



THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST – HOLY TRINITY

We Go Forth in the Triune God's Name

Matthew 28:16-20 (NIV)

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

What's the point? What's the point of getting up each day, going to work, going about daily tasks? Why am I here? We need a reason to live, a reason to exist. So, we search for meaning. We look at people, relationships, work, school, stuff to give us meaning, but these all give us short term meaning. They only bring us value as long as they exist. If people go away, work, school, relationships, stuff go away, we're lost and searching for the point of living. And if something or someone doesn't come and fill that void, we are left without meaning, without value, without reason to keep going.

After Jesus' death, this search for meaning may very well have been on the minds of the Eleven disciples. Jesus was gone. What do we do? If we go and preach, they'll kill us like Jesus. We can't win. What's even worth doing? Why go on? Let's just lock ourselves in this room. This is where the Eleven had been since Jesus' crucifixion on Good Friday.

But on Easter Sunday, an angel told the women who looking for Jesus, looking for purpose, for meaning, for value, that Jesus was not in the tomb, that he was, in fact, alive, raised from the dead! The angel told them to tell the disciples that Jesus was going ahead of them to Galilee, that there they will see Jesus again. Then Jesus himself met the women and told them the same thing. "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." (Matthew 28:10) Purpose! A reason to keep going! We will see Jesus again! The disciples listened to the women and went. "Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted." (verses 16-17)

They worshiped him; but some doubted. What's up with that? Here is Jesus in the flesh; what are you doubting? I think some doubted their purpose. If Jesus is here, everything can go back to the way it was. We can just follow around Jesus, learn from him while he takes care of us. We'll be valued by him, have a purpose to get up, to keep going. But Jesus also said that he was leaving us, that we couldn't follow where he was going. Will things go back to the way they were, or will Jesus take off and leave us again? Will he stay, giving us our meaning and purpose, or will that all go away again?

Jesus was still going away, going somewhere where his disciples couldn't follow, but he was not going to leave them as orphans – as evidenced by the giving of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost that we heard about last week. And he was not going to leave them without purpose. He told them, "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." (verses 19-20a) There it is: a mission, a purpose, a reason to keep going. Go! Make disciples of all nations everywhere. Baptize. Teach. It's a mission and a purpose that's given to us as well because we know that not all nations, not all people, are disciples of God. More are to be made!

We, like the Eleven, came here to worship Jesus. But how is our mission going? Does it look like it's going pretty badly? Even with roughly 30% of the world's population confessing to be Christian, that means that a majority of people, of the nations, are not disciples of God. And the numbers seem to be going down. We see people who once confessed to be Christian to be falling away, giving up meeting together. Yes, our congregation is growing, but does it feel like we are gaining ground among all nations or that we are treading water, maybe even that we're starting to sink? Are we actually fulfilling our mission from God? If not, are we the ones to blame because we're bad at doing it? Is the world to blame because it's so hostile at the idea of being disciples of God? Is God to blame because he's not actually changing hearts through his Word? Is God really with us on this mission or are we left on our own? Is it worth putting in more effort, continuing on? Are we doubting our mission, our purpose, our value?

Some of those disciples who were worshiping Jesus on that mountain in Galilee had doubts in their mission, their purpose, their value; we do too. But our doubts do not change what our God has done for us, what our God has done very uniquely for us as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – the Triune God.

God the Father gave you life and is still daily and richly providing you with everything you need for your body with all its automatic functions to the world turning from night to day, the oxygen in the air, the food on the table, the clothes you're wearing, the house you live in, the job that you have, the school you go to. He has not taken these from you, but continues to give you more of it. You rightly expect there to be oxygen in the air, that your lungs still breathe in and out, that food exists for you even when you're not sure where it will come from. You are still here all by God's gracious design and his active gifts that preserve you, gifts we observe and expect. And he's giving life to more people being born every day, people that he preserves and wants them to become his followers, his disciples, for their benefit.

Because God the Father has given us life and keeps preserving us so that we get to know what God the Son has done for us. He has, in time, in history, without a credible doubt, come into the world as God made flesh, our Immanuel, our God with us. He was born of a woman, born under God's law, to keep it all for us perfectly. And he did! He also gave his life into death to pay for all our sins, including our doubts about God and what he does, our doubts about whether his mission to us is worth our continued effort, doubts about whether we have value outside of family, friends, work, school, etc. Because Jesus still lives, having been raised from the dead, our sins are really paid for, without a doubt. Death is still defeated and will be annihilated in the end. Our mission to carry this message into the world is still valid, still worth it. Our worth is measured in the life and blood of Jesus, an accomplished act of love done for us, that we are totally forgiven, totally covered with Jesus' perfection. These facts are given us to fight our doubts.

For us here in this room, God the Holy Spirit has also done miraculous things for you. God the Father placed you around people who shared with you what God the Son had done for you. It was the Holy Spirit who miraculously caused you to believe this. He changed your stone-cold heart and replaced it with a heart of flesh, a heart that believed that God really did give you life, that God really did pay for your sins, that God really did cover you with perfection. God the Holy Spirit use the Word, used baptism, to adopt you into his family and clothe you with Christ's perfection. He has made you and me heirs of eternal life with God – Father, Son, & Holy Spirit. He has continued to teach us and increase our faith through the use of his Word, fighting the doubts that we have about who we are, what is our worth, what is our value, what is our purpose.

Already having worth and value and purpose because of what the Triune God has done, Jesus gives us even more reason to keep going. Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." (verse 18) Yeah, we live in a messed up world where most people are not Christian, and it is going to get worse. At the same time, though, Jesus assures us that because of his resurrection, because of his accomplished mission, he now holds all authority in heaven and on earth. Nothing is outside of his control. Nothing happens without him allowing it to happen. We may not see how the mission to make disciples of all nations is progressing, but God the Son rules heaven and earth in order to make it happen. He tells us this so that when we don't see the victories, when we have our doubts in what we are doing, whether or not we should continue, he makes sure that we know that he is still in control and so the mission is progressing.

What's more is that Jesus also tells his disciples and us, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (verse 20b) The Immanuel is true to his name. It was not just that he would be with a select few people while going about his mission here on earth. No, he remains the Immanuel as the one who is with us always to the end of the world. Yes, physically, he went where his disciples could not follow, but he sent the Holy Spirit, our Advocate, to still be with us. As God, Jesus also is with us always. Physically, he will come back and take us to be with him in heaven forever on the last day, which is the end of the age. You and I are never alone. Jesus, the Immanuel, is always with us. We are valued with his attention, his presence.

Until the end of the age, though, we have work to do. We have a mission to go and make disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching. We are part of a bigger story. Our worth and value and purpose are longer-term than the relationships we love, the job we do, the school we go to, the stuff we have. Our worth and value and purpose come from Triune God who is forever and who is forever with us. We share what our Triune God does with others so that others are added to this story, that others have our same worth, value, mission, and purpose – reasons for us to keep going every single day.

This mission, this purpose, is also a little scary and still raises from doubts. We don't know how our individual efforts will all play out, but we do know that what our Triune God has done for us will not change. Jesus still has all authority in heaven and earth, still in charge and ruling all things for our good, so this mission that he has given us will succeed. More will become disciples as we share our Triune God with others. With God's mission and purpose for us, we have reasons to keep on living, to keep on going every single day. We go forth in the Triune God's name. Amen.