



Windex in The Salvation Army?

“My Big Fat Greek Wedding” is a movie that has many funny moments. Some that we share with others. Like the capacity for Mr Portikalos to trace back any word to the Greek language. He was able to confirm the Japanese word “kimono” as having its origins in the Greek language. (Of course those of you familiar with Greek, like Mr Portikolas, will know that, “Kimono is come from the Greek word himona, is mean winter. So what do you wear in the wintertime to stay warm? A robe.”)

Another familiar trait of Mr Portikalos is the use of the cleaning product Windex. He believes that it is the panacea – the “cure all” agent that can be used on human or objects, preventative or responsive to injury, irrespective of disease or disorder. What a solution!

If only we could use this spray on the people in our congregations – someone falling asleep during our homily, children misbehaving during the appeal, dear old Mrs Alma singing off key again, even when the song has finished! A quick spray of Windex and these issues are fixed.

There are many within and external to The Salvation Army with whom I share about mission, growth and health. It is not uncommon for me hear panacea phrases during these discussions. I am extremely cautious of whatever comes following a statement like, “All The Salvation Army needs to do is....” or “if we only just” or “the only thing we need to do is to focus on”.

You can insert your own phrase. Perhaps it is, “wear our uniform on Sundays” or “all corps have brass bands” or “all corps have no brass bands”. Extreme, polarizing comments are unhelpful and are often damaging the very mission to which we have been called.

Jesus articulated important things during his earthly ministry. He shared about neighbourly relations, divorce, money, property and everything in between. Loads of material from which we could draw, “all we need to do” statements.

However, Jesus, before he ascended into heaven, gave some final directives. It’s been said that last words are lasting words. What did Jesus say to those gathered around him, and by implication, us today? Surely it would have to be something like, “Make more soldiers?” Perhaps “Plant more churches?” Maybe “Grow more leaders?” Undoubtedly “Make more Christians?”

Matthew 28:18-20 captures the words of Jesus as final instructions to his people, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go 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 I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

So he says “go and make disciples.” Perhaps a better translation from the original text is, “make disciples as you go.” The verb “make” is in the imperative. That is to say, it has the same sort of force and commanding nature as I might use to stop my son from running in front of a car as he follows a ball onto the road.

Not merely a casual, "would you mind please stopping before you get struck by an automobile?" It is a command, "Stop, now, for your life depends on it!"

Jesus says to us, you and me, with a lot of velocity and commanding authority (seeing all authority has been given to him – both in heaven and on earth – we better listen), "make disciples." What is a disciple? What is discipleship? What is it to make disciples. I believe it is to make learners. Make ones who are teachable. Make ones who want to learn the things of God. Disciple them after me.

Where are to we to make disciples? As we go. As we live our life, as we journey in the everyday, we are to make disciples. As we "do life" with fellow Salvationists. We are to make disciples. That means two things:

1. We are to be disciples ourselves. As key influencers, from whom are we willing to learn? What relationships do we develop so that we can become metaphorically more like Jesus? How do we position our life – how do we use our time – to learn from someone who is spiritually more mature and able to speak into our lives?
2. We need to be in relationships with others over whom we have spiritual authority because we are more like Jesus than they. We have something very powerful – life transformational – that we need to pass onto other generations. How are you doing this? What relationships are you developing for this very purpose? The very purpose of discipling Christ followers.

Note that Jesus didn't say to, "Make Christians." He didn't say get them across the line. In fact, what he is really saying is not get them over the finish line, but get them over the starting line, to run the race of life with perseverance, with eyes fixed on Jesus. Jesus' call is clear. We haven't been good, as a movement, generally speaking, to disciple people after Jesus. Sometimes I think we believe if we go to the corporate worship service, check out the Bible regularly and say grace before each meal, we'll become more like Jesus. I want to suggest greater intentionality is required.

He says to go to all nations. The Greek word for nations is perhaps better described as, "people groups." Often we place a higher priority on people going somewhere else (Training College, Project 1:8 Missions, Missionary service overseas) to interact with other people groups. We celebrate (often in quite an outrageous way) this "high profile" missionary work.

We're actually all called to be urban, sub-urban or rural missionaries, depending upon where we live. And those whom God has entrusted into our care for spiritual growth and development – they too also need to be missionaries to the people groups in which God has placed them.

Strategically God has given us a network of relationships, a sphere of influence with people outside the Kingdom of God. These are the people groups whom members of the "ekklesia" (the gathered) need to be making disciples.

(Interestingly, those not in the "ekklesia" were known as the "idios," the origin of the word "idiot.")

Being metaphorical salt and light. Always being prepared to give the reason for the hope that we have as we season our conversations. Wow! What a privilege, opportunity and responsibility.

What did Jesus say next? Given our tradition, you might be wondering how I'm going to address such a commanding statement from Jesus. "Baptising them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." Not "kosher" from a Salvation Army perspective.

I don't believe Jesus was establishing some sort of incantation that we need to recite as people are submerged beneath the depths (or shallows, depending upon what you prefer) of water. Surely the God who came to earth declaring in many ways a "substance over form" faith expression wasn't wanting to establish some sort of rite or membership phraseology!

I believe we are better served by providing a less than traditional translation, but one which seems to have consonance with the essence of God expressed through the Word.

The doctrine of the Trinity is woven throughout Scripture and is captured in Article 3 within The Salvation Army formularised doctrine. It describes the God head, three in one. Difficult conceptually for humans to grasp, yet patent (and potent) in the Bible.

Is it possible that Jesus was wanting us to not only make disciples as we go, but *submerge them in the Trinitarian reality*. That is, allow believers to become so familiar with expression and interaction of the Trinity with individual Christians, local churches and movements, that it forms an integral part of the discipleship process?

Whilst we may choose to baptise Christ followers and use the common phrase, "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit", the essence of this baptism must move beyond mere spiritual hydrotherapy. I believe it is calling us as influencers in our corps, social centres, headquarters and any other place in the world where people outside the Kingdom of God exist to become overwhelmed by the existence, work and authority of our Trinitarian God. Being submerged in the Trinitarian reality isn't mere lip service. It is a Jesus directed position in which we need to find ourselves.

What next does Jesus entreat us to do? "Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." The Greek word translated as obey, "terein" can also mean: Keep, Reserve, Preserve, Watch, Hold Fast and Observe. It is this final term that is most readily associated with Matthew 28:20. More fully, it conveys ideas including - to keep an eye upon, to watch; hence, to keep, to guard; to watch, observe attentively.

Here Jesus is not merely wanting disciples to note his commands. Nor are Christ followers called to be intellectually aware of the commands of Jesus. He is calling apprentices of Jesus (disciples, Christ followers) to observe – to guard and to watch.

Guarding items is a tough responsibility. I recall being asked to guard a parking spot for my friend when I was at University. There were many potential car parkers, but I remained faithful to the cause of guarding the spot for my friend, who was only moments away. (That's what he told me. He ended up being fifteen minutes longer than what he originally communicated.)

I had potential parkers ask me about spot, but I said it wasn't available. I had other potential parkers hurl abuse at my direction about guarding something that I didn't

have authority to guard. (I was parking in the car park predominantly used by future lawyers, so I had many quality arguments about the constitutional legality of guarding a car park for a student not yet on campus.)

We are to teach disciples to guard everything Jesus commanded. No small feat, yet something for which we are adequately prepared. For the one who has all authority guarantees his powerful presence when we are teaching disciples to guard all that Jesus commanded.

Final question – what did Jesus command us to do? Matthew 22, Mark 12 and Luke 10 capture the same message – to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love our neighbour as ourselves. How are you teaching those over whom have influence to love God and others with all their capacities?

To what extent are you equipping the people involved in your ministry context to use the easiest and most effective form of evangelism established – to love one another? “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, that you love one another” (John 13:33,34).

So, if we are making, submerging and teaching, does that mean we have fulfilled all that Jesus called us to do? Does that mean we have established what is required to see a revolution within The Salvation Army, locally, territorially and internationally? I referred to something else earlier. Before we can start discipling, we ourselves need to be disciples.

We ourselves need to become better disciples. We ourselves need to be submerged in the Trinitarian reality. We ourselves need to be taught to guard all the love principles that Jesus commanded.

Perhaps, like Mr Portikalos, we have a veritable spiritual Windex. If we are making and being made, submerging and being submerged, teaching and being taught, all that is not of God that is within the bride of Christ will fall away as, with increasing measure, we integrate God’s timeless life principles in our daily lives.

How are you doing? What Windex needs to be sprayed into your life? Out of the six potential areas of fulfilling Jesus last words, in what area you excelling? In what are you on the ropes of defeat? What steps do you have in place to grow in these areas. Remember, it won’t happen over night, but it will happen!