

**MORE THAN PUMPKINS:
WE MAKE DISCIPLES
MATTHEW 28:19
OCTOBER 7, 2012**

Has anyone ever asked what church you go to?

What do you tell them?

Northwest Hills United Methodist Church.

And they say, "Where is that?"

You could give them the street address: 7575 Tezel Road.

You could tell them we're in between the carwash and the Culebra Meat Market.

You could say we're near the corner of Tezel and Mainland,
but not the church with the tower.

And with those answers most people will be a little puzzled.

But there is one answer that you can give that nearly everyone in this part of town will understand.

We're the Pumpkin Patch Church.

"Oh, I know where that is.

I LOVE the pumpkin patch.

We go there every year."

That's how many people know us.

Not as Northwest Hills, but as the Pumpkin Patch Church.

Over the years that pumpkin patch has been the sight of some people's family photos for over 20 years.

I know of at least one bride and groom who took photos out there.

In the Patch there have been painful personal stories told and prayers prayed.

Some people had their first introduction to NWH out in the Patch,
decided to come back,
and have made NWH home.

The Patch is also a fund raiser,

a place where many people get their first taste of volunteer service,
a place where we can meet our neighbors,
and a kid magnet.

Every year we have about 1000 children come through the Patch in groups.

They come from daycares, Mother's Day Outs,
public schools, and private schools.

Some kids have come on buses from out of town.

Some come and make a field trip out of it.

We have folks who read pumpkin story books, sing songs,
and generally have a good time with the children.

And every child goes home with a little pumpkin.

In October it seems NWH is all about the Pumpkin Patch.

But we're about more than pumpkins.

We make disciples.

Jesus gave us one job that we can only do here and now,
in this life and this world,

something we will not be able to do in heaven and the kingdom of God.

Make disciples.

We cannot do that then,

because everyone there will already be in a flourishing relationship with Jesus.

So this is our only chance to do it.

Our one and only opportunity to make disciples is here and now.

When the risen Jesus was preparing to ascend to heaven and leave his followers,
he gave them some final words,

his design for what the church is supposed to do.

We know it as the Great Commission.

Jesus did not lay this out as one among many good things the church could do or might do.

It was not the Great Suggestion.

It is the Great Commission, a *command*.

MATTHEW 28:16-20

These are marching orders given to all who would follow Jesus,
OUR marching orders.

Go make disciples.

Let's be really clear as to what that means.

Jesus did not say go make decisions for Christ.

He did not say go make pew sitters.

He did not say go make church members.

He said go make disciples.

He broke that down into two basic parts.

1. Baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
2. Teach them to obey everything Jesus commanded.

The first part, baptize them, has to do with that word scarier than Halloween itself: "evangelism."

Most people see evangelism one of two ways.

Either it's Billy Graham proclaiming the gospel,

and I could never measure up to his integrity or his articulateness.

Or it's a wild-eyed, manipulative televangelist,

and I don't want anywhere near that.

So either way, I'm off the hook.

Let me short-circuit both of those stereotypes.

Evangelism is simply doing what you can to point people toward Jesus and his church.

That's it.

Nothing more, nothing less, and nothing else.

Evangelism is simply doing what you can, by word and deed,

to point people toward Jesus and his church.

You don't have to be a Bible scholar

or be able to prove the existence of God through reason and science.

You don't have to call someone a sinner

and tell them they're bound for hell unless they repent and believe.

It can be a simple invitation for your neighbor to worship with you.

It could be a listening ear and the offer of prayer out in the Patch.

And you help make evangelism happen when you put money in the offering plate.

With your offerings,

then we mail out information about NWH to new residents,
and we send out mailings to first time guests to NWH.

We place a listing in the Yellow Pages

and keep up our web page.

More and more guests check out on the web page

before they ever walk in the door.

Your financial support of ministry is a significant part of

pointing people toward Jesus and toward his church.
 And that means it is part of people spending eternity in heaven
 instead of the rather unpleasant alternative.
 An eternity bathed in the boundless love of God,
 as opposed to a Christless eternity.
 Your giving makes a difference.

VIDEO: EVANGELISM, DARLA NELSON

VIDEO: EVANGELISM, DESIREE TEELE

VIDEO: EVANGELISM, ELISA GARCIA

But let's not forget the second part of Jesus command to "make disciples."

Teaching them to obey everything Jesus commanded.

If all we do is get people to give their life to Christ,
 but don't do anything to help them grow in Christ,
 they're basically stillborn.

The second part of making disciples is really important.

Teach them to obey everything Jesus commanded.

And there are two big pieces to this.

First, there's the informational component.

We've got to learn what Jesus commanded.

We have a library full of books that can help you learn, as well as books just for fun.

VIDEO: LIBRARY, BARBARA BELCHER

We have Sunday Discipleship Café and Wednesday night Bible classes for beginners,
 for those who already know the basic storyline,
 for those who are ready to do homework and dig deep,
 and to encourage you to get off the bench and into the game, serving.

VIDEO: DISCIPLESHIP CAFÉ, DOTTIE BOEZINGER

VIDEO: DISCIPLESHIP, SOAR, RON GLOYD

VIDEO: DISCIPLESHIP, WED NIGHT, DEBBIE HERMANN

If anyone wants to know about God,
 the information is there and the teachers are there.

And your financial support helps make that happen.

Your giving funds the upkeep and utilities of the buildings we meet in.

Your offering buys curriculum and materials.

When you give, you are helping get into people's minds
 the most vital information there is.

But beyond information, there's transformation.

The truth is, it is possible to have your head full of Bible knowledge
 and still live like hell.

Jesus didn't say, "Teach them to *know* everything I commanded."

He said, "Teach them to *obey*."

Teach them to *live* it.

Hopefully any class you're in is going to challenge you to
 make application of what you're learning.

But beyond that, we need the support, encouragement, and accountability
 from others who are also seeking to follow Jesus.

For real openness and vulnerability with other believers,
 a smaller group where you develop deep trust
 and talk about your walk with Christ,
 what are you doing to feed your spirit,

where have you been faithful to Christ,
 where have you stumbled,
 how are you treating your family, your coworkers?
 A group where you talk and listen, pray for each other,
 encourage and correct each other.

Emmaus Reunion Groups are designed for just that purpose.
 But you don't have to go on the Walk to Emmaus
 to be part of such a group.

Though the Walk is a great experience.

I think God has something for almost every believer
 on the Walk.

But you could also start an accountability group of your own.

It can make all the difference.

It's also an encouragement to know you can share your hopes and worries,
 and people will actually pray about those things.

Our prayer ministry includes a prayer group on Sunday evenings,
 prayer support for our leaders and ministries,
 and an email prayer chain.

These folks are ready to pray for you, at your request.

VIDEO: PRAYER, SCOTT BELLAIR

You could join one of those prayer teams.

And you'll find your heart growing in compassion for those in need.

You will grow spiritually.

And again realize, when you give a financial gift to the church,
 you helped that ministry happen.

In Matthew's Gospel Jesus' last command was, "Go make disciples."

As you consider what your financial pledge will be to support our ministries in 2013,
 keep in mind what is at stake.

It is easy to forget.

It's like the lighthouse that was built on a rocky outcrop,
 so it could guide ships and help them not run aground.

But the lighthouse operators became concerned
 they would not be able to afford the electric bill for
 both the lights inside the lighthouse
 and the great light that shone out over the water.

So they decided to turn off the great light,
 so they could live comfortably inside without any worries.

Until a ship did crash on the rocks, and a few lives were lost.

Then they realized the great light really did matter,
 that lives really were at stake.

So they turned the great outside light back on,
 ships were guided to safety,
 people recognized the importance of what they did,
 and they made sure there was enough money to pay the bills.

What's at stake in what the church does?

People coming to know Christ,
 people finding a church home,
 people growing in Christ,
 people becoming all God desires for them.

At stake is people discovering abundant life in this life and, after that, eternal life.

Let's commit to answering God's call and fulfilling the Great Commission.

And let's celebrate the good work already being done here at NWH.