

Written Copy Matthew 28:18-20 "The Great Commission-My Responsibility?"

Holy Trinity Sunday

Sunday, June 4th, 2023

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

The 11 disciples are called by Jesus to meet Him on a mountain in Galilee where He had directed them to go. They see Him, and fall to their knees, worshiping Him not just as the Messiah, but the Lord God in human flesh. While all had faith, some were wavering/doubting. We are not told what was causing this, but could be doubts about the resurrection, and/or doubts about what they were being called to do. Jesus as He had done in the past assures them proclaiming that He has all authority over all things in creation. And from that position tells them that wherever they may go be baptizing in the name of the Triune God, and making disciples by teaching what He has told them, and through the Spirit confirming these things as the truth for each other and for all they disciple. Jesus calls the Church to reach out to all people of all nations and ethnicities. And we do so knowing that He is always with us, as long as we live in this world, and continuing beyond through eternal life to come.

Focus Statement:

Jesus assures us that He has all authority. We proclaim and teach the Gospel and baptize by His authority and His presence. We are tools of the Holy Spirit who works conversion through the Gospel witness. He directs us in our lives through our vocation. Through His authority He provides divine appointments in which we are tools of the Spirit to share our faith in Jesus death and resurrection, and the gifts of grace He gives to us in Worship.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

We have doubts about what Christ is calling us to do as part of the Great Commission, doubts, not loss of faith. We doubt His presence, or our ability to do what is, on our own, the impossible task of Conversion.

What the hearer should do as a result:

As the Church corporately, and individually, wherever our vocation may take us, reach out to the lost with the Gospel. Develop relationships by patient listening. Speak the hope we have in Jesus. Invite them to join us in fellowship and worship. Help them and each other grow in knowledge and faith in the Lord.

Subject Sentence: The Great Commission: the power/authority of Christ

Introduction

How much do you enjoy being told what to do? Even further, how much do you enjoy being told to do something that you're pretty sure is beyond your capabilities: beyond your knowledge, skills, and gifts?

In my former life, I used to work as a line cook at a restaurant called the Double Eagle, located at Sylvan Glen Golf Course in Troy. I hired in out of High School as a dishwasher. But I guess I impressed the chef with the work ethic I'd been taught by my father, so that he eventually promoted me to the broiler station. Now, I'd not really done much of any cooking, beyond making eggs for breakfast or cooking hamburgers and hot dogs. But now they were asking me to cook steaks, filet mignons, and broil fish. At the time I jumped at the chance because it was a lot more money than what I was making as a dishwasher or pantry prep. Those jobs didn't need a lot of skill. But this one did.

When I started, I remembered thinking, "They're not going to keep me here for long. I'm going to mess up too many orders." These steaks were expensive. And this restaurant, being on a golf course in Troy, which was a ritzy neighborhood, had an expensive menu. But it turned out the assistant chef was a good and patient teacher. He taught me how and where to put the steaks on the grill and how to move them to different spots as they cooked. He told me how to tell when a steak was rare, medium rare, medium, medium well, or well done. It turned out that I was the kind of cook that, if showed me how to do it enough times, I could follow in your footsteps. Unlike my wife, I never really had the gifts needed to be a chef: to create new dishes and things on my own. I just followed what I was taught by someone else. And to this day I sometimes wonder how good of a job I really did, especially when it got really busy. All I know is that it was very seldom a waiter brought back something I prepared that the customer didn't like. And those few times they did, it was usually undercooked, just a matter of putting it back on the grill for a little longer. Overall, somehow, some way, in ways I'm not really sure of even to this day, I muddled through long enough to make a living for a while.

Perhaps some of you like trying new things, learning new skills. But most of us we like a learning curve of sorts. No one likes to be thrown to the wolves: made to perform a job that we've not been taught or trained to do. With that in mind, welcome to Jesus' command in our Gospel Lesson today which we call "The Great Commission". A command we've been given not to earn anything, but one we do because we've already been given the greatest gifts from Jesus Himself.

What Is Jesus Commanding Be Done, and By Whom?

First of all, we should be clear on what His marching orders are and who He is giving them to. In our text He is giving them to the disciples, who by following what He tells them to do will assume the vocation of Apostles: those commissioned to be ambassadors of the Gospel. But is He only talking to them? No. This Great Commission that He gives them extends through them to the Church, which they founded as they fulfilled the vocation that He gave them as Apostles. But they are not to be the only ones sent out with His Gospel message. When Jesus was sending people out into the cities and villages of Galilee, He sent not just the 12, but He also sent out 72 followers to preach the Good News that He was bringing the reign and rule of God to people's hearts and minds. We, as the Church, have been given an even better message to proclaim, the complete Gospel Message of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection; His gracious gift to you that welcomed you into His kingdom: His reign and rule in our hearts and minds by faith. Through the Gospel He calls you into a relationship with Him now and forever. And as with all God's gracious gifts, He gives them not just for our own blessing but to share it with others.

Secondly, we should consider what exactly it is He is telling us to do. Our English translation of the text can be somewhat confusing.. **Matthew 28:19 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.** As you can tell, there is a command there; two of them actually. But the command is not the word "Go". What Jesus is actually saying is, "**Wherever you may be going, do these things.**" And where is it they would be going? Wherever their vocations as Apostles would carry them, wherever it was that Jesus would send them.

To them was given the special vocation to be Apostles: His special ambassadors to other peoples and nations. They were eyewitnesses of His resurrection and were empowered by the Holy Spirit to be His authoritative voice. You and I have not been given that vocation. But you and I have been given other vocations nonetheless. And what are your vocations? They are whatever roles you find yourself serving in as part of your life here on this earth. Are you a parent? That is one of your vocations. Are you a spouse? That is one of your vocations. Are you a son or daughter? That is one of your vocations. Being a member of this Church family, being a neighbor, being a friend, through your place of employment, even your place as a member of the community you live in, in all these things you have the roles and responsibilities to fulfill. And in all of these roles you are called to be Jesus' witness. In fulfilling the duties and responsibilities of each vocation you "go"; you make contact and develop relationships with others around you. And it is in all these vocations Jesus is telling you to be involved in two things: making disciples and baptizing. And these are not separate activities but are closely interconnected.

Now when it comes to baptism, you may wish to argue, “That’s the Pastor’s job”. And it is, except I don’t do it alone. As a parent your responsibility is to bring your children to be baptized. And then after they are baptized your responsibility doesn’t end. You are to follow it up by making sure they learn what our Lord has taught us in Scripture. This means bringing them to Church so that they can hear the Children’s Message, be a part of Childrens Church where they can further hear God’s Word on a level that is aimed at them, learn what worship is about by watching you do it, learn how important worship is as they see your commitment to coming and participating, to be in the presence of the Holy Spirit speaking through the words of Scripture. And then when they get old enough enrolling them in Confirmation Classes. It’s called “Confirmation” because the purpose is to confirm them in their baptismal faith by teaching them the basic doctrines and beliefs we hold fast to as presented in the Small Catechism. And all this teaching should be reinforced in your home, as you pray at meals, have devotional time with them, even family Bible Study is a great thing to practice.

How about those adults you encounter outside of your family who you find out, through conversation, have not been baptized? As you have opportunity, share with them what we believe about baptism. Tell them what it means to you personally. Tell them how you believe by the promise made in Scripture that when the water was splashed upon your head three times in the name of the Triune God, the Holy Spirit was present in that water according to His promise. And by the testimony of Scripture, you believe that He came to make His home in your heart and mind. That He came to grant you the free gift of faith by which you know and trust that Jesus perfect life, suffering and death, and resurrection was done for you. That His suffering and death was Him taking your sin and suffering in your place. That His death means He removed your sin from your record before God forever. And His resurrection is the promise that the Father accepted Him as your perfect sacrifice. And even more so, His resurrection is the guarantee and promise that you will rise again to eternal life on the Last Day.

That’s not just a message to share with the unbaptized. That’s the Gospel Message we are called to share with everyone. We are to share it with those who don’t yet believe in Jesus, because the Holy Spirit promises to be present and able to create faith in their hearts and minds. It’s also the message we are to share with each other. We are called to worship together and study God’s word together, in worship, and in Bible Study groups. That is what Jesus is telling us in His other word of command “**Make Disciples**”. This is not a once and done activity. It involves growing in faith and knowledge of God’s work throughout our time on earth until He calls us home. Through these means of grace: Word and Sacrament, the Holy Spirit works to keep all of us in faith to life everlasting. And He also prepares us to do this work Jesus calls us to do as the Church, and as individual believers: sharing the Gospel.

How Do We Go About Doing It?

You may be saying, “Okay, I’m called to share the Gospel. But how do I go about doing it? You may feel kind of like I did when I was put in front of the broiler and told to start cooking steaks and fish. Thankfully I had a good teacher by my side. You have someone even better. In your Baptism Jesus has given you the perfect gift, the perfect Mentor, Teacher, Counselor: The Holy Spirit. Whenever you share the Gospel Message He is there to help you, advise you, give you the words to say. And when its the words of the Gospel, He is present with the power to change hearts and lives: create faith and sustain faith.

Jesus tells us in **Matthew 28:18** **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.** As the One with all authority, He has the power and ability to make divine appointments in your life. What are these? People who cross your path not by accident, but according to His will being worked out in their lives and yours. It’s the person that you get to know as you are fulfilling your vocations. They may be a family member, a friend, and neighbor, a coworker, anyone you meet where you have the opportunity to strike up a conversation.

And in this conversation, it is best to do a lot of listening. Ask questions as to who they are and what is going on in their lives. Listen for what is troubling them, what issues they are dealing with. Be sympathetic with what they are going through. Be slow at first to share what you may be going through, and when you do, never do so with the attitude of “You think you have it bad, let me tell you about what I’ve been through.” That tends to cheapen what they are experiencing. At the same time, be in prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you and help you in your conversations with them. Ask Him to show you the door He is opening for you to share with them on a deeper, spiritual level.

And what is that open door? Maybe it’s when they ask you how you deal with the problems and troubles that you’ve been through. However, it comes up, when you share how you handle life, share with them how you handle it through faith in Jesus Christ. Share with them the promise He makes to all who believe in Him from **Matthew 28:20** **behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”** Share how He came to you in your baptism, how He comes to you now in the Gospel Message, giving you faith to know and believe He is Your Lord and Savior. Share that He does all this because He desires a close personal faith relationship with you, the kind that started in your baptism, and continues now, and never ends. He promises to be with you throughout eternal life to come. Jesus is the friend and Savior who comes to stay and never leaves.

No matter how much of this message you are able to share, invite them to join you for any of the Fellowship Events we have going on here at Lamb of God. Many people outside the Church are hungering for the friendship and fellowship we share, even if they don’t realize it. Give them a taste of what they are missing. And of course, invite them to come and worship with us. After all, inviting them to worship is inviting them into the real presence of Jesus Himself.

Realize that in their minds, coming to worship may seem as difficult as me being put in front of the broiler for the first time, especially if they've never attended Church before. And even if they have, I can attest to you from my experience in having to visit and worship at other congregations, both LCMS and non-LCMS, walking through the doors of a church you have never attended is very, very difficult.

I had an instructor who kept inviting a neighbor to come to church. The neighbor over and over said he would come "next Sunday", but time and again never showed. So one day, as he and his neighbor were headed to play golf he stopped by the church. He gave his neighbor a "dry run" on what it would be like if he came to Sunday. He said, "You can park right here, it's reserved for visitors. You'll walk through these doors and you'll be greeted by several people who would love to shake your hand and say hello. And then you can pick up a worship folder which tells you all that we will be doing and saying in worship. If you don't want to sit up front, there are pews reserved here at the back so you don't have to feel like all eyes are on you. There are screens that project the worship service, or you can follow along in your worship folder." But the most important thing he said he did was promise his neighbor he would be with him very step of the way. He told his neighbor, "When you pull up and park, I will be waiting for you by the doors. I will walk in with you and introduce you to some of my friends who worship here. I will sit with you through the entire service and help guide you through it. And I will walk out with you. There is fellowship hour afterwards and we can stay and visit if you like. Afterwards we can go out for dinner. And you know what? It worked. The neighbor came that Sunday. Then he came back the following Sunday, and the Sunday after that. Eventually he became a member of the Church.

Conclusion

That is one way the Holy Spirit worked through a sinful broken person to call someone into His kingdom, into Church. There are infinitely more scenarios that He can and does use. The point is it doesn't happen because of your power of persuasion or your gift of evangelism. It happens when you become a tool of the Holy Spirit who is willing to answer Jesus' command to teach, baptize, and reach out with the Gospel in whatever divine appointments He sets up for you. It happens by the powerful working of the One in whom all authority on Heaven and earth has been given. It happens through the Spirit's work of sharing the Gospel, through baptism, through the study of God's word. And what happens when you fail to answer His call? You will at times; I certainly have. That's when you need to apply that same Gospel forgiveness to yourself. You are forgiven by the precious blood of Christ. What happens when you feel you've done poor job of telling someone about Jesus? Know that faith is not created by your power or work, but by the Holy Spirit working through sinful broken people, like you, and like me. Amen.