

Please pray with me...

Open our senses so that we can see Christ in the people around us.

Amen

The Beginning

We have all been shocked by the coming of the virus and the stay at home orders. Then we were shocked again by the murder of George Floyd and protests which ensued. Protests which brought to the light the great injustice of the racial divide in our nation. The frustration, fear and anger in our country is at boiling point. We all recognize it and perhaps we can take a knee and pray for our country - its leaders and those who need to be healed.

Our world has been forever changed and we can never go back to the way it was. We now live in a world where a virus can kill over 110,000 people in our land in a few short months and shut down our country. A world where we question the idea of justice and living in peace. We have all been shocked. How would things be different if we understood our call to find and experience Christ in the people around us? It is time to reevaluate our ideas, thoughts, methods in living together. All of us who have ignored our common history must look at it with new eyes and see how we can act differently going forward. The time for transformation as begun.

The Telling

This Gospel, known as the Great Commission, tells of Jesus commissioning the eleven disciples. There are eleven disciples because Judas Iscariot killed himself after he betrayed Jesus. They are in Galilee, back where they started. Jesus has told the group to meet him on a certain mountain. He is planning to give some instructions and his time with them is short.

They arrive at the mountain together and the story tells us that some worshiped him and some doubted. That seems strange. These men have been together for a good three years. They witnessed healings and transformations of lives. They walked all over the countryside preaching the Good News. They saw Jesus walk on water. Some of them have seen him transfigured. Finally, they experienced the last supper with its drama including Judas leaving the group, the foot washing and the transformation of the bread and wine into Jesus' body and blood. They experienced the trial and conviction. They experienced his crucifixion, death and burial. They all experienced the resurrection in some way. For forty days after his death Jesus is with them. Here we are at the last moment of the Gospel of Matthew and they are on a mountain. Some worshipped and some doubted the story says. After all they have experienced, there was still room for doubt. These men who are about to become leaders of this young church still have doubts – how human. Perhaps they too had been shocked by what occurred around them. The Romans are still there, the oppression still occurs. There does not seem like there is any way to bring about

transformation in their society. Jesus rose from the dead and change does not seem to have come to their society.

Jesus commissions them by telling them that he has been given all authority in heaven and on earth. That authority comes from God, of which he is a part. The authority comes not from our faith in him but who he is. The scriptures say that Jesus, the founder of the realm of Love, the teacher of forgiveness, and the healer of humanity has authority over heaven and earth. This authority and the granting of this authority has nothing to do with us or whether we believe or doubt the truth of the Gospel.

Jesus then tells the disciples to go and make disciples. He tells them to do what he has done. Jesus gathered twelve people and worked and taught them how to live the abundant life of which God dreams. The life which brings peace and forgiveness into the world. Now, he sends them to all nations, to all parts of the world. St Hippolytus and pious tradition tells us

- Peter to Turkey, Italy and Rome
- Andrew to Jordan.
- John to Asia and island of Patmos
- James throughout Israel
- Philip to Turkey.
- Bartholomew to Turkey and India.
- Matthew to Iraq and Iran.
- Thomas to India.
- Jude to Lebanon.
- James, the son of Alphæus, Simon, the Zealot and Matthais stayed in Jerusalem.

This is why they are called Apostles because they are the sent ones. Jesus told them to go and in most cases, they did just that, they went.

Jesus charges them to baptize their disciples in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. This became the act to acknowledge one's faith – baptism. There is no method described in the Bible, or any eligibility test for baptism. So much of Church conflict would have been avoided if these two things were taught to us. Baptism, using this formula, is a public confession of faith. It is part of the transformation of a person into a Christian by recognizing the person's faith. The people who come to faith in Jesus and are baptized are to be taught everything Jesus has commanded them. We are to do what Jesus has done. Gather a set of believers and teach them the faith. The teaching primarily comes from the experiences one has living out the faith. Jesus commanded three things. Love God with your whole being, love your neighbor as yourself and love one another. These commands are to be obeyed and our faith is built upon them. These commandments help us interpret and understand all the stories in the Bible and from our heritage.

Jesus, perhaps thinking about the doubters, or those who are shocked, gives a word of reassurance. I am with you. Jesus is present for us, all of us. Jesus is there regardless of the circumstances we find ourselves in. Jesus is there because Jesus loves us. This statement is for us too, because he said he will be there until the end of time.

The Application

The church of today seems hesitant to live out the Great Commission. We live as if what Jesus said to the disciples as he turned them into apostles does not apply to us, or is too hard, or is too embarrassing and yet we too are being called to this work. We show the world that a community can live in love and that love can transform those around it. We get concerned that we will offend someone or we don't know enough about the Bible or the faith. Jesus has given us the way to live. How do we do it in this pluralistic society, a society filled with people of such varying beliefs. Jesus gave the method in his commission.

First we recognize the ideal and the prime motivation – Love. Jesus tells us to love all. Think of that statement where he said love your enemies. This is so difficult, and yet it is what we are called to do. This is the ideal - to live by the law of love. Based on this we make friends with those around us. We do this by being ourselves and living into our true selves. We serve people, we care for people, and we teach people when appropriate. We must remember that our business is to care and love our neighbors. It is God's business to transform them. We are not called to judge or diminish others. Evangelism is a method of loving another. Love does not operate from the principle "I need to change this person." It operates from the recognition of Christ in the other. It is a radical call. It will change us. It is much easier said

than done. Mother Teresa said, "Following Jesus is simple, but it is not easy".

The End

In this shocked world, the church is the institution which can provide the love, care and vision for this new reality. The people who have been touched by Jesus' healing presence are also those who have been called to love, serve and lead those around us.

Amen