's all true. The resurrection is real. Jesus is alive. Just take a moment to step into those emotions. That's all surprising, and because we hear it every year, we forget how awesome it is that Jesus was raised from death.

But the real surprise is what Jesus says. The disciples, on top of all these emotions, must be thinking to themselves: Jesus is raised, he's going to rule and bring this Kingdom of Heaven he's been talking about to earth, and we're his friends. This is awesome! No, you're going to spread the Kingdom. You're going

to make disciples. Surprise! The disciples thought they were getting Benihana's and instead, Jesus said, surprise, you cook.

## **Surprise in Scope**

The surprise really comes from the scope Jesus's expectations and commission. There are four places in this morning's text where Jesus describes the fullness of the scope of the mission. Jesus tells them that, "*All* authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey *everything* that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you *always*, to the end of the age."

All authority. All nations. Teaching everything I've taught you. I am with you always. The first and last of these gives the disciples, and us, comfort that we are never alone in this mission. Jesus has authority, and Jesus is with us always. That wouldn't have surprised the disciples, but that's surprising to the world. All authority has been given to Jesus, but by the world's standards, by many of the standards that we hold in much of our lives, Jesus lost. Jesus was defeated, he died. Jesus was weak. But it is this humble carpenter and teacher who is given all authority on earth and in heaven. And if that's not enough of a surprise, he turns to these eleven ragtag disciples, fishermen, zealots, tax collectors, nobodies, to go and make disciples. They weren't teachers, they weren't rabbis. And that call has been passed down generation to

generation until it landed at the doorstep of this church this morning.

So Jesus's authority wasn't surprising to the disciples, but the middle two might have been surprising to the disciples, the command to go to all nations to baptize and teach. You see, Jesus had already given the disciples a commission. In Matthew 10, Jesus tells the disciples this as he sends them out to spread the Good News: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons." You see the difference between going only to the lost sheep of Israel in Matthew 10 to the whole world in Matthew 28? The difference between, don't bother with the Gentiles in Matthew 10 to all the nations, literally, to the Gentiles, in Matthew 28. The extent of this mission has expanded exponentially.

More than the surprise of the scope of the mission would have been the eleven missionaries. Every one of the eleven would have been thinking, "Me? You want me to do this? Who am I?" The disciples were unimportant people from Galilee, An unimportant part of an unimportant nation in the world at the time. Israel was not special at the time, and if there was anything special in Israel, it certainly wasn't Galilee. And yet it is eleven Galileans that Jesus calls to spread the most important Good News the world has ever known to the entire world. Surprise!

## **Making Disciples**

This text, if we take it seriously, should be uncomfortable, because, if we take it seriously, as Jesus's disciples these words are for us as much as they were for the eleven. Surprise! How many of us are living this out? If Jesus chose these eleven disciples to spread the Gospel, none of us can say that we're unqualified. You may be thinking to yourself, just as the disciples might have, "Who am I?" I'm not qualified. I've messed up in my life. But that's not the right question to ask. It's not about you. It's not about me. The right question is "Who is Jesus? What has Jesus done in my life? How can I share that?" In our weakness, God is strong. Jesus has all authority, and he is calling you to make disciples. Jesus knows you intimately, and he is calling you to make disciples. Jesus knows the "Who am I?" question better than you do about yourself, and he is calling you to make disciples.

So, what is our task? To make disciples of all nations. How do we do that? Jesus lays out a twofold strategy for us. Making disciples is about evangelism and education. Look at verses 19 and 20, "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." Baptizing and teaching. Baptizing refers to introducing people to Jesus in such a way that they want to be a part of this commission too. Demonstrating Jesus's love and grace in such a way that people feel invited to be baptized into this movement. This is evangelism. Showing the Good News that Jesus is Lord and God through our words and deeds. Loving

people the way God loves us. Forgiving people the way God forgives us. Having mercy on others as God has mercy on us. While I was raised in the church, I'm a Christian today because I've had many in my life show me the love of Christ through their words and actions. That's good evangelism. It's not forceful, but inviting. It's not demanding, but encouraging. It's not fearful, but hopeful.

Good evangelism is first, teaching is second. This is the first Christian Education curriculum. Teaching them - all the nations - to obey everything that Jesus has commanded us. This command to teach what we've been taught means that we need to first know what we've been taught! We need to learn all that Jesus has commanded us in such a way that we can turn and teach it to others. A good place to start is what Jesus says is the greatest commandment: Love God with everything you are and love your neighbor as yourself. Live that. Teach that.

Evangelism and Education. I guess this would be a good time to ask if anyone wants to join the Mission committee or one of our Christian Education committees!

## **Conclusion**

Jesus invites you to make disciples. You. Surprise! It's okay if you have the same blank stare and doubt that I had when it sunk in that this was a surprise party and we weren't going to Benihana's. If the task of making disciples seems surprising or daunting to you, first rest in the fact that all authority belongs to Jesus and that Jesus is with you always. That is Good News. Now go share that Good News with your life, and make disciples.