***“Making Disciples”***

**Matthew 28:16-20**

**Trinity Sunday/June 4, 2023**

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It was 1976. An Irish kid named Paul Hewson was trying to figure a lot of things out; his mom had died a couple years earlier, when he was just fourteen. [Bono](https://www.npr.org/artists/15289501/bono), as he was known, spent a lot of time at home, in Dublin, arguing with his dad and his older brother. But two goals kept him focused — *to win over the heart of a girl named Alison Stewart and to become a rock star.*

And in the same week, he asked Alison out — (she said yes) — and he ended up in Larry Mullen JR's kitchen for an audition. Two other guys were there — Adam Clayton and David Evans, also known as The Edge. The four of them would go on to become one of the biggest bands of their time: *U2.* And he is still married to Alison Stewart 40 years later.

Bono writes about these foundational relationships in his new memoir, called [Surrender: 40 Songs, One Story](https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/566576/surrender-by-bono/), released last November. In it, he also delves into another core relationship: *his spirituality.* Though never a Mass-on-Sunday’s kind of Catholic, from a young age he was fascinated with *mysticism and ritual – and Jesus.[[1]](#footnote-1)*

He wanders through the territory of the Psalms, the birth and life of Jesus, the words of the Apostle Paul, and various other biblical scenes and stories, and places them alongside his own journey in and around Christian faith, and especially his ongoing attachment to the person of Jesus. He wrestles with that blending of the sacred and secular, working faith into action and lifestyle. As he says*, “We need less to be told how to live our lives and more to see people living inspirational lives. I’m also deeply conscious that I can’t live up to the badge I’ve pinned to my lapel. I’m a follower of Christ who can’t keep up. I can’t keep up with the ideas that have me on the pilgrimage in the first place”* (137).

You see, a gift of a great artist or communicator is to *stir* the souls and imaginations of others. *Surrender* puts that gift on display, in the same way his music has for generations of those in his audience. His musings reveal redemptive and refreshing views on *marriage,* in his ongoing commitment to and honoring love of his wife Ali; on *friendship,* which he calls a sacrament, in the bond that has held the 4 members of U2 together during 40-plus years; on *faith,* which he finds indispensable and the anchor through his journey, with the metaphors and stories of Scripture as lifelines. His meditation on the *incarnation of Jesus* offers one such picture, an example of his ascendant view on life and faith,

*“The*[*poetry*](https://englewoodreview.org/category/poetry/)*and politics of the Christmas story hit me as if I were hearing it for the first time: the idea that some force of love and logic inside this mysterious universe might choose self-disclosure in the jeopardy of one impoverished child, born on the edge of nowhere, to teach us how we might live in service to one another is overwhelming.  Its eloquence is overwhelming. Unfathomable power expressed in powerlessness. I nearly laugh out loud.  Genius. Inexpressible presence choosing to be present not in palace but in poverty” (512).*

The book ends *with a flourish,* the final chapters containing vulnerable takes on his journey of *marriage, family, band, and faith* – and how he sees himself as still unfinished, still working out the songs that are to be sung by his band, and his life. As he says (in reference to his song ‘I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For’), *“This, our most gospel-like song, is about the quest, not the arrival. And that’s how I find faith…the story of every pilgrim is the running toward and the running away from enlightenment. From the Holy Spirit. From Jehovah”* (508).[[2]](#footnote-2)

I share this with you because our text from Matthew 28 this morning, rightly understood, is also *about the pilgrim’s quest, not the arrival.*(Pretty much the exact opposite of how the *“Great Commission*” is understood in contemporary American culture today, as an institutional charge calling the church’s members to *“convert the heathen!”*).

When Matthew wrote, however, the Christian movement was still part of Judaism. There *was* no institutional church seeking to grow. So these words must have meant something quite different to its first readers.[[3]](#footnote-3)

*Let’s take a closer look …*

You see, Matthew’s Christ is a barrier-breaking Christ, inviting all people into the meaning of God’s life and God’s love. The meaning of God is ultimately seen, says Matthew, in the love of the God-filled one (Jesus). And so, when Matthew reaches his concluding episode, this, his essential message, receives its final moving image in the final paragraph of his gospel.

Recall that the disciples have climbed the mountain in Galilee. Jesus has come out of the sky transformed in order to give what in Matthew is his final word to his followers.

*Go to all nations,* the risen Christ says. Go to those whom you have defined as beyond the boundaries of the love of God. Go to those you have decided are rejectable. Go to those you have judges as inadequate. Go to the uncircumcised, the unclean, the unsaved, the unbaptized and the different. Go beyond the level of your own security needs. Go to those who threaten you. Embrace them as part of the human family. Make them fellow disciples of Jesus with yourselves. Accept them as fellow pilgrims walking into the mystery of God. Proclaim to them the good news of God’s infinite love, a love that embraces us all. In the power of this experience, allow your fears to melt away; and with those fears gone, bid farewell also to your insecurities, your prejudices, your boundaries. The human community has room for all. Learn to practice that truth. There are no outcasts from the love of God. *That* is what the Great Commission means.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Its instructions continue:

Baptize these others in the name of the *“Father.”* That word must not be thought of as the name of some external deity, but rather as the name of the *Source of Life* that inhabits the universe, calling us to live fully.

Baptize, too, in the name of the *“Son.”* That word must not be seen as the name of the founder of an exclusive religious system, but the name of the *Source of Love,* which embraces us all and then frees us to love wastefully, to love beyond every barrier.

Baptize them in the name of the *“Holy Spirit.”* Those two words are not another name for God but are rather the name of the *Ground of Being,* in whom we all are related and in which we find not only the courage to be all that we can be, but also, perhaps even more important, the courage to allow others to be all that they can be in the infinite variety of our humanity.

The human community contains people of all races, genders, sexual orientations, ages, political persuasions, and economic statuses. The call of God to us to be all that we can be is also the call to rejoice in the very being of all others. *That* is what forms the universal community of which the church is but a symbol; indeed, to build the universal community is the ultimate goal of the Christian church[[5]](#footnote-5) (see Revelation, Chapter 21!).

The final promise of Matthew’s gospel from the lips of Matthew’s glorified Christ is simply a translation of the word *“Emmanuel.”* Recall that Matthew began his story with the angel telling Joseph that this child about to be born would be called, *“Emmanuel,”* which, he said, means *“God with us.”* Matthew now ends his story with Jesus, once and for all, making the Emmanuel claim for himself” *“Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age”* (Matt. 28:20).

You see, extending the presence of the holy in every life is finally what being the messiah means. *That* is what the Christ symbolis all about. *That* is what the life of Jesus means.

Friends, Matthew has painted a portrait of Jesus, who is so at one with God that he is beyond every sectarian boundary that religious people have ever tried to impose on him; he is also beyond finitude and mortality.

He is the revealer of that eternity for which all finite and mortal people yearn. *That* is why the Christian story is (at root) a universal story. *That* was Matthew’s goal.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The Christian invitation to the world has always been: *“Come unto me, all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”* (Matt. 11:28). It was never meant to have a limit, to only be for *“some of ye”*![[7]](#footnote-7)

My hope is that Christianity itself, in all its forms, will also walk courageously into that God, who in the words of Paul will be all in all.

*Peace!*

1. # Bono discusses his new memoir, *'Surrender,'* and the faith at U2's core, *NPR,* October 27, 2022

   [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. # Bono – Surrender – 40 Songs, 1 Story [Feature Review], *The Englewood Review,* March 2, 202

   [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. John Shelby Spong, *Unbelievable: Why Neither Ancient Creeds Nor the Reformation Can Produce a Living Faith Today,* Harper Collins, New York, 2018, pp. 274, 275 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. John Shelby Spong, *Biblical Literalism: A Gentile Heresy,* Harper Collins, New York, 2016, pp. 365, 366 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid., pp. 366, 367 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid., p. 367 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. John Shelby Spong, *Unbelievable: Why Neither Ancient Creeds Nor the Reformation Can Produce a Living Faith Today,* Harper Collins, New York, 2018, p. 276 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)