

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Fourth Sunday after Easter, May 2, 2010

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Hymns: 22, 301, 496, 507, 509.

Lessons: Daniel 7:13-14, Romans 6: 1-12, John 21:1-19.

Sermon: Mark 16: 14-16 & Matt. 28:16-20

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

All of you who have prepared for a career know what it is like to begin that career. You have prepared, some of you by getting a lot of training, perhaps from your father, if he did the same thing you did for a career. You may have prepared by getting a diploma or certificate or a college degree. You may have just been hired for a job and started by getting some on-the-job training, maybe superficial, maybe intensive. So, many of you know what it is like to begin a career being somewhat prepared for what it involved. But there came a time when you actually had to do the job, when you actually had to do the work expected of you, and that might have been scary, if you didn't really feel prepared.

Jesus' followers were now at that same point in their career, but it is more correct to call it not just a job or a career but a calling. They had been invited; they had been called by God or personally by Jesus the very Son of God to follow him. The Word of God that had been proclaimed to them had moved their hearts and souls to follow Jesus because they had learned that he is the Savior of mankind. They were convinced that Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah. At a time early in his ministry when *"many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him,"* we read: *"You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."* John 6:66-69.

Much had happened since Peter made that strong confession. Jesus had gone up to Jerusalem and had suffered many things at the hands of the leaders of the Jews and the Gentiles. He had been crucified because of who he was and what he did. He had been buried. And, you know and confess he had been raised from the dead on the third day. But many of his followers were confused. Jesus was no longer with them every day. Now what should they do without him? Listen carefully as Jesus now gives them

"THE GREAT COMMISSION"

- 1. Their work is to "Make disciples", to "Teach all nations", to reach out to all mankind.**
- 2. Jesus' authority to commission them for their work.**
- 3. They are to teach mankind to obey everything Jesus has commanded.**

You know the way to heaven. You heard it summarized in our texts this morning. Believe and you will be saved. But they aren't only intended for you. Jesus intends you to share those words and share and teach the way to heaven with all mankind. Because you have been called by the Gospel of Jesus Christ, you, too, have been given "the great commission".

These words were spoken by Jesus between his resurrection and his bodily ascension into heaven. We do not know for sure how much time passed between Jesus' appearances on the day of resurrection and this appearance to the 11 in Galilee. We do know that Jesus appeared to various people in various places over a period of 40 days before he ascended into heaven. When the disciples met Jesus there by appointment, he gave them this great commission for their calling on earth.

Matthew tells us that they "doubted". What has been called "the great commission" is Jesus' answer to their doubts. One reason Jesus told them to meet in Galilee may have been so they could get away from the crowds

and the distractions in Jerusalem. He would soon be ascending to the right hand of his Father, so he wanted to take full advantage of the few opportunities that remained for instructing them. After all, this time for instruction was to be only 40 days, just a little over a month, although they did not know how long he would be with them.

During his ministry here on earth as he worked out salvation for all of sinful mankind, Jesus' preaching and teaching was for the most part restricted to the Jews, the chosen people of God. This was according to God's plan. But that salvation is intended for all mankind. We know that "***God our Savior, [is the God] who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.***" 1 Timothy 2:3-4.

Having accomplished man's redemption, Jesus' gospel message was to be preached to all people. No longer would circumcision be the entrance into the kingdom and family of God, rather the sacrament of holy baptism. In this sacrament Jesus would bring to those baptized the mercy and grace of the gospel. But he added a warning. For those in whom faith would be lacking or who would refuse to believe, there would be no salvation. However it is not we who save ourselves by making a decision and accepting Christ. Of ourselves we can only reject Christ. It is God who gives faith and salvation.

So Jesus met the 11 on a mountain in Galilee. Perhaps this happened shortly after the miraculous catch of fish and Jesus' reinstatement of Peter, which took place on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, as recorded in our gospel lesson today. This mountain in Galilee was not the hill from which Jesus actually ascended, because Luke tells us that he ascended from the Mount of Olives just outside Jerusalem.

Matthew and Mark do not give us any indication that anyone besides the 11 was present but these accounts do not rule out the possibility that other believers may have been present. Regardless of who was present, both Matthew and Luke make it clear that the great commission applies to others besides the 11. They would only live so long, but this command assures all believers that Jesus will be with his disciples "***to the very end of the age***", that is, "***unto the end of the world***" as the King James Version tells us.

Just as Jesus' commands concerning the Ministry of the Keys and the Lord's Supper apply to all Christians and not just to the apostles, so Jesus' great commission applies to all believers of all time.

For Jesus to issue such a great commission, such a great command, he must have a correspondingly great authority. Jesus makes it clear that his authority is unlimited. He claims all authority in heaven and on earth. Only God can say that. But Jesus also says all this authority "***has been given to me.***" With these words Jesus claims to be the Son of Man who was given all authority by the Ancient of Days as prophesied by God speaking through Daniel in our Old Testament lesson. The authority that has been delegated to him by the Father he now shares with his disciples: "***as the Father has sent me, I am sending you***". John records these words of Jesus as he spoke to his disciples on the evening of the night in which he rose from the dead: "***Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.'***" John 20:21.

He gives them the authority and responsibility to make disciples of all nations by baptizing them in the name of the triune God and by teaching them to obey everything he has commanded. As Christ's Church proclaims the gospel and administers Christ's sacraments, the church has Christ's promise always to be with his followers, working through his Word and sacraments to make and keep people as his disciples, as believers.

Our sermon texts are significant passages and teach a number of doctrines. Christ here instituted the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. The Trinitarian baptismal formula is also used in much of our liturgy and prayers, such as the invocation and in the absolution. Both the morning prayer and the evening prayer, which Martin Luther included in his small catechism, begin with the words, "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." And it is most often with these very words that we emphasize the doctrine of the holy Trinity.

The command that Jesus gives is not first and foremost "Go!" but "make disciples." Jesus' assumption however is that what he tells them to do will not happen unless they go to people, unless they reach out to others. As we apply these words to ourselves we certainly will want to include mission work in our own communities and wherever we can. Our tiny size as a church body should not hinder our prayers for all mankind to come to faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior, as the only way to eternal life and should not prevent us from knowing that the Lord can accomplish great things. Jesus himself started with only a dozen men!

The whole concept of mission work is an area where the Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship has much work to do. And remember mission work starts at home, with you. You, too, are to be involved in

making disciples of all nations. But let's emphasize those first two words. Make disciples! That means reaching out. That means talking about Jesus. That means telling others what God means to you and what God has done for you. At the same time, let us not overlook how this begins at home in our families. The responsibility God gives to parents is to bring up their children in the fear of the Lord. God plainly tells us in Ephesians 6:4: ***"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."*** If every household took this responsibility seriously, what has been called "the in-reach evangelistic work of the church" would be largely done.

These words were spoken in "Galilee", also called "Galilee of the Gentiles" because of its large Gentile population. What better place to speak to Jews of reaching out to "all nations" than a Gentile area! Both in the Hebrew Old Testament and in the Greek New Testament, the phrase "the nations" refers to Gentiles. When Martin Luther translated the Bible into German, he used the word Heiden, which means "the heathen." Although Jesus' followers on this occasion were all Jews, they were to preach the gospel both to Jews and Gentiles alike. This was certainly consistent with God's ancient promise to Abraham: ***"all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*** Genesis 12:3. It is significant that Jesus spoke these words in Galilee, where Jews and Gentiles had been in frequent contact with one another for centuries.

John the Baptist had prepared the way for Jesus by ***"preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins"*** Mark 1:4. Jesus began his public ministry by coming to John to be baptized. Jesus told Nicodemus, ***"no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and of the spirit"*** John 3:5. And Jesus' own disciples also administered baptism to those who wanted to become Jesus' disciples. So now when Jesus commissions them to make disciples of the Gentiles by baptizing, this is not entirely new to them but what is new is that baptism has been transformed by Jesus' death and resurrection. This is explained in greater detail by the apostle Paul in the Epistle lesson today.

Jesus tells us to teach them to obey everything he has commanded us. This means we are to preach the entire message of Jesus without embarrassment and without compromise. We are neither to add to it nor to subtract from it, as we read in Revelation 22:18-19: ***"I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book."***

We dare not pick and choose which of Jesus' words we want to believe, follow, and obey. We are to preach the whole will of God. Matthew places these words at the end of his gospel. One good way to ***"observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you"*** (King James Version) is to go back and reread the gospel of Matthew. No one can exhaust this book just reading it through one time. We can go back and see new things in the opening chapters that did not dawn on us the first time. And as we do so we have Jesus' precious promise, ***"surely I am with you always."***

Jesus has the authority to give you such a commission. This is your commission, too. This is your calling too. ***"Go and 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 everything I have commanded you."*** Matthew 28:19-20. ***"Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."*** Mark 16:15-26. Don't be afraid to go and do Jesus' work in this way, because Jesus himself assures you ***"surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*** Trust his word! Follow it! Amen.