



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

7643 Huron River Drive

Dexter, MI 48130

734-426-8480

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**Discipleship 2007: "Living Small"**  
**He must increase, but I must decrease**  
**September 23, 2007**  
**Dr. Matthew J. Hook**  
*John 3:23-30*

This month, as a part of our 175<sup>th</sup>, we've been looking at Discipleship in 2007. Our church's mission statement is Jesus' last words: "*Go and make disciples.*" The world needs disciples, because the world needs Jesus, more than ever. As we say here, every single person is one decision away from moral, financial, and marital ruin. 2007 is yet another year on the brink. Thus our church's mission statement is "*Go and make disciples.*" Not stay and hope they find you, but go. And we do believe that people are doing the best they can. So what can we say to them to help them in their decisions? What can we say to them to help them? What can we say to: Young people drowning in debt? Older people facing health crises? People without jobs? People who are drowning in unsustainable schedules? Teenagers looking for meaning and a purpose to hang on to? And for those of us who have been walking with Jesus for awhile, what can we say to rekindle the fire? What's next for us? What DOES discipleship in 2007 look like, and why do I have such a hard time "going and making disciples?" Why doesn't it seem to work? What could God say to us this morning that each of us could fit into our situation? Can God work in my life? Can God guide me in what I'm facing? Yes. We're here to explore how He can. But it's pretty radical. It's way different from what we're used to. And the words come from a pretty way-out source...

A man who lived 2000 years ago, in the wilderness named John, nicknamed John the Baptist. He was wild. He ate locusts and honey. He had a great ministry of his own. He had many disciples. He was making quite a splash. ☺ And the government was getting nervous. They kept sending people to find out more about him. "20 John the Baptist did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Christ." 21 They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." 22 Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" 23 John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'" 24 Now some Pharisees who had been sent 25 questioned him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" 26 "I baptize with water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. 27 He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie." 28 This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing. 29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" John 1:20—29.

So John recognized Jesus. He prepared people by saying "Get your acts together and live the way God called us to!" Back to that radical minimum discipleship idea. You know, that instead of looking at the 10 Commandments as something unattainable and beyond us somehow, we must realize they are the bare minimum for civilized society. Anything below "Don't kill each other; don't lie; don't steal, don't worship other gods," is barbaric. So John was calling people to quit making excuses. God's grace is supposed to take us *beyond* the minimum, not give us an excuse for living below them!

So now that John baptized Him, Jesus is on the scene and ready to begin his ministry, which he does. But a short time later, Jesus and John are both baptizing near the same place, and some of John's disciples were worrying because more and more people were going over to Jesus, including many of John's disciples. I

think they said something like “He’s starting 2<sup>nd</sup> Baptist Church!” John 3:27 “*To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven. 28 You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.' 29 The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. (John was playing the part of best man). 30 He must become greater; I must become less."*

And there’s our answer: “*He must become greater; I must become less.*” Other translations say “He must increase, but I must decrease.” Or “This is the assigned moment for him to move into the center, while I slip off to the sidelines.” He must increase, but I must decrease.

John didn’t want the credit. He didn’t go for all the attention. For him to live out his mission in life, and for us to live out ours, Jesus must increase, but we must decrease. Remember “We are the World?” when all the biggest names in pop music stayed up all night after the 1985 Grammys and recorded that song? Many people wondered how Quincy Jones, who produced it, was able to get all those people who were used to having the stage all to themselves, would get them to sing half a line or even simply be part of the chorus. He showed reporters the sign on the door where all the singers entered. And as all the invitees came in they read this: “Check your egos at the door.” There’s no limit to what you can accomplish when it doesn’t matter who gets the credit! EGO=Edging God Out.

And whatever you’re facing today, God is ready to help you. And the best way for you to get help is to ask: How can Jesus increase in this? And how can I decrease? For God to increase, I must decrease, because there’s plenty of me that can interfere if I don’t decrease.

So how do we do this? First, like John the Baptizer, we must remember our focus → PROP: the telescope: The fact is, I think about myself more than I think about anyone else. (This is not news to my wife Leigh). When I aim the telescope at myself, I look through this big end here, and can barely see any of the rest of you. You’re so far away! But that’s what happens when we focus on ourselves. That’s the sin of pride. And it pushes everyone we care about away from us, including God. We end up isolated, even from ourselves. We can’t see the details of anyone else’s life because they appear so far away. But that only makes sense. If God, the Creator God, the Author of Salvation, the Giver of Life, is truly the center of the universe, then of course life doesn’t work as well when we put ourselves or anyone else there. “He must increase, but we must decrease.” John the Baptist reminds us that Christ must take center stage. When we turn it around, the way it’s supposed to be used, look what happens: We DO see clearer. We DO see people closer. Some of us are so afraid that if we put God in the center stage position, and we move off to the sidelines, that that act will somehow take away friendships and cut us off from people, when in fact, the opposite is true. The natural consequence of making Christ greater and us becoming less is that God’s Spirit enters your life, and the natural consequences of that happening are called the fruit of the Spirit, like the fruit on a tree is the natural consequence of a healthy tree. And the Apostle Paul tells us: the first fruit of the Spirit is love. Christ at the center allows you to draw closer to others, just like this telescope. We DO narrow the gap, for no other reason than our focus is where God originally intended it to be: on Christ.

We increase Jesus by decreasing ourselves. Like John, we lose people to Jesus. Every situation, every potential argument, every business deal, He must increase, we must decrease. And here’s something interesting: Notice that John didn’t stop his mission and ministry, even after he baptized Jesus. He continued being the forerunner, preparing people to encounter Jesus, and baptizing people until his arrest, imprisonment, and death. When we start putting the focus on God, and thinking through Christ increasing and us decreasing, we stay faithful to where he’s called us, with the mission he’s given us: whether that be changing diapers, or helping a friend through the loss of a loved one.

John’s whole mission was tied in to Jesus. If you are having difficulty tying your life-mission into Jesus, I invite you to think about it: is it to help Jesus increase through your ability to do your job? Your ability to make money and build the Kingdom through financial support? Is your mission to build relationships at work or school? Is it to live out what a Christ-follower looks like? Reacts like? Speaks like? Talks about?

John said “Behold! And shifted the people’s attention to Jesus. Not many leaders say “Hey! Look over

there!” Behold, he became flesh!

**WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO HELP JESUS INCREASE?** It’s the best thing we can do in our lives!!! The other good thing about being small? You know you can’t do it alone.

God is looking for little leaders. God wants us, for our own sakes, to be small before a Big God. Jesus must increase. Humility is seeing God as he is. Pride is seeing ourselves as we’re not. Remember, you know the Great I AM. (We could all have nametags that say “I am not!” In every decision, be small before a big God; that he may increase, and we may decrease.

Imagine a whole church whose telescopes were all pointing at Christ, seeking to let Him increase, all the while finding ways for us to decrease. Bringing Him center stage in every one of our decisions, relationships, our families, our schools, and our communities? “That Jesus Christ increase, and we decrease.” May it be so! Amen.