

Holy Trinity Sunday
June 11, 2017

“Final Words for Doubting Disciples”

MATTHEW 28:16-20

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go 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 I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Doesn't it seem strange to you when Jesus' disciples worshipped him some of them had doubts? How could they possibly have doubts about Jesus' resurrection from the dead since he had appeared to them several times? How could they possibly have doubts that all their sins of the past were forgiven when they saw the nail prints in his hands? This was the irrefutable forensic evidence that full payment was made. How could they have doubts that Jesus was their Lord and God? Even doubting Thomas confessed, “My Lord and my God.” However, I can see them having doubts about their abilities to take the message of Jesus' death and resurrection into all the world.

I can relate to these disciples because I have often doubted my own ability to get out into the community to bring people the message that Christ Jesus my Lord and Savior has done everything necessary to rescue us and save us from eternal death and punishment in hell.

What does Jesus do for doubting disciples? What does Jesus do for me and you? He does not reject us and cast us off for our weaknesses and our doubts. Jesus tells us so clearly and plainly that even though we are weak, he wants us to make disciples of all nations. By his very words he leads us to believe in his power, his plan and his presence.

Jesus leads us to believe in his power

Is there any doubt that Jesus has the power to help us make disciples of all people? Listen to what he tells us. “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations.” Jesus has all authority or all power in heaven and on earth. He has ascended into a position of great power and strength by sitting on the right hand of his heavenly Father. He has the power to know our needs better than we know ourselves. He has the power to help us very specifically with every challenge we face, including the tough work of telling other people how much they need Jesus and how he has rescued them. Is it any wonder the Apostle Paul said, “I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.”

An elderly Jewish man, a much loved medical doctor with whom I developed a close friendship, asked, “Do you believe that Jesus hears your prayers when you pray?” Of course I responded by saying, “Yes, he does.” Then he asked another question, “If millions

of Christians pray at the same time all over the world, how can he possibly hear their prayers?" We believe Jesus has the power to answer all our prayers, and the power to help us with this very tough job of making disciples or bringing people into his kingdom from all over the world.

This past week in our midweek Bible study, we were going through Isaiah chapter 40. There the Lord God speaks of his great power with these words, "Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens; Who created all these? he who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing." John chapter one says of Jesus, the Word made flesh, "All things were made by him." It is hard to imagine the energy that was released when our Lord and Savior Jesus created all the matter in the universe by the power of his Word out of nothing in split second of time. The ultimate "Big Bang" occurred in creation by the hand of God. This power is now given to us by Jesus to carry out the tough work of making disciples of people who want nothing to do with him.

In the book of Acts we discover how these disciples who doubted at first transitioned into relying on Jesus' power to boldly witness to their faith. After being threatened with imprisonment and death they did not pray, "Lord, help us find a safe place to hide." No, they prayed, "Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness." It was the church father Augustine who prayed, "Lord ask what you want, and then give what you ask."

Members of Star of Bethlehem you know firsthand how tough it has been for us to bring the message of Christ crucified and Christ risen from the dead to the people of this community who do not want him. Have we doubted our ability to do this important work? Yes, we have many times. Jesus does not cast us off and find others who will do a better job. No, Jesus calls us to be on his time with these compelling words, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations." Our much loved prayer for boldness is not outdated. So we have prayed and we continue to pray. "Lord God, You know the challenges we face in a world that does not want You. Place Your hand of blessing on Your servants and make us bold to proclaim Your pure Word. By Your Holy Spirit lead many to know Your Son, Jesus Christ, the only hope of salvation. Amen."

Jesus leads us to believe in his plan

We don't have to develop a plan for going into all the world and making disciples of all nations. Jesus gives the plan and that plan never changes. He says make disciples of all nations, "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all everything I have commanded you."

So we teach people all things. We teach them about how the world was created by the hand of God as told to us in Genesis chapter one as we read together this morning. We teach them how sin entered the world through Adam and Eve, and how this sin enters our lives and makes us unacceptable to God. We teach people how God, our heavenly Father so loved this world corrupted by sin that he gave his only begotten Son to suffer on a cross and have him punished in our place so we can be forgiven. We teach about the Holy Spirit who opens the hearts of people to believe and leads them from wanting nothing to

do with Jesus to believing in him as the only one who can save them and rescue them.

So we follow in the footsteps of the great missionaries who went into places where people knew nothing about the true God. Did they make up their own plan or own ideas for making disciples? No, they stuck to the words of the Bible. They taught about the true God who is one God, but three person, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And when people came to believe they were baptized with the very words Jesus said we should use in baptism, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

For over forty years I have had the privilege of baptizing infants, children, young people and adults. I have never changed the words for baptism. It is always the same. "I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." I have also had the privilege of reminding people of their baptism. I can still see the smile on the face of my mother who was in her last days and in much pain when I told, "Mom, you have been baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." This past week I had the privilege of talking to an elderly lady who has been going through a rough patch lately. I told her, you have been baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. What do you think I saw on her face? What do I see on your faces here even now in this service as I speak these words, "You have been baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

Do people who are taught the word of God for the first time have difficulty coming to believe that three persons are one God? Sure they do. We cannot try to make the concept of three persons and one God more understandable with illustrations that some used with the Eskimos in Greenland. It is not right to say that the teaching of the Holy Trinity can be understood by comparing it to water with its three different properties of snow, water and ice. There is only one God, but three distinct persons. That is something we believe with Christians all over the world even though we cannot understand with our finite minds how this can be.

Remember the story about the church father Augustine struggled to believe three persons are one God. It took him years to come to believe that three persons are one God. One day he was walking on the beach. He saw child digging hole in the sand and with a shell he was taking water from the sea and pouring it into the hole he had dug. He heard the little fellow say, "I am going to take all the water in the sea and put into my hole." He laughed at the little fellow but then realized how foolish he was to think he could fully comprehend the true greatness of God before he believed.

It took years for Augustine to finally confess the true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In contrast the Apostle Paul was changed immediately. Oh, how he must have hated the Christians and their belief that the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God, yet at the same time they confessed as the Jewish people did that there was only one God. That all changed for Paul on the road to Damascus. When a light from heaven appeared to him, he cried out, "Lord who are you?" The voice came back and said, "I am Jesus." Shortly after that Paul was baptized by a man named Ananias who told him, "Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins." And what words did Ananias use to baptize Paul? "I baptized you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." Ananias did not change the words to "I baptized you in the name of the sun, moon and stars" or some other formula. Miraculously Paul was led to believe in the Triune God and baptized in that name. Until Jesus returns Christians will make disciples by teaching everything he has commanded

and baptizing people in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” That’s the plan and that plan does not change.

Jesus leads us to believe in his presence

If we are afraid of the great task of making disciples and our own personal weaknesses, then let Jesus help us by reminding us that he is always with us. “And I will be with you always to the very end of the age.” Listen to the Lord speak to you in the words of Isaiah 41: “So do not fear; for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will hold you with my righteous right hand.” The great missionary, Patrick of Ireland fearlessly proclaimed: “Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I arise.” We greet other with the words, “The Lord be with you.” We say goodbye to each other with the words, “Jesus be with you.” Even the word “goodbye” comes from the Old English words, “God be with you.” The little brother is not afraid when the big brother is with him. Jesus is our brother and he is always with us wherever the paths of our lives may be. He overcomes our fears and doubts by telling us about his power, his plan and his presence. This always remains the same. Amen.