

Written Copy: Matthew 28:18-20 The Authoritative Narrative

Holy Trinity Sunday

Sunday, June 7th, 2020

Text: Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Exegetical Statement

As the Disciples-the eyewitnesses to Jesus Resurrection are heading to Galilee, called by their risen Savior to meet Him there, the soldiers who had been assigned to guard His tomb are headed to Jerusalem to report to the Chief Priests who had given them their marching orders. They report what they had witnessed, the appearance of the glorified angel, the earthquake as he rolled away the stone, and their passing out due to their extreme fear over what they saw. When they regained consciousness, the tomb is empty. This report is very disturbing to the Chief Priests who ordered them to guard the tomb so that this very thing, the disappearance of His body would not happen. After consulting with the Sanhedrin, they come up with a plan of action and a report that they command the soldiers to tell. They fell asleep, and while asleep the Disciples stole Jesus' body in order to claim that He rose again as He said He would. To encourage them to implicate themselves in dereliction of duty by falling asleep, and to get them to accept and spread their report, the Chief Priests pay them a considerable amount of money. They also promise to make things right with Pilate if he hears about them falling asleep and the resulting theft of the body. They comply and the story of the Disciples stealing the body was continuing to be told as Matthew was writing this Gospel. Meanwhile the eyewitnesses of the truth that Jesus has in fact risen from the dead meet the risen Savior on the mountain where He told them to meet Him. Upon seeing Him the worship Him as their risen Savior and Lord. But some have uncertainty and doubts in their heart despite the faith that moved them to worship. So Jesus draws near to them and tells them that He has been granted all authority in heaven and upon the earth. And by that authority He commands them to be about the business of making disciples, wherever they may find themselves headed after Pentecost, among all ethnicities and nations. They are to do this by teaching the same things Jesus had taught them including their eyewitness account that is the Gospel. They are to baptize them into the name of the Triune God. And they are to continue to disciple them and they grow in the faith given by the Spirit through the Gospel. Jesus promises His presence with them and with all who come after them as the Church continues to make disciples. He will be with His Church until the mission of the Church has been completed.

Focus Statement:

Jesus proved He is the One True God in human flesh through His teaching, miracles, and especially His suffering, death, and resurrection. The Savior who gave His life for us and sent His Spirit to baptize and confirm us in faith toward Him is the one ruling over all things in heaven and on earth. And He has authorized us to be His witness through the Gospel

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

We can be influenced and discouraged by the world whose matrix or paradigm of what life is all about and where to find answers to life's problems does not include Jesus who has been given all authority and rules over all things

What the hearer should do as a result:

Authorized by the highest power and the ruler of the universe we come alongside those struggling to solve life's problems on their own and in their despair show them the truth of the Gospel which has a better answer than any other paradigm or belief in culture

Subject Sentence: The Gospel: God's authoritative narrative

Introduction: Two Competing Metanarratives

If you have kids, you know the problem of conflicting narratives. All you have to do is walk into a room and find something broken. Then call each child one by one and ask them what happened. Chances are you will end up with as many conflicting narratives as you have children. Conflicting narratives abound among adults too. Metanarratives. Narratives that concern how we look at the world. How we look at authority, and in whom we place that authority

Two Competing Narratives in the Gospel Lesson

Our Gospel reading contains two competing narratives dealing with the resurrection. The actual assigned Gospel Reading for Holy Trinity Sunday begins at verse 16 with the Eleven Disciples headed to meet Jesus in Galilee. This section of Scripture is very familiar to you. But have you ever considered it in light of the section that comes before it in our reading today? When we consider it in context its easy to see these two competing narratives that are ordered to be spread among the people. First, we have what the soldiers were told to spread. The problem with that narrative is that it's not the truth. It's not the whole truth even as the soldiers know it.

Those soldiers were sent to guard Jesus tomb by the Chief Priests. These Chief Priests had heard Jesus say repeatedly that He would rise from the dead. The problem wasn't that they believed Him, they did not. Who on earth could ever rise from the dead? But the problem was His disciples. They may be unwilling to let their dream of a new kingdom in Jesus' name go. They might scheme to steal the body from the tomb and claim Jesus did the impossible. But by posting soldiers at His tomb, and sealing it with a heavy stone, that would fix any attempted schemes those disciples might concoct to make it seem like Jesus kept His word

The problem comes when the supernatural figure of an angel appears early Easter morning. As Matthew describes it in **Matthew 28:2-4** ² **And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.** ³ **His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.** ⁴ **And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men."** This vision momentarily fried the brains of these soldiers. It was more than they could take. They are thinking, "These kinds of things just don't happen! They can't happen!" And just as we may have, had we been there, they passed out. When they awoke the angel was gone, and the body of Jesus was also gone. They really didn't know what happened to His body. All they did know was that they had failed miserably in their command to guard the tomb. They sulked back to the city to report to the Chief Priests their failure, and to face the music. In their defense was the supernatural appearance of that angelic being. Anyone else seeing that would've passed out just as they did.

When the Chief Priests heard their report they were very concerned. They immediately consulted with the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling body that had sought Jesus' death just as they had. They need advice as to how they should proceed. The very thing they had sent these soldiers to safeguard against had happened. With His body gone and the tomb empty this heretical religious movement now had new life. Something must be done to counter any story that this Jesus had indeed risen from the dead.

The problem was this supernatural figure that the soldiers had claimed to see, the one that had caused them to pass out. Did that really happen? Not very likely. The Sadducees who made up a majority of the Sanhedrin did not believe in such supernatural hocus pocus. What really must've happened is that these soldiers nodded off. They dreamed that an angel appeared, or they added that bit out of their imagination to prevent themselves from getting in serious trouble. The punishment for dereliction of duty could result in their being stoned to death. So the Chief Priests and the Sanhedrin came up with this story, which perhaps they really believed to be the truth. The soldiers fell asleep. And while they slept Jesus' disciples came and stole the body right out from under their noses. Now, how they could've rolled the stone away and done all this without any of the soldiers waking up was a question they didn't want to address.

This story did make the soldiers guilty of dereliction of duty. But to get them on board with this narrative the Chief Priests were willing to compensate them handsomely. And to ease their fears of reprisals for falling asleep on duty they promised to smooth over any problems that might arise if Pilate heard about this. How much authority the Chief Priests and the Sanhedrin had to protect them from Pilate is a matter of conjecture. But the money was a good enough incentive, especially seeing they were in hot water no matter which story they told. Might as well tell the one that pays and may end up with them off the hook. So the narrative taught to them by the Chief Priests is the one that was spread abroad by them throughout Judaism.

While the soldiers were spreading this account, the eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection had left for Galilee. They were not in town to counter this false narrative as it began to spread. But God already had big plans to counter this false narrative 50 days later when Pentecost arrived.

Jesus Gives the Authoritative Narrative

When they arrived at the mountain Jesus had told them to go to and saw Him, they worshiped Him. They worshiped Him as their risen and Savior and Lord. But some of them doubted. It's not that they no longer believed in Jesus as their risen Savior, but they were struggling in their faith concerning who He really is. They were conflicted: Is He really the same LORD God who we are commanded in the Scriptures to "Worship God alone?" Should we be worshipping Him as God?

So Jesus approached them and came alongside them, much as He had in His previous appearances when they thought they were seeing a ghost, when He showed them His hands and side and ate with them. He explained to them the new reality, the new narrative going forward. **(Matthew 28:18) And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."** All authority everywhere. Even though there was an account already being spread in Jerusalem authorized by the Sanhedrin, the ruling council in Jerusalem, here stood the One whose authority far superseded them. This is The Word of God who spoke all things into existence at the very beginning. The One who told the people time and again that in Jerusalem He would suffer and be put to death, but three days later would rise again. No other man had the authority and power to make that claim as well as make it come true.

By the authority of God on earth these disciples were empowered to spread the true narrative of what had happened. The one that Peter would proclaim on Pentecost in **Acts 2:22-24** ²² **"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know---²³ this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. ²⁴ God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.** Yes you put Him to death, but death could not hold Him. By the power of God He rose again from death. This is because it was all part of the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. Jesus came to be our sacrifice for sin. The answer for all the rebellious acts we commit. For all the false narratives of the world we buy into. To suffer and die so that we might be forgiven and have life with God now and eternal life with Him to come. The truth is that we cannot save ourselves, and we don't have to try. Jesus already has done that for you and for me. And He gives that salvation to you, and to me, and to all men free of charge. And spreading that wonderful Gospel message is the work given to His Church

Authorized to do the Work of the Church

Matthew 28:19-20a ¹⁹ **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, ^{20a} teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."** By the highest authority the disciples were ordered to be in the disciple making business. And we who have followed in their footsteps, confessing the faith they confessed, as those Jesus has called into His Church, we are to do likewise. And how does Jesus say this should be done? By discipling: coming alongside of those who do not know or believe in Jesus and then introducing them to Him. In small children this is initiated by Baptism. But in adults it starts with developing a relationship with them. Earning their trust and the right to speak into their personal life and address their beliefs. Then after the teaching what Jesus taught His disciples, adults are sealed in Baptism.

People outside the Church have bought into a narrative that doesn't include the resurrected Jesus Christ. It doesn't include Him as having all authority in heaven and on earth. He may be a part of their narrative, as a spiritual figure, or as one who has authority in a portion of their lives. But when problems like COVID-19, or the racism that is still inherent in our society, as well as when rioting and looting occur they don't look to Him for help. They don't see Jesus as the authority who has the answer. The answer for them is found in man's supposed ability to change himself. That change can be forced upon people through protest and violence. That the answer involves doing away with police, even though they are God's gift to us to keep order in our society. None of these changes address the real problem which is found in the heart of men and women.

Jesus has called these eleven to disciple all ethnic groups. These eleven men who weren't white German heritage Americans. They were Jewish men. And yet the Lord Jesus worked in their heart to change their thinking on who deserves to be in the Church. It was something only Jesus could do. Through His Word He showed them where they were wrong in their vision of the Church. He moved them to repent and to turn and follow Him. To understand that He truly did go to the cross, die, and rise again for the sins of the whole world, for sinners of all nations and ethnicities. He impressed this upon Paul who on behalf of the risen Savior tells the Church in **Galatians 3:26-28** ²⁶ **for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.** ²⁷ **For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.** ²⁸ **There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.** When we love as Jesus' loved we understand that All Lives Matter. We are to consider all people, no matter what their ethnicity or gender to be One with us in Christ.

Christ calls each of us to share His Gospel with all people no matter what race they are or where they live. We too need to examine our hearts for the reluctance to hear and follow His authoritative command. We need to examine the distrust and racism that is buried in our hearts. We need to repent of that. When we do, His Spirit cries out to you and to me that the same Gospel, we are called to proclaim is the answer for our sins. Jesus died to forgive you and me for the evil that hides within our heart. He loves you. He forgives you. He promises to work to change you and me as we are disciplined by His Spirit, who is always at work through His Word to create real change that lasts.

Conclusion

The world has a metanarrative that puts limits on the authority of Jesus, if it recognizes Him at all. It forgets or disbelieves the Gospel fact that He has risen from the dead. It doesn't recognize that He is the LORD God of all races and nations. We too forget His call to be the Church to all races and nations, to see all people the way He sees them. As the Church we turn to our hearts back to Him in repentance. We pray to the One with all authority to heal and change our nation and bring about peace. We work as His witnesses to be the Church, sharing His love with all those around us. Amen