

Making Disciples as You Go

Psalm 8; Matthew 28:16-20

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With Rick and Ellen Burnette

Weatherly Heights Baptist Church

In the church of my adolescence, Lottie Moon was one of the saints. Right up there with St. Francis and St. Augustin was saint Lottie Moon.

Beason Divinity School in Birmingham has one of the loveliest chapels I've seen. It's like you've stepped into a high church chapel in Europe. High above the nave, the sanctuary, is an ornate dome. It is painted with a mural named The Great Cloud of Witnesses. St. Augustin is there, looking down upon the worshippers. He is considered to be the greatest father of the Church. St. Thomas Aquinas is there too. He is regarded as the greatest theologian of the early church. John Bunyan is with them. A simple man, he was arrested and imprisoned for preaching the gospel without a license. He wrote the classic *Pilgrim's Progress*. Of course, Martin Luther is present, whose 95 theses led to the Protestant Reformation. And William Carey, seen now as the father of modern missions. And then, included in the great cloud of witnesses, there's Charlotte Moon, known by her friends as Lottie. She gave herself to foreign missions in 1873, began the arduous task of learning the Chinese language, and served the people of China for the rest of her life. She suffered the starvation and depravation that were so common at that time. She raised money for missions. She inspired women to become involved in missions. As a result of her labors, the Women's Missionary Union (WMU) was founded in 1888. In the mural of Lottie Moon at Beason, she holds a loaf of bread, representing her tireless work to feed the hungry in China.

Lottie Moon and many of the others in that mural at Beason Divinity School were influenced by our New Testament text from Matthew: "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."

I learned something interesting about this verse that adds a deeper dimension to it. In the Greek language, the word "go" is a participle. It could be translated this way, "Going therefore into the world," but that doesn't read very

well. So this could be a better translation, “As you go into the world make disciples.” In other words, if you’re not able to go to China or Thailand or south Florida, make disciples *as you go* wherever you are going. These words from Jesus challenge us to be on mission as we go about our everyday activities.

Rick and Ellen Burnette, our missionaries, get both dimensions of this important teaching. They left home to go to Thailand where they served as agricultural missionaries for fifteen years. They returned to the states in 2013, and in 2017, they founded Cultivate Abundance, a ministry that works with migrant farmworkers in Immokalee, Florida. NPR recently reported that the farmworkers in Immokalee have the highest transmission rate of the COVID-19 virus of any community in the United States of America. Doctors without Borders has dispatched a team to treat the sick and stop the spread. That is where the Burnettes are working.

Rick and Ellen, welcome back to Weatherly. I have to say that I am amazed at your commitment to your work. Tell us what it’s like there and how you are doing.

Rick, I’ve heard you point out the irony of the farmworkers’ lives. They harvest the produce we eat, yet they themselves are food insecure. Tell us more about your work with the farmworkers and what their lives are like.

Most of us who grew up in Baptist churches heard many sermons on the Great Commission. Did Jesus’ charge to “go and make disciples” contribute to your decision to become missionaries?

Many of us keep up with the work you are doing and are proud to call you “our” missionaries. How can Weatherly support your work?

Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

Rick and Ellen, thank you for joining us today. We pray for you. We are proud of our association with you. Please be safe. And give our fondest regards to your sons. When you are in Huntsville again, I would love for you to speak at Weatherly.

You and I may never work with migrant farmworkers in Immokalee, Florida. We may never teach sustainable farming practices in Thailand. But, we can be missionaries as we go about our everyday lives. Weatherly, as you go make disciples.

A Prayer of Confession is printed on your worship guide. Join me as we confess our sins together.

Prayer of Confession

Faithful God, we rejoice that You have sent Your promised Christ. And yet, we confess that we are still not ready for Christ's coming. We are reluctant to live as if the whole earth were Your domain. We know the story—His life, miracles, death, and resurrection—but don't fully understand what it means. Awaken us to Your Spirit, let Christ's life make a difference in our lives, and grant us Your peace. Hear our silent prayers....

Assurance of Pardon

Hear the good news. God has forgiven each one of us and calls us to take our parts in the drama of redeeming love. Praise be to God!

Service of Holy Communion