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Dan Hollis

Who here remembers watching the classic 1961 animated film *One Hundred and One Dalmations*? Show of hands. Obviously I was *definitely* alive in 1961, because I *remember One Hundred and One Dalmations* very clearly.

It's a love story about two dogs, and also a love story about the dogs' two *owners*, and it's also about the family that the four of them build together and that grows with every puppy they find until the house is filled with, as the title would suggest, one hundred and one Dalmations.

There's a great scene in the movie—well, there's a lot of great scenes—but the one I'm thinking of is all about the Twilight Bark.

At this point in the story, the family only has *seventeen* Dalmatians. "Only." Pongo and Perdita and their fifteen puppies. But those fifteen puppies have been stolen, and the human authorities have been no help tracking them down. So the desperate parents put their faith in the Twilight Bark—a sort of Dog Gossip Line. The two of them bark their story out to *anyone* who will listen, and soon enough, a Great Dane and a Terrier learn the news and begin to pass it on. You watch as the message travels across the city and out into the countryside, and soon enough the stolen puppies are located and the quest begins to put their family back together. *Everyone* gets involved: city dogs, country dogs, cats, horses, and even cows... all galvanized by the Twilight Bark.

A more recent version of this idea was found in the *sequel* to *One Hundred and One Dalmations*, called *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*. Okay, fine, it wasn't a *sequel* to *One Hundred and One Dalmations*, but it definitely kept the Twilight Bark alive.

In *The Return of the King*, the kingdom of Gondor is preparing to do battle against the forces of evil, but it doesn't look like they can do it alone. So someone lights the great bonfire perched high above the city, signaling the keepers of *another* bonfire on a nearby mountain. *They* light *their* fire, and one by one down the mountain range the Beacons of Gondor are lit, sending the message to their allies in *another* kingdom, calling for them to join their quest.

This message sparks a chain of events that in the end leads to the people of the two kingdoms coming together as one united Family of Man, strengthening each other and bringing light to the world.

The Twilight Bark and the Beacons of Gondor were each established to get a message out faster than any one person could, and to foster community and cooperation. And I think that's really the same kind of thing that *Jesus* was establishing in the final days of His ministry.

In the three years that Jesus was active, preaching and teaching, healing and serving, he did a lot of walking, traveling from place to place. But in the grand scheme of things, he didn't really go all that far. For the most part, the range of his ministry was only a few hundred square miles, not even the whole length of the modern nation of Israel.

But everywhere He traveled, he showed his disciples, the men and women who followed Him, what it looked like to share the Good News, to live a life under God, and to welcome others into God's family.

We've talked about it every Sunday for the last several months, and you'll find it in page after page of the Gospels—Jesus showed His followers what it *looks* like to obey God's calling, and to make disciples of all people. And I like the way modern theologian Rob Bell describes what it *is* to be a disciple: a disciple isn't just a *student*—it's someone who wants to *be* like their teacher, who wants to *do* what the *teacher* does.

On Good Friday we remembered Christ's death. On Easter we celebrated His resurrection. And after He rose from the dead and revealed Himself to His disciples, He ascended to Heaven, returning to Divine Oneness with the Creator. He went off to bigger and better things, but before He did, He charged His disciples to do the same. To go on to bigger and better things. To 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 He has commanded them.

Now the disciples were already having a rough month. They were planning to follow Jesus, their teacher, their king, to the end. To the establishment of God's kingdom on Earth. When all of a sudden their dream

got cut short, and Jesus... tossed them the keys to the car. "You know that thing you thought you were going to help me do? It's actually on you, kids."

The disciples didn't have *any* kind of blueprint for this. To them it had felt like Jesus' journey was only just beginning. There was so much work for Him to do to bring God's kingdom to the whole world. But just as it looked like He was finishing up His work on the homefront with His people in Israel, he turned the whole thing over to His disciples and... expected *them* to figure it out.

The disciples felt a bit like the workers on the Titanic at that point. As the story goes, while the Titanic was under construction, the design team had a five-hour planning meeting. Four hours and fifty minutes of that meeting were spent discussing the interior decorations... while they only spent *ten* minutes on the lifeboats.

It felt to them like Jesus had spent four hours and fifty minutes talking about and dealing with the people of Israel, Samaria, and a *little* bit of Syria... and then about *ten minutes* on the rest of the world. And then He sent them on their way with a pat on the back and an impossible task.

But what did Jesus say, really, to those Disciples? And what is He saying to you and me, here in York?

The Gospel of Matthew presents His charge as three simple sentences, but like everything Jesus said, there's a *lot* to unpack there.

First, Jesus reminds the Disciples that He has the power. They've *seen* it, they've *felt* it, and they've been the recipients of it. And now they have to *share* it.

He charges them to go into the world to baptize and teach. What the *act* of baptism *is* is a welcoming of someone into the Christian family. It's a sign and seal of their participation in the family of God, and an outward symbol of an inward reality: that the one being baptized is recognized as a child of God. Baptizing the nations is like *One Hundred and One Dalmations*. You start out with *two* dalmations, and then you have *seventeen*, and before you know it you have one hundred and one dancing around the living room.

Jesus called the Disciples to make a *family* out of humanity, to welcome them, to take them in, and to teach them all of the messages of God that Jesus revealed to them in His every action, His every word. In all the miles Jesus walked, he welcomed in strangers, sinners, the contagious, the hopeless, the alien, the poor. He lifted them up, fed them, healed them, showed them how to live a better, holier way, and asked them not only to follow Him, but to carry God's light into the world through their very own lives.

And there was a third sentence Jesus had for His disciples. That day we read about in Matthew, before He left them for good.

"Remember," he said, "I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Jesus just gave the Disciples a *huge* mission. A mission they had no reason to think they could complete without Him. And it's the same mission that He gives to us *all*. To go out into the world, to *show* the Way of Jesus to *all* people, to welcome them *all* as children of God, to teach all that we have learned from the work and words of Jesus Christ, and to *do* what our Teacher *does*.

And even as He prepared to leave them, Jesus promised His disciples, which includes every person in this room today, that He would be with us *always*, to the end of the age. That we *aren't* alone in this. That we aren't just throwing a pebble into the ocean. That when we bark, Christ barks with us. That the fire of the Holy Spirit springs from every beacon we light, from mountaintop to mountaintop all the way down the range.

Now making disciples of all nations *can* mean becoming missionaries and traveling to far away lands to do God's work and spread God's love. Some people are called to that, and we have several of them in our congregation. But that isn't *all* making disciples of all nations means, because not everyone can make a journey like that. In *One Hundred and One Dalmations*, Pongo and Perdita were confined by their own fences and leashes, and couldn't search the entire world for the dogs they sought.

But from where they *were* they could reach *two*: a Great Dane and a Terrier, and that's all it took. Because that Great Dane and that Terrier reached another Terrier, who reached a Collie, who reached a pet shop full of puppies, which caught the attention of a Poodle passing by in a limousine, who got the word out all the way down Main Street, until the whole city was *roaring* with the sound, and it could be heard all the way out into the countryside beyond.

*That's* what it can look like for people like *us* to make disciples of all nations. To *be* disciples—to live our lives striving to *be* like Jesus, and to *do* what *Jesus* did, here in York, and *wherever* we find ourselves and wherever our lives take us. To be a beacon for Jesus, and through our very *lives* light the next beacon, and the next, and the next one after that, just as Jesus' first disciples did, so that one day—in the words of the Gospel of John—they may all be one.

In our reading today, the Risen Jesus charges each and every one of us in our own ways and our own lives to make disciples of all nations: to welcome others into the family of God and to teach them how to walk the way of Jesus.

How? Jesus showed you how. You don't even have to *say* anything if the words won't come to you. You just need to be a disciple—to live with Jesus shining out of you... because when you live like that, people start to say "I'll have what they're having."

Is it gonna be hard? Sure it is. Nothing worth doing ever started out easy. But Jesus will be with you, every step of the way, whether you can see Him or not, I *promise* you that. And He has the *same* message for you that He had for the Disciples two thousand years ago: "I think you can do what I do."

I'll say it again: "I think you can do what I do."

So let's do it.

Amen.