

## **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 some 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."

### **Sermon: All authority in heaven and on earth**

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

It's Trinity Sunday, and our scripture from Matthew this week contains a very clear reference to the Trinity – probably the clearest reference to be found in the bible. The Great Commission – Jesus' final instruction to the disciples before he ascended to the Father was '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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.'

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – the Trinity. This week I am supposed to expound on the Trinity; explore it and explain it, so that we all become theological masters. But here's the thing – the Trinity is a mystery. The Three in One, the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer – this God is too big to fit into our heads. The Trinity is a mystery that can be experienced, but not adequately explained – not in human words and human wisdom.

There is something much more compelling about this passage from Matthew. Authority. Power. This is something that certainly concerns all of us who live on earth – indeed, our history is defined by whomever holds the power.

In the beginning we were created and given power. We lost it – we gave it away – then Jesus gave it back to us, and now we have to determine what we are to do with it.

Let's begin. 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me,' Jesus tells his disciples. This statement reveals an awful lot. Authority is something that is given – it is granted or bestowed.

We've got a couple of retired OPP officers among us. They carried badges that mark their authority – the badge is a symbol of authority that is granted by the crown.

Authority can be given through election, where we all voluntarily give up some of our own power for another to wield in our name – Jim Oliver is an example of this, as are our Session members. Civil authority is a social contract.

In any case, authority is something that is bestowed. We can try to go the other way and seize authority through use of force, and throughout history many people have tried that, though it never really works.

Seizing power through fear and threat of force has short term benefits, though what people find it that to hold onto power a greater and greater force must be used just to maintain control. Despots and tyrants are formed in this manner, and eventually it self destructs – while a ruler may have envisioned many people serving him, in the end he will need brutally oppressive force just to keep the people from rising up and killing him – all the power he gains must be multiplied and reinvested in further suppressing those that he has seized power from.

This is exactly what Jesus was talking about two chapters earlier when he admonished one of his followers for using force in this way, saying ‘all who draw the sword will die by the sword.’

Authority cannot be seized, it cannot be taken – authority can only be granted.

If this is the case, that authority is bestowed, then it matters greatly where our authority comes from. The higher the source, the better the authority. My parents can grant me authority over a sibling, a boss can grant authority over co-workers. We talked about authority given through election or appointment through government – but ultimate authority can only come from an ultimate being. Only God is the ultimate source of authority, the voice above whom there is no other.

We were already given this authority – a divine mandate. We read from the first chapter of Genesis:

God created mankind in his own image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup> God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

<sup>29</sup> Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. <sup>30</sup> And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

<sup>31</sup> God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

God gave to the first humans the authority to rule over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and every living creature that moves on the ground, and gave them all the seed-bearing plants and fruit trees.

I like the account given in the second chapter of Genesis even better:

<sup>15</sup>The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. <sup>20</sup>So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

This naming of the animals is also an authority. In our culture we don't attach as much significance to names as when this book was written. In most older cultures, to know someone's name was to have power over them, and if you give a name to something, then it's yours – you own it.

Adam named the animals, owned them, had dominion over all of creation and was charged with tending and caring for all of it.

God had granted his divine authority to humanity. And then we gave it away. We lost it all. This happened through sin, and continues to happen.

Adam and Eve gave up their own autonomy and control by listening to, and following, Satan. In doing so they gave the devil a claim over them. This is what happens when we sin – whenever we sin, we give up control.

Think about this: when we tell a lie, we are then held by that lie. We have to remember it and we have to alter our own reality in an attempt to try to continue to make that lie the truth. We are forever bound by the lie, we have given up a small bit of authority.

When we steal, we become bound to the object and the desire that it arouses within us – we are also then bound to a lie. Nowhere is the giving up of authority by sinning more clear than in the area of addiction, which is any desire that has grown out of control. We can be addicted to substances like drugs, alcohol or smoking, but we can also be addicted to the rush of gambling, shopping or eating to fill a void within; we can become addicted to a need for approval or love.

Whatever the form of the addiction, we quickly find that the addiction controls us – it takes our time, our money, causes broken relationships, and health problems. We lose control, we give up our authority and fall under the control and authority of something else.

Jesus has given us back our authority – he has cleared the hold that sin and Satan has over us. The power of sin is broken – those old things – they no longer control us, we have been given new life. Guilt controls us and binds us – forgiveness sets us free. Jesus re-establishes us to the

position of being sons and daughters of God – heirs to the kingdom, bearers of his name and representatives of his father.

Jesus clearly ties this new life of power and authority to baptism. Not just any baptism, but a baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Such is the power of sin, that we need the full weight of the Trinity to restore what we have frivolously wasted.

We need our Father, our creator, who formed each one of us and gives us life. We need our Saviour, our kinsman redeemer who restores the power and glory that we have corrupted. We need the Spirit, who strengthens and guides us – who gives us the power to exercise the authority we have been given. We cannot go out into the world without all of this.

So, now that we have been re-authorized through the saving grace of Christ, what are we to do with our newly restored power? What did Jesus tell the disciples?

Go and make disciples of all nations. Jesus isn't speaking of nation states as we know them, but other nations means foreigners. God had made Israel into a nation, so the other nations are the other people that aren't God's people. People not at all like them, people who don't share their values, their customs or their language. The Gentiles.

We've heard this commission so many times that we don't really think about it anymore – we've forgotten the scope of this command. Jesus was on a mountain top with, not twelve, but eleven disciples, since one had betrayed him, telling this little band of confused, disoriented and overwhelmed disciples that they were to herd all the peoples of the earth toward Mount Zion in the name of Jesus.

I'm sure to them this sounded like an impossible task, and with their resources it would be. But, they were not relying upon their own resources – they were to rely upon the power of God.

As we look back on how these eleven fulfilled that mandate we should be encouraged. Given this impossible mission of baptizing the world, we find that two thousand years later billions have been baptized and the generations are still following that same commission. Do you think they could possibly have imagined that they would play a key role in such a saga? Do you think it would be remotely possible without the authority and power that Jesus gave to them?

And is it any different for us? We too are called to an impossible task – I think we often miss the enormity of what we are called to do. Our role is not limited to paying the bills and keeping the building in good repair. Our role is not to gather here for an hour each week and then go home, feeling satisfied with our commitment.

Our call, our original call, is to steward all of creation – all of that out there – that is our responsibility. Our commission is to go into all the world and cure cancer, clean up the environment, evangelize the unbelieving, and establish world peace. If you think it's not, then

you're not thinking big enough. We are not limited by our offering plate, or the number of bodies in the seats. The disciples had nothing, they were nothing, and look at what God has done through them.

We are to cast mountains into the sea – and do even greater things than Jesus – not less. That's our mandate, to do the impossible, with a tiny grain of faith. You see, with impossible tasks we stop taking stock of our resources. As long as we limit ourselves to doing what is possible within our given budget and available manpower, then we are not glorifying God, we only glorify ourselves.

If we attempt the impossible, we have to throw ourselves completely onto the mercy and strength of God, and when God does the impossible through us it glorifies God before the nations.

What's your dream – your passion? What has God laid on your heart? If money and time were no object, then what do you feel that God is calling you to – individually, and all of us together as a congregation?

Our calling is to take this fragmentary community with a fragmentary faith, and a fragmentary understanding of the Trinitarian God, and go into the world with everything Jesus has taught us to work miracles in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit

Our task is to re-activate and reauthorize all of humanity, restoring each and every one to their rightful place in God's created order as empowered human beings.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Christ, who has authorized you to act and speak in his name. Now get out there and change the world.