**Today is the last in our series about the Great Commission “Go & make disciples of all nations.” Matt. 28: 19 now we come to ‘What does the Great Commission teach us’ personally & as a church family or Christian fellowship?**

1. INTRO As they say in long TV series from a complicated novel by Dickens ‘here is the story so far..’ –in other words a recap. Firstly, in Mk. 1: 15 we saw the Lord Jesus’ basic message & acts as He began His preaching & teaching in Capernaum-“The kingdom of God is near-repent & believe the good news.” This was followed by calling individuals like Peter & Andrew.

Secondly, Paul Mileham explained the pattern of His work in the early days. The disciples learned how He preached & taught, they copied him & occasionally were sent out in twos to do the same. Clearly, not all the disciples were front of house like the Seventy Two-there were many who were back stage, where their work was vital. It was a team effort, as Paul showed when resolving a dispute about his preaching & that of Apollos. They were “only servants, through whom you came to believe-as the Lord has assigned to each his task.” 1 Cor. 3: 5, while in v. 9 Paul says “we are God’s fellow workers.” All were needed in this joint task, as Paul in Phil. 4:14-19, our first reading, thanked the church there for contributing to his ministry’s running costs. It was a team effort of which more anon, gentle reader!

Thirdly, Hans said that after the Crucifixion the disciples were at a total loss, because their Master was no longer with them physically, but He was raised from the dead, was alive & by the Holy Spirit could give them power, wisdom & understanding for their task! The Resurrection was vital.

Fourthly, Ron dealt with the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles. At first, the apostles spoke to Jews, but God planned it for everyone. Peter grasped this after his vision in Joppa, while Paul knew this, as a Pharisee coming to real faith. He taught that both Jew & Gentile must believe in Jesus-there was no need for any distinctive Jewish extras like circumcision. “You (Jew & Gentile) are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.” Gal. 3: 26. Later, he wrote “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.” Gal. 5: 6. As a footnote, the Mediterranean world, during Rome’s heyday, had the best communications for centuries, so that news, people & ideas could travel so easily, which helped the spread of the Gospel enormously.

To sum up-we’ve seen Jesus’ basic message-believers are God’s co-workers & part of His team-Jesus is alive to help achieve the Great Commission by his Spirit-the Gospel or Good News is available for all.

1. Today we look at Matt. 5:13-16 to see the perspective on our own role to make disciples. In verses 14-16 believers are described as “the light of the world”-we cannot be hidden, much as we might like to occasionally! As light, we should be prominent to illuminate those around us. Verse 16 outlines our role. “Let your light-shine before men-that they may see your good deeds & praise your Father in heaven.” These three commands need investigation.

Firstly, where does “your light” come from?
Jn. 1: 9 explains the light comes from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself- “The true light, that gives light to every man was coming into the world.” It’s His character, His Goodness, his Love etc that should be shining out of all believers.

Secondly, what does this light do? It’s like that of a light house where, originally, the light was created from many candles or oil lamps with a mirror behind to project it out across the waves. This light would warn of dangers below-of jagged rocks &, also, point the way out to safely Similarly, the torch you take up into a complicated attic will show you the beams, which your head might hit, the gaps where your foot might go through the ceiling as well as the way back to safety.
How might this apply? On the personal level-Jesus’ light might show us our flaws or weaknesses, which may trip us up or, in society, show the inequalities, selfishness, cruelty, exploitation or inability, now, to disagree agreeably. As for the way out-for both society & us it can show the right way to behave, to act & to speak in ways that are kind, thoughtful, sensitive & practically helpful.

Thirdly, exactly how can we let God’s “light shine before men”? It must be that our good deeds are shown in the way we act or speak. It may be a visit to someone who is lonely & isolated-to talk to them or do their shopping-or there’s the listening ear for someone in distress-or a shoulder to weep on-or offering to pray for or with them &, of course, there is the terrible situation in the Ukraine to pray for. These can be quite challenging! What about in society? We should be ready to protest about the evils in it, which brings in the reference to salt-Matt. 5: 13. If light is a positive force to show up what is good or bad, salt, especially, in the Ancient World was a preservative against the bad-rot or decay in food. It was often, deceitfully, mixed with alum or ground up chalk to stretch it, so that after it got wet the salt leached away, leaving the useless additives. Thus it would fail to preserve against corruption. How, therefore, can believers prevent decay in our society? We can call out what is evil, pray against it & work against it-perhaps, via some Christian organisation like Tear Fund or Open Doors. Burke is alleged to have said “It is necessary only for good men to do nothing for evil to triumph.” How right he has been proved to be over the years.

Fourthly, what is the result of men seeing our “good deeds”? Because God is the source of our light, they should praise our Father in heaven & not us for altruism or goodness. That would only feed our ego, give us bogus brownie points or inflate our conceit! I think of Toad in his new motor-driving furiously, hooting the horn & swelling with pride-not an example to follow! If people, in fact, praise God, that suggests they realise He is the source of the compassion, kindness or helpfulness, they see before them. It might soften the ground somewhat, as it were, so that they might think, if this is the result of Christian belief, I should look into it further. Authenticity like this is what seems to count nowadays! I remember when, I was on Salisbury Plain during my National Service, there was a group of Christian National Servicemen who seemed to have’ something’ I had not got. It was their behaviour as individuals & as a group that struck me & when I became a Christian, I discovered it was Someone not ‘something’ that they had & that I had lacked!

1. How, then, can what we’ve looked at help us to follow the Great Commission to make disciples at Stowe?

Firstly, & I say this as much to myself as anyone else, we can pray that God’s light will be in us & shine out of us, as Jesus dwells in us by faith. We all have difficult moments-feeling grumpy-there’s the saying ‘bad day in the office, so come home & kick the dog.’ We should pray for forgiveness, so that the foul mood can be put right & God’s light shine out!

Secondly, we can ask God to show us the task He is assigning to us now. We are all varied in character & gifts. If He gives us a task, He will provide the wherewithal to accomplish it. The task may be of deed or word. If the former it could include supporting a Christian mission as we do at Lent. If the latter it could be across a spectrum from saying how the Lord has helped us today to explaining exactly what it means to repent & believe the gospel. Peter reminds us in 1 Pet. 3: 15 “But in your hearts set Christ apart as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness & respect.” To do this, we need to follow the instruction at the start of the verse!

Thirdly, we can pray that God will help us to be alert to the opportunities to help others by letting our light shine before them & then to have the courage & wisdom to take that opportunity. If we love our Saviour we will want others to know Him.

Might we follow these three suggestions this Lent?