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April 21, 2024

Scripture: Matthew 28:16-20

Sermon Title: Our Common Mission

Prayer...

Introduction:

Our passage this morning is what is classically called the Great Commission. It is Jesus' final words to his disciples before he ascends to heaven. According to the gospel writer Matthew these are Jesus' parting words, so they have carried a lot of weight in Christian history. Imagine you were going to share your final words before going to heaven. What might you say to your loved ones?

For Jesus he gives direction to his disciples. The story starts with the eleven disciples going to a mountain to meet with Jesus. We do not know the name of the mountain. Maybe it is the location of Jesus' sermon on the mount. Maybe it is where the transfiguration took place. We don't know for sure. When they come to the mountain the

disciples worship him. It is fitting that there is also the line that some doubted. It is strange for me to imagine that the disciples would see the resurrected Jesus and still doubt, but it is also a comforting line.

It is comforting because it shows that the disciples were human. Some struggled with doubt even after all that Jesus had done and showed them. For those of us who have followed Jesus a long time and have seen God do amazing things, we might be surprised when we still doubt, but we are in good company. For me this statement about doubt is a word of grace that as we worship Jesus it is okay if our doubts surface from time to time.

Jesus is not surprised by the doubts, but he reminds his followers that he has all authority. This is key since what the disciples are asked to do next will take the authority of God not their own strength. Jesus says since I have all authority I am asking you to “Go and make disciples of all nations. Let’s pause here. Notice that the

disciples are asked to make disciples. The disciples are to make other disciples. So much of our evangelism today conjures up images of one time conversations where we invite people to accept the Lord or maybe we imagine a big stadium where people are asked to make a commitment to follow Christ. Those settings are wonderful, but Jesus does not simply say preach about me. He asks his disciples to make other disciples. To raise up other disciples requires more than a sermon. It involves forming community with people and learning together the way of Jesus. It requires an ongoing commitment rather than one conversation or one talk. As I think about our common mission of the church, we are invited to form disciples together. We are invited to go deep with people and really experience life together as we study Scripture, pray, and serve together. Discipleship is a big commitment.

I also find it compelling that Jesus calls them to make disciples of all nations. Here we are reminded to make disciples around the world.

Missions might mean traveling to different parts of the world. If you have ever been involved in international student ministry, you are likely aware, that the world has come to us here in the United States.

We are blessed with people from many nations right here and sometimes we have the opportunity to make disciples of other nations in our own community. I have shared with you before that when I was 24 years old, I had a job teaching English as a second language with the American Cultural Exchange in Seattle. I taught practical skills classes for international students in TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language). I will always remember one of my students named Puikimas. (Tell her story and connect to making disciples of all nations).

After the invitation to make disciples, Jesus asks his disciples to baptize the future disciples in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and to teach them to obey all the commands of Jesus. I do not know how you feel about baptism, but I am glad as Christians we

have a sacrament and ritual that allows us in a physical way to show our commitment to Christ. In baptism we have a way to identify with the death and resurrection of Jesus. We show that we are dying to an old way of life and choosing to live as a new creation devoted to Jesus. I have to say I am a little jealous of other denominations and how they do baptism. Presbyterians often use a little water in baptism of both infants and adults. We are allowed to do full immersion baptisms, but we usually do just a little water. I saw a video recently of people being baptized in a tub of water at George Fox. It looked pretty powerful for those students. Whether we are baptized with a little water or through immersion, we do this practice partly because of our Scripture today.

Do you notice in our Scripture, we also see the Trinity mentioned?

The word Trinity is not used but it is interesting that Jesus says to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Jesus seems to find it important to include the Father and

Holy Spirit with him in the baptism experience. This suggests that we always are mindful of how the whole of trinity participates in the mission of the Gospel in the world. As we will see in the Gospel of John and the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit takes center stage after Jesus enters heaven and especially on the day of Pentecost when the disciples are filled with the Holy Spirit in a special way.

One of my favorite parts of this great commission by Jesus are his final words. “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

As this passage shows, I know it is okay to doubt. It is okay to have seasons where we wonder if God is who God seems to be. We wonder how the world continues to suffer so much if God is really loving. My experience is Jesus does not answer all my doubts about human suffering. Instead, he says, I am with you always, now and for all eternity. Jesus says he will be with us in our highs and in our lows. Jesus is with us when we are filled with faith and confidence

and things seem to be looking up and when sorrow and suffering bring us down and it feels like hell has broken loose. Jesus does not promise a cake walk through life. Instead, Jesus promises to be with us always and to love us even in our seasons of suffering.

I want to share a couple more stories today that highlight what it means to live out our common mission as a Christian community.

Rev. Shavon Starlings Louis- Co-Moderator of the 225th General Assembly and Pastor of Memorial Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, NC.

She gave a sermon on Matthew 25 and Micah 6.8- Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. Powerful to hear her talk about connecting to Presbyterians around the world. She spoke to thousands of Christians including many Presbyterians in South Sudan at a Pilgrimage for Peace that included Christian leaders from Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant Churches. Pope Francis also attended.

Barbie's Village Visit- Powerful to meet Chenoa and her team.

Presbyterian Church of Laurelhurst was officially transferred to FGC in exchange for \$1, marking its historic return to Native hands for the creation of Barbie's Village – a tiny home village and early childhood center for Indigenous families experiencing homelessness. Example of Land Back community organizing work. I also met Jo Smith of Warm Springs Presbyterian. We are hoping to eventually invite Native people from Barbie's Village and Warm Springs as guests when we honor Native people as part of our Newberg Peace Garden. End of the day, I dropped off Bibles to Jerry Kingery with the Bible Foundation here in Newberg.

Friends, we have a common mission to make disciples of all nations and to show love to all creation in the Name of Jesus. What a joy to be a follower of Jesus and to fulfill the great commission in our world.

Please pray with me...

Matthew 28:16-20

The Commissioning of the Disciples

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him, but they doubted. 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 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”