

Go, Do: Discipleship!  
Sermon by Leah Fowler  
November 6, 2016  
Psalm 145: 1-5, 17-21  
Matthew 28:16-20

Recently when I was driving with my family in the car, we were listening to the radio and I started tapping out a beat on the steering wheel. “You know, your clapping is confusing,” my spouse tells me. “My clapping?” I ask her. “In church. When we sing more upbeat hymns in church, and you start clapping, you clap on a different beat than many of the people in the congregation. I think it confuses everyone.” Now, it is not often that my spouse plays a backseat driver to my worship leadership. So when she does speak up, I usually pay attention. I realized perhaps she had a point. We don’t always clap together. But it also did not bother me. However, at that point I had to realize that if it bothered Chris, maybe it felt awkward to others too. “But you are *supposed* to clap on the off beat,” I protested, “if it is a song that inspires clapping. It adds pop to the rhythm. You clap on beats 2 and 4.” (demonstrate “This Little Light of Mine” while clapping on beats 2 and 4)

“Yeah, people don’t clap like that. They tend to clap on the first beat.” Chris informed me. “*I* like to clap on the first beat.” She lays out what side *she* is on, and it’s clearly not mine.

“You mean like this?” I ask her, and then sing “This Little Light of Mine” while clapping on beats 1 and 3. “Yes, that’s it. That’s how you should clap,” she confirms.

“Well, that’s fine if you are marching,” I tell her, “but I have always learned it is better to clap on the off beat if you are going to bother clapping.”

“Who taught you that? You were raised by white people of European ancestry. You should clap like your race,” my Filipina American spouse advised me.

Of course I had to research this when I got home. I found what I suspected: that clapping styles are indeed cultural, and that some people prefer not to clap at all. I also felt a little vindicated when I saw a video of a Harry Connick, Jr. concert, in which his entire audience is clapping on the first and third beats while he looks annoyed. What does Harry Connick Jr. do about this? 40 seconds into the song, he adds a fifth beat to the measure and tricks the audience so that in the next measure, they are clapping on the second and fourth beats. Ha!

But I cannot feel too victorious in this discovery, because the truth remains that our church claps with different rhythms and some may not choose to clap at all. What then, if we cannot clap together, should we even be *singing* together?

And, if agreeing on clapping is so difficult, how can we possibly know the *right* way to reach others to go and make disciples of all nations, as Jesus commanded in the Great Commission? What can we find to say, in this pluralistic culture? On the one hand, some of us are so afraid to step on one another’s toes that we don’t share anything of who we are. On the other hand, we may be so certain that our way, our perspective, is right, that we dismiss anyone who doesn’t think like us. Raise your hands: who of you have de-friended someone on facebook or have been de-friended because of this political season?

As we move toward the United States elections on November 8, we feel these divisions deeply. I cannot remember a time when this country felt so fractured. It is disappointing. It is hurtful. And it doesn’t have to be this way. I tell you, Jesus lived in a time that was no less divisive than our time is now. Jews were looking for an apocalyptic messiah who would

overthrow the Roman empire and re-establish the Davidic monarchy. Some Jewish leaders claimed to be that guy. Others chose instead to support Rome and enjoy the privileges that granted them. There was conflict between Jews and Gentiles.

But in the midst of that, Jesus did two things: he reached out across boundaries of religion, gender, politics, wealth, and race, and he told stories that spoke to the heart.

Kosuke Koyama, a Japanese theologian who had spent time as a missionary in northern Thailand, had earned his PhD from Princeton and was well acquainted with the theology of Karl Barth and Thomas Aquinas. However, when he spent time sharing the gospel in Northern Thailand, the water buffalo he passed on the way to the country church where he preached became his primary texts. “The animals remind me to discard abstract ideas, and to use objects that are immediately tangible. ‘Sticky-rice,’ ‘banana,’ ‘pepper,’ ‘dog,’ ‘cat,’ ‘bicycle,’ ‘rainy season,’ ‘leaking house,’ ‘fishing,’ ‘cock-fighting,’ ‘lottery,’ ‘stomachache’-- these are meaningful words for them. ‘This morning,’ I say to myself, ‘I will try to bring the gospel of Christ through the medium of cock-fighting!’”<sup>1</sup>

You don’t have to come up with any kind of fancy theological formulation to tell of God’s love. Stick to the basics, and speak from the heart. We start with the basics that Jesus taught. As he said, “teach them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”

The Psalm of the day also tells of passing the story of God’s greatness from one generation to another: “One generation shall laud your works to another and shall declare your mighty acts.” When we teach and nurture children through Sunday School, and in worship, we are handing down the story of God’s presence in our lives and glory in the world. As I examined Psalm 145, I saw that in the Hebrew script the Psalm is written as an

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<sup>1</sup> Kosuke Koyama, *Water Buffalo Theology* New York: Orbis Books, 1999 p. xv

acrostic. The first letter of each verse forms the Hebrew Alphabet in order. Aleph, beit, gimel.. If it were to show the same literary technique in English, it would be something like this:

**A is for Always** I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name.  
**B is for Bless God**, each day, and praise God's name forever and ever.  
**C is for Cry out** that the Lord is great, and greatly to be praised; God's greatness is unsearchable.

My own child knows her ABC's, and is now learning how to use them. She tries to write letters to her friends and asks us how to spell the words she wants to say. She tastes words anew in her mouth as she tries to find the letters that form them.

In the same way, new disciples learn the stories of our faith and try to find how they integrate into our lives and inform the ways we will Go and Do as Jesus calls. They learn from those of us who teach them and tell them stories about our own faith about God's love. They learn of the joy that life in Christ can bring. They learn of God's passion for justice and Jesus' compassion for outsiders, and find that works on them too. They learn that when they mess up-- and they will-- God will forgive them and not turn God's back on them.

Do you have a story like this you can tell? These are stories worth telling, and no one can tell these stories quite like you. If you don't think you have a story to tell, think again. Maybe it is in the very air you breathe. Maybe it is that in sitting in this room, this sanctuary, you are not alone. Maybe it is that you have managed to live another day sober. Maybe it is that the great loss you experienced years ago is not nearly so painful today, and you can even find the blessings of joy from time to time. What are your stories, and where in those stories is there an entry point for God? As you look at your neighbor-- whether their face is familiar, or their face is that of

a stranger-- what entry points in their stories can you find that God will bless with a connection?

We may clap with different rhythms when we sing, and some may not clap at all. And I am really okay with that. But we all have reason to sing praise to God, and we all have reason to go and do as Jesus commanded, and share the good news of our faith. Go, and make disciples. Amen.