

“We have been given authority – now what?”

When I chose to use today’s Gospel Lectionary Reading, decided on the focus, and chose the sermon title, I was aware most of us have previously heard or read Jesus’ Great Commission. Further, when we heard or read it, the focus was most likely on evangelism – specifically on going out to tell others the Good News. Yet, it is likely very few of us have gone out to tell complete strangers, much less the whole world, about the message and work of Jesus the Christ. However, this sermon’s purpose is not to browbeat everyone into submission with the demand each of us go out to convert more people into believing in Jesus. **Instead, let’s consider what the original disciples were to do and what we are to do in response to what our Risen Savior is reported to have said in today’s Scripture!**

It is my hope each of us will come to a more complete and deeper understanding of what Jesus called and calls his followers to do after his death, resurrection, and return to his Divine Parent. **What is next for you, me, all of us, and for everyone, who has come to experience God’s Love for us through Jesus, the Son of God?** I believe the answer to that question will provide each of us greater direction and motivation for the living out of our calling as followers of Jesus Christ and his New Way. So, don’t worry and think the purpose of this message is to intimidate you into spending tremendous amounts of time and energy harassing unsuspecting strangers.

The original disciples were in the middle of an unbelievable experience – their Lord and Teacher of three years had been betrayed by one of them, denied by the eldest, was executed, miraculously raised back to life, and as he was leaving them – returning to his Divine Parent, Jesus gave them their call – their work for the rest of their lives. **Can any of us fully comprehend what they were thinking and feeling?** Helping us put ourselves in the awesome and overwhelming experience, which the disciples were facing, Larry M. Goodpaster writes, “You have been anticipating the arrival of that special moment, that singular event when your life will take on a different character, a different goal, a different setting. You are to be on your own, making decisions for yourself, doing as you please, when you please. You are about to leave those comfortable, familiar surroundings with their protective environment. Yet, for all the excitement and enthusiasm of the moment, there is a bit of doubt in the back of your mind. Is this what I really want?” **“What now?”** (LIKE A BREATH OF FRESH AIR, “Formula For Life” by Larry M. Goodpaster)

The Risen Christ knew his disciples were in utter turmoil. They had great fears – remember they continued to meet behind locked doors when they gathered inside. They were bewildered by doubts, such as, how would they be able to do anything without Jesus. First, he reminded them of his authority, power, and relationship with the Almighty, **“Jesus drew near and said to them, ‘I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth.’”** With all of that authority, they and we can trust Jesus’ purpose for his followers will have all of the power, resources, and authorization they need to fulfill their calling! Those words from Jesus not only remind us of his unique authority, position, and power, which we need to pay attention to, **but they also imply we have been given authority – you and I have a special and Divine calling. So, now what?**

If I was hearing you or someone else make that claim, I would be tempted to say, “Now wait a minute, Jesus didn’t say he gave the disciples and us all of that authority.” Notice, I said I would be tempted to say that but in all truthfulness, I make that statement because the Scriptures do report Jesus gave such authority. For example, in Matthew 18:18, Jesus said to his disciples, **“And so I tell all of you: what you prohibit on earth will be prohibited in heaven, and what you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.”** According to Matthew the same basic pronouncement of authority had been given to Peter by Jesus but in 18:18 Christ broadened it to include all of them. The Risen Jesus Christ also stands among the disciples and gives them a Great Commission in John 20:21-23, **“Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you.’ Then he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive people’s sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.’”** Forgiving sins is a great amount of authority belonging to the followers of Jesus Christ! Take note how Jesus did not put any disclaimers on his giving to us the authority to forgive! Lest we get swelled heads or too big for our britches, Jesus did not provide us with the ability to “Lord it over” the unconverted, instead he was declaring a fact – people will not realize God has forgiven them, if we do not share that Good News with them.

In today’s Scripture, Matthew reported Jesus went on to specifically say to the disciples and us, **“Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy**

Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Those instructions were not so much the dictating of missionary trips for the disciples, as they were the declaration **“all peoples everywhere” – not just the Jews were to be invited to share in the New Faith Relationship we have with Jesus and the Divine Parent!** Again, Jesus did not include small print legal disclaimers to limit who qualifies to receive this universal invitation to be in Relationship with himself and God.

Rev. Robina Marie Winbush also speaks for this different view of our calling. She says, “Making disciples is not synonymous with recruitment for the church rolls. It is not the same thing as building up membership. It is not a numbers game of who has how many,” **“but it’s taking time to enter into relationship with others that is deeper than superficial friendship. It is daring to share with others the life-giving, life-liberating, death-defying relationship of God in Jesus Christ. It is inviting others into this relationship.”** (dayone.org, “It’s Not Over” by Rev. Robina Marie Winbush)

Sharing additional insight about our call to engage others in our Relationship with God through Jesus Christ, Alan Brehm says, “I would think it stands to reason that the only way we can experience the presence of ‘the God of love and peace’ is if we are practicing ‘love and peace’ in our lives. And I don’t think this works in the theoretical — I think it has to play itself out in the way we relate to those around us on a daily basis.”

Brehm continues, “It seems to me that as we open ourselves in compassion to our sisters and brothers all around us, we find that there is a great deal of peace and compassion and love in the world — even in the midst of suffering and injustice. Precisely in the midst of suffering and injustice. ...”

Brehm points out, **“And it’s no wonder we look at our world and complain, ‘Where is God?’”** Brehm concludes, **“It is precisely when we open ourselves to those who are around us and allow ourselves to experience their pain and suffering and share compassion and kindness with them that we experience God’s presence.** That’s when we can be sure that the God of love and peace is with us, filling us all with grace and joy and life!” (“The God of Love and Peace” by Alan Brehm on thewakingdreamer.blogspot.com,)

Jesus specifically told his disciples in today’s Reading, **“teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.”** What is it Jesus commanded his disciples, including us, to obey? The answer to that question, is reported in John 13 following Jesus’ Last Supper with his disciples – during his farewell conversation with them according to the Gospel of John. Jesus said to them, **“My children, I shall not be with you very much longer. You will look for me; but I tell you now what I told the Jewish authorities, ‘You cannot go where I am going.’ And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples.”** So again, we get back to being in the same type of relationship with one another as that which we have with God – **one based on our Divine Parent’s Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love.**

Especially on this Father’s Day Sunday, it is good for all of us to take to heart – to remember the great importance of being in relationships which are based on self-giving and sacrificial love! **Not only are parents and grandparents called to raise our children and grandchildren in self-giving and sacrificially loving relationships, we are to teach them to manifest such relationships with their families and with all people. Indeed, we are to offer all people – no matter who they are – the invitation to be with us and our Divine Parent in such loving relationships!**

Just as each of our lives are transformed by God’s Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love, Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Healing, so **Jesus calls you and me with the Great Commission to seek to be in the same type of relationships with all people, so they too will experience the New Faith Relationship with God and New Life we have through Jesus Christ. Now what? Teach our children, one another, and all people the way of God’s Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love by living it out with them and by inviting everyone to join you in this New Loving Relationship with God and one another!** Be confident in your New Relationship with God through Christ and live it out with great hope for Jesus also promised in today’s Scripture, **“And I will be with you always, to the end of the age.”** Amen.