

For Such a Time as This

A Daily Devotional

Tuesday, April 2, 2024



From Matthew 28:

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him, but they doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

The closing words of the Gospel of Matthew is often associated with the ‘Great Commission’ or Christ’s call to his followers to spread the word and share the good news of God’s action in Christ. These words have been employed by numerous denominations and churches to inspire greater emphasis upon their membership for evangelism. They are often used as themes for church growth and revitalization conferences as well.

I spent most of yesterday, with the office closed and nothing better to do with my time, reading an academic paper about church decline and possible strategies to increase congregational numbers. It was an interesting and exasperating read. Interesting because some of the data shared certainly checks out with the experience of mainline churches and big-box evangelical churches alike over the last twenty years: everybody is losing membership numbers. Exasperating in some of the conclusions and suggestions for methodology in regaining our recent ecclesiastical losses.

I will not cite the name of the Ph.D. candidate who wrote the thesis nor his degree-awarding institution (to protect the innocent ... or maybe the guilty), but the following was offered seriously as a possible way forward for church growth:

[A midwestern] pastor talked about his use of a cleverly trained horse, and how this horse was taught to recognize certain cues from its human handler. People would ask the horse question, and it would give answers by ‘stamping out’ Bible verses using its feet. All such entertainment efforts are intended to provide an initial momentary engagement, and, more critically, inspire members to return to the church.

In an effort to increase worship attendance, I will soon be obtaining a horse ... his name is Abner. (I hope you realize that we are one day past April Fool’s Day)

Prayer for the Day: (From *The Valley of Vision*)

My God, I bless thee that thou hast given me the eye of faith, to see thee as Father, to know thee as a covenant God, to experience thy love planted in me. Amen.

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