

To God Alone Be The Glory

On this Trinity Sunday, I am especially thankful to God for you. It may seem like a small thing, but there you sit. You could be anywhere else. But the Holy Spirit living in you motivated you to set aside this time to gather around God's Word, even though you know you're going to hear the same two basic messages you hear every week. 1) We are all rotting sinners, unworthy of even a smidgen of God's love. 2) But we are also cleansed, fresh children of God through faith in Jesus, heirs of eternal life with our gracious God. Yes, I'm grateful for you this Trinity Sunday!

A while back I attended a public event, met some interesting people, and got a chance to do some basic witnessing. I didn't even get as far as telling anyone that Jesus is their Savior from sin. So I was a long way from baptizing or teaching people, as Jesus commanded his followers to do. All I got to do was bring up how I learned yet another reason not to get stressed out: because God is so good at orchestrating things in such a way that they always happen at the right time, even when I think they should have happened earlier. Now, I got to share that message twice, but neither time did it open the door for a deeper conversation about Jesus as Savior, at least not yet.

The rest of my conversations that night

simply reinforced the fact that there is so little knowledge about God in our society. People talk about everything BUT the Lord. Is it that way where you work and hang out? And consider television. Programmers seem bent on never mentioning our Lord. It's as if they don't want us to think about him. Even on religious shows like "God Friended Me," does any of the characters ever say, "That is a sin against God. Such a sin makes a person worthy of God's wrath"? Do they ever point people to Jesus as the one who paid the awful penalty for all sins by his death on the cross, the one who took God's wrath on himself in our place? Please don't misunderstand. I'm not trying to rip apart any show with enough guts to teach the morality of the Ten Commandments. I'm simply trying to point out that almost everything around us seems intent on sending us the message: "Jesus is not your Savior. It's up to you to please God on your own, or not." Do you see this in our culture?

Nevertheless here you are. When you listen to God's Word, your actions lead me to conclude that Jesus is a big deal to you, that you believe he not only exists but sits at God's right hand interceding for you. Right now your tuning in tells other believers that they have not wasted their time worshiping today, that there is indeed something to this teaching that Jesus' life and death is why we are right with God.

The disciples didn't feel they were wasting their time either. Oh sure, there was no ski lift or helicopter to take them to the top of the mountain in Galilee—they had to hike. But they got to see the resurrected Jesus one more time. Now, I was always under the impression that it was only the Eleven who were present on this occasion. But there are a great number of Bible scholars who think this may be the occasion that the Apostle Paul was talking about in 1 Corinthians 15. There he says that on one occasion over 500 people saw Jesus at the same time. The Greek words that the Holy Spirit chose for Matthew to write down certainly allow for this understanding. If this was the occasion when 500+ people saw Jesus alive, then it's easy to understand why some doubted. For most of these 500 people, this was their first and only sighting of the resurrected Jesus. Remember how even the Eleven had had difficulty believing when they saw Jesus on that first Easter evening? Remember how Jesus ate a piece of fish in front of them to show them he was not a ghost? Remember how a week later he encouraged Thomas to touch his scars? By the time the events in our text happened, the Eleven were convinced, so they knelt down on the ground and worshipped Jesus. He had been their friend and their teacher. Now they also acknowledged him as their Lord and their Savior—their God. It's nice when

people acknowledge reality.

But soon Jesus would stop being visible to them. He would meet them once more down in Judea, near Jerusalem, and from there he would ascend to the Father's right hand to rule the nations and bring about blessing after blessing for his church at least until the year 2020. So it was time, time to get all the disciples ready to carry out the one task Jesus would leave his church, their 'prime directive': make all the nations his disciples.

Whoa! All the nations? Our goal is everyone in the whole world? Talk about mission impossible! The church hasn't called this "The Great Commission" for nothing. Imagine how those disciples felt. Pentecost would happen at least two weeks later; so the Holy Spirit hadn't yet come and filled them with courage and confidence and conviction. This commission must have been overwhelming!

It still is, don't you think? Less than two-thirds of the world is even nominally Christian. So our target audience is roughly 5 billion people. If we talked to 1000 people per day, it would take over three years just to reach one million people with the good news. Five billion people! Jesus, are you sure you know what you're asking? "*All authority in heaven and on earth is given to me,*" Jesus said, so that no one

would ask such a silly question.

When you think of authority, think of possessions. Let's take your cars, for example. I've arranged with some gangs from the Twin Cities to steal your cars and sell them. They were supposed to start about now ... yep, right on time; there they go. Wave good-bye to your cars. We'll all be walking from now on.

Now, if I had arranged for your car to be stolen, you'd be angry with me. Why? Because the cars are your possession. (Well, really they belong to God; we're just managing the cars for God). Only you have the **authority** to take your car and sell it. I have no right to commission anyone to take your car.

To give a great commission one must have great authority. Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth. Everything belongs to him, including us. I've heard at least a hundred people say, "No one can own you." But Jesus says he owns us. So if he says that 'making disciples' is to be at the top of our priority list in life, then what right do you or I ever have for ignoring this command, or worse, living as if Jesus doesn't exist? Do you ever find yourself going through a stretch of days or hours forgetting about Jesus? That's when the dirty jokes come out. That's

when we talk bad about someone else. That's when the cuss words fly. That's when we worry, as if Jesus doesn't have the power to make things turn out right. And it's not just a matter of forgetting. Sometimes we know Jesus is watching, and we do sinful things anyway.

Now, if you were the parent of a child who behaved this way, would you ask, "Why did you do that!?!?" I regularly encourage parents not to ask their children such a silly question as "why?" The answer is always the same. We know the answer from our own lives: "I did it because I wanted to, and I didn't really think about or care at that time what the consequences would be." Oh, that children and adults would be so honest about their sins all the time. Oh, that we would then immediately feel godly sorrow over such rebellion.

Want to know why? "*All authority in heaven and on earth is given to me,*" Jesus said. That means he has the authority to forgive all our sins. And why would he not forgive anyone who asks? He knows what it's like to suffer God's wrath for each sin everyone ever committed. Why would he want anyone to have to suffer a second time for those sins in hell because they refused to believe the gospel? He doesn't want that.

And that's exactly why he tells us to go make disciples. We know what it's like to rebel against God and be in deep trouble for it. We know what it's like to have that debt completely cancelled. Who **better** to go tell other sinners that Jesus died also for their sins and rose again? The angels can do a great job of praising God and declaring his glory. But they don't know what it's like to be forgiven! We do! We're free from sin and hell because of Jesus. The one with all the authority said so. Therefore **GO MAKE DISCIPLES**.

But how? "I'll give you special means," Jesus said. "Here's baptism. Try it on babies. It washes them clean on the inside. Works great on adults too, after you've taught them about my death on the cross for them, and my resurrection. Baptizing people is like putting my seal of approval on them. When I see this mark on their heads, I know they are adopted into my heavenly family. I love blessing them."

Jesus also gave us another means for making disciples: teaching. Teaching the world about Jesus starts with our behavior. For instance, the world likes to use bad words to punctuate their sentences, words like "hell, damn, I swear," the f-bomb, and God's name. When we purposely don't talk like the world, we are teaching the world that Jesus has made a difference in our lives.

When we say a quiet "Praise God" for good things that happen to us... When we stop during times of trouble and say a prayer for us or our co-workers... When we walk away while gossip is being shared, we are putting our faith out there in small ways. Sooner or later we'll bring Jesus up in a conversation. We'll be asked, "How's it going?" We'll reply, "Actually quite well, thank you very much." The curious will ask, "What makes things so good for you?" We could respond: "Well, I don't know if you hear this sort of thing every day, but I'm grateful that the Lord has taken the time to teach me how blessed I am." If we keep pointing at God's goodness to us, eventually God will present us with an opportunity to state the two messages you hear here every week. ¹We're sinners. ²We're forgiven in Jesus. That's teaching. By sharing these simple messages we will do exactly what our Savior told us to do: make disciples.

And he who has all authority in heaven and earth will be with us, and he will help us, and he will protect us. Don't be afraid. **GO MAKE DISCIPLES**.