

PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL WITH ASSURANCE!

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Matthew 28: 11-20
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INTRODUCTION

Our text this morning ends with what we commonly call the Great Commission, namely to make disciples of all nations. This was the main thrust of the end of the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew wrote for a Jewish audience. He started his gospel with the genealogy of Jesus to convince his Jewish readers that Jesus was the descendant of Abraham, but also of king David. He was the promised Messiah, the king of Israel. He finished his Gospel and insisted that the Messiah was also the savior of the world, a blessing to all the nations. The Good News was even for non-Jews.

The Great Commission was first addressed to the apostles on a mountain in Galilee but we know that it is still valid for us. All along the book of Acts and even in the epistles, we see believers who had a desire to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. The apostles claimed that they could not stop speaking about what they had seen and heard (Acts 4:20). Later Paul taught Timothy to teach men who could teach others. The process of making disciples has been the means for multiplication of the church from the very beginning of church history. The church grows as new followers of Christ are grafted in the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit. When we become disciples of Christ, we should be involved in making new disciples.

We know, however, that this is not an easy task. We face much resistance, even within our own families. At times, we become discouraged thinking that no one will ever believe our message. We find out that many prefer to believe the lies of the world promoted by the media or false teachers of all kinds rather than the truth of Jesus Christ. We also go through times of fear. It takes courage and boldness to proclaim that we have believe in Jesus today. I believe that our text this morning provides us reasons to find renewed courage. The story of the resurrection reminds us that our message is a message of peace for ourselves and for those whom we wish to reach. The Great commission remind us that Jesus, Himself, sends us to make disciples and gives us a wonderful promise. Let us proclaim the Gospel with assurance!

1. THE MESSAGE OF CORRUPT MEN VERSUS THE MESSAGE OF GOD

Did you notice the contrast between the message of the angel and Jesus to the women and the message of the chief priests to the guards?

The message of the chief priests:

Some of the guards returned to the chief priests to report to them what had happened at the tomb, where Jesus had been buried. They had experienced a severe earthquake and had seen an angel of the Lord, who rolled away the stone and sat on it. The text tells us that the guards were so shocked that they became like dead men. This must have been a terrifying experience for them. They had been there to secure the tomb. Yet they couldn't do anything when the angel came. They were petrified. After they recovered a little, they returned to those who had sent them. The chief priests could have run to the tomb to find out by themselves. Instead, they bribed the guards and even promised to keep them out of trouble should the governor hear of what happened. Here is the message they were to spread, **"You are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep'"** (Matthew 28: 13). One may wonder how the guards could have known that the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus when they were supposedly sleeping. If the chief priests had been sure that the disciples had really stolen the body, they should have prosecuted them for molesting the grave. They had already bribed Judas. Their reputation and their authority were more important than truth. They did not do any further investigation and had a lie spread among the people. It seems that their lie encountered success and many believed it. They used a technique that powerful and rich leaders have been using for centuries. They use their authority and money to manipulate information and to present facts in a way that is convenient for them. More than one is ready to pay big money to suppress God's truth and disseminate wrong information to promote values contrary to God's Word. Many people believe them. Justin, an early Christian writer declared, "It is interesting to see the means that the Jewish authorities used in their desperate attempts to eliminate Jesus. They had used treachery to lay hold of Him. They had used illegality to try Him. They had used slander to charge Him before Pilate. And now they were using

bribery to silence the truth about Him. *And they failed.*” The same means are still being used today and they will fail also.

The message of the angel and Jesus

When the women came to the tomb, the angel said, **“Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you”** (Matthew 28:5-7). When the women ran away to tell the disciples what they had just heard, Jesus came to meet them. The empty tomb was not enough to prove that Jesus had risen from the dead. To see Him alive took away all their doubts. Here is what Jesus told them, **“Do not be afraid; go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they will see Me”** (Matthew 28:10). The messages of the angel and Jesus are very similar. They both give a sense of urgency. The message of the resurrection should be brought to the disciples without delay. They needed to be comforted and encouraged by this incredible news. No time to waste! Both messages started with the same words, “Do not be afraid.” What a great message for them! When Jesus, their Master, healer, best friend, counsellor, had hung on the cross and died, they had lost all hope. They probably feared arrest and even crucifixion. They were deeply troubled and did not know what to do next. But now He was risen! They need not fear anymore. If Jesus had even conquered death, was anything stronger than He? God had vindicated Him. He was indeed the Son of God! When Jesus appeared to the disciples, His first words were **“Peace be with you” (John 20: 19c)**. Their fears, anxieties and uncertainties could be changed to real peace. What a beautiful message to them but also to us. What a great privilege. We can be at peace because the Prince of peace has risen from the dead.

It's interesting to note that when the angel foretold the birth of Jesus to Mary and Joseph he communicated a similar message. To Mary, the angel said in Luke 1:30-33, **“Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.”** In Matthew 1:20b-21 we read what the angel told Joseph, **“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”** Again, the first words were “do not be afraid”. Later when Jesus was born, a multitude of the heavenly hosts appeared to some shepherds and said, **“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased”** (Luke 2:14).

The message of the angels and of Jesus had nothing to do with manipulation or bribes. It had to do with the glorious truth about Jesus. It was a message of victory and of peace. This message was not based on any human opinion, but on the very Word of God. The Old Testament prophets had announced Him and Jesus Himself had told them he would die and rise again. Those who know the Lord and serve Him have nothing to fear. People who build their lives on a lie will never know real peace and will always be fearful. Which message do we believe and teach this morning? A message of corrupt men who work for their own interests, or the message of Christ who died for us? The first is based on sinful human reasoning and the other on the Holy Word of God. One brings eternal damnation, the other eternal life. One offers no real peace; the other guarantees there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. The first is a message of death, the latter of resurrection. Today the message of corrupt men seems to prevail. However, the truth is not necessarily with the majority, nor with the rich and mighty. One day all will have to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. The message of the Gospel is a message of peace. Look around you, listen to the news, there is no peace in this world. They need to hear about the peace only God can give. This brings us to the Great Commission.

2. THE GREAT COMMISSION

While the guards spread their lies, the disciples went to Galilee to the mountain Jesus had designated. Before ascending to heaven forty days after His resurrection, Jesus met with His disciples in the same region where He had started His earthly ministry. They had already seen Him at least once or twice in Jerusalem. At the mountain, they worshiped Him. We are told that some were doubtful. The word translated “doubted” also means hesitated. They probably no longer questioned His resurrection but felt unsure not knowing how He was going to deal with them. Remember, they had all fled when He was arrested. Jesus did not rebuke them for their doubts or hesitations. On the

contrary, He sent them out to be fishers of men. He had called them to be His disciples; now He gave them the great privilege of making disciples. During His earthly ministry, He had sent them to the Jews; now they were sent to all the nations. I am not sure that we are always aware of the privilege that Christ gives us. He calls to be His ambassadors. To know Christ is a wonderful grace; to make disciples is also a wonderful grace. The Lord could have proclaimed the Good News to all nations without us. Yet He decided to use weak people like us to proclaim the Good News. The time had come for the disciples to do the job. They had received the training. They had seen Him serve His Father. Now it was up to them to go. In John 20:21, when Jesus appeared to His disciples, He told them a second time ***“Peace be with you”***, but this time He added, ***“as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”***

Jesus taught a principle we can apply in many areas of our lives. As leaders of the Bible Institute, we sometimes have a hard time watching students go into ministry. We wish we could spend more time with them. But then when a church calls them to be their pastor, it's time for us to back off and let them do their work, trusting the Lord will use what they have learned. This is not to say that we no longer have any contact with them. We remain available for advice, but they must make their own decisions. This principle also holds true for our families. Our children are the first we train as disciples. The years they spend in our homes should be years of training in the Bible. During these years, they should learn what a Christian couple looks like. They should see in their parents committed people, whose desire is to please the Lord. They should see us pray. When the time of their childhood is over, they slowly learn to make decisions for themselves. But when the time comes for them to leave home and get married, then it's time for parents to let them go. When our children are married, then it's no longer for parents to interfere in their decisions. Then comes the time to pray that what they have learned produces fruit. Then comes the time to take a healthy distance that allows them to build their own families. There is a time for training and there is a time to let go. It does not mean that we do not love our children anymore or that we are not there for them when they need us. It means that they must walk by themselves and live with the consequences of their choices.

A. Jesus sent them

Here is what Jesus said about Himself before sending them in Matthew 28:18, ***“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”*** They could go into the darkness of the world knowing that they were sent by the One who had received universal authority. This authority was given to Him by God. He had humbled Himself when he came on earth and accepted to become a man. Now that He had risen, He was invested with all authority. What a great reminder today for us! The One who is building His church, the One who calls us to be His followers, has all authority. No adversary has power greater than Jesus. This gave the apostles much courage. It should encourage also. We often feel so weak when it comes time to share our faith. We fear for our reputation, for our jobs etc. Yet we must remember that our Lord is in control. All power was given to Him.

We live in a globalized world. A word that we hear all the time these days in France is “mondialisation”. This amounts to the idea that we are stronger if there are more of us. We spot the same trend in Christian circles. People seek to promote large associations of churches in hopes that size will make us more secure and give us greater impact in the world. We believe if we are more numerous, we will have more money and governments will have to take our ideas into consideration. But the larger these associations become, the more compromises churches must make to share a common statement of faith. We look for the lowest common denominator so everyone feels comfortable. As we do this, we abandon some of the great doctrines of the Bible. Of course, it's not a bad idea to work with other like-minded Christians. However, we must remember that our power or authority does not come from us or from great numbers, but we are backed up by Jesus Himself who has received all authority. We can do the work of the ministry not because of our own capacities, but because He sent us. The work we are called to do is a spiritual work. It is done by spiritual means.

B. Make disciples

The Lord sent them to make disciples of all the nations. To make disciples means we bring others to know Jesus, and that they place themselves under the yoke of Jesus' instructions. Disciples have new priorities and affections. In Matthew 16:24, Jesus explained what it meant to be a disciple: ***“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me’”***. To make disciples is not to share a watered-down message. People need to understand the price Jesus paid for their sins. They must be told how much God loves

them and how glorious it is to know Christ. It must be clear that once they turn to Christ, they receive eternal life. It must be clear also that their lives no longer belong to them but to their Lord. A disciple must duplicate himself in others. A disciple is disciplined and gives high priority to praying and reading the Bible. A disciple is not one who wants to change the world, but one who preaches repentance. Our church will not grow if we are not making disciples. Making disciples is not only for pastors and leaders in the church. Whoever knows Christ and claims to be a disciple can reach out to others and share what he already knows and what Christ has done for him. If the process of multiplication stops, many people will not hear the Good News. The work is not finished yet. We cannot rest and think that others should continue. Some churches stop growing once they have a building and a pastor. They feel they have done their job. As long as the Lord has not returned, we must continue to make disciples.

These new disciples are to be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Note that Jesus placed Himself on a level with the Father and the Holy Spirit. At their baptism, new disciples declare their union in the death and resurrection of Christ. They pledge submission to His Lordship and declare that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one God.

These new disciples must also be taught to observe all that Christ commanded the apostles. Jesus had spent three years with them and had taught them all they needed to know. As we read the book of Acts, we see how they actually put this into practice. In Acts 2:42 we learn that the church in Jerusalem persevered in the teaching of the apostles. Later when there was a conflict regarding widows in the church, they chose deacons to help distribute food so that the apostles could devote their time to teaching and prayer. The rest of the New Testament contains the teaching they had received from Jesus and passed on to the next generations. In the first century people needed to be physically close to the apostles if they wanted to be taught by them. Today we have the entire Bible at our disposal, to read and to teach new believers.

C. A wonderful promise

The Gospel of Matthew ends with a promise, not a command. Jesus promised He would always be with us even to the end of the age. "Always" literally means "the whole of every day". There is not a minute, where He does not stay with us as we carry out His will. It's arduous work to make disciples. It's a long process. There are times of discouragement and fatigue. Yet we know that we are never alone. He does not forsake us. Jesus knew very well and had taught His disciples that being a disciple would also mean persecutions and trials. In His grace, Jesus did not send them alone, He promised to be with them. Paul put it very clearly in Romans 8:31-39, ***"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, 'For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."***

Remember the four "alls" of the Great commission: All Authority, All the nations, All that I commanded you, All the days!

CONCLUSION

Will we proclaim the message of the Gospel with assurance? If we have believed the message of the resurrection then we should be like the apostles. We should not be able to be quiet. Let us not be fearful! We have nothing to fear. We are at peace with God and are safe in His hand. We can proclaim the Gospel with assurance because Christ sent us and promised He would be with us. What is it that keeps us from making disciples? Let us not waste one more day! Get started without delay! Proclaim the Gospel with assurance!