

Sermon Notes

Date: January 7-8, 2012

Title: *Think Again*

Theme: *Evangelism is one of the most misunderstood words in the Christian vocabulary, and some of our misunderstandings keep us from ever giving it a try. We'll dispel the myths and discover that evangelism is more engaging and mysterious than we ever imagined.*

Text: Matthew 28:16-20 [This is the "full" periscope, and I would recommend we use it]

Matthew 28:16-20

Last words are important, and that's especially true when it comes to Matthew's gospel. The disciples had experienced the brutal death of their beloved friend and master, and with him went their hopes and dreams. But I would imagine that seeing Jesus alive again would have stunned them even more than seeing him die. Jesus' death, while tragic, was explainable. How do you explain a dead man coming alive again?

Back in 28:10 the resurrected Jesus had instructed the disciples to meet him in Galilee. The place where Jesus' ministry began would become the place where the disciples' ministry would begin. Can you imagine the journey, the conversations and the questions along the way? In verse 16 we're told that Jesus had instructed the disciples to meet him on a mountain in Galilee. The specific mountain is not named, but mountains hold a prominent place in Matthew's gospel (e.g. temptation, Sermon on the Mount, Transfiguration). When the disciples saw Jesus their reaction was mixed – some worshiped him and some doubted. Both responses seem somehow appropriate! And notice that Jesus did not chide the doubters, but gave all disciples the same commission.

Matthew 28:18-20 frames the ministry of Jesus' eleven remaining disciples. Jesus words contain four "alls" which capture much of what Jesus seeks to communicate. In fact, they pretty much capture the central message of Matthew's entire gospel:

All authority: God has now given the resurrected Jesus authority over all of creation, both heaven and earth. Not only does this say something important about the One whom the disciples continue to follow but it implies the authority with which the disciples will fulfill the mission Jesus is about to give them. We, too, are given this authority.

All nations: The disciples are to make disciples of all nations regardless of their race or nationality. There are no boundaries to this global mission.

All that I have commanded. Notice that Jesus did not call the disciples to make believers. He called them to make disciples, people who would not only believe but follow, obey Jesus' teachings. Of all the gospels Matthew's is the most "teaching based". It is literally structured around five major teaching sections. But Matthew has urged disciples to do what Jesus has taught over and over again. In fact the final parables of judgment in Matthew 25 center on the issue of doing, not just having faith.

I am with you always. The disciples are given a big commission. In a world without mass communication or mass transit this commission would have been overwhelming for eleven men. But Jesus reminds them that they will never be alone. Not only will they have Jesus' authority, Jesus himself will be with them. His Spirit will dwell in them and empower them to accomplish more than they could imagine.

Preaching Possibilities

Somewhere along the line the Great Commission became misunderstood as trying to present people with enough facts with enough charisma that people would make a decision. That decision is essentially to give intellectual assent to the notion that Jesus died on the cross, appeasing God's wrath so that God could forgive us, assuring us of our escape from hell and our welcome into heaven. Consider just a few of the ways in which this framework conflicts with the Great Commission:

- The burden is on us. We have to close the sale.
- It's all about information and decision.
- The focus is on what happens after you die.
- It proposes a transaction...God will do something if we will do something.

Today's text, however, suggests something quite different. The Great Commission:

- ...is built on a foundation of God's authority not our abilities.
- ...lays claim to people lives, not just their minds.
- ...focuses on life now and forever.
- ...is a proclamation of what God has already done Christ, a proclamation that creates faith which sets people free for joyful obedience.

Negative images of fulfilling the Great Commission are all around us: religious door-to-door callers, bullhorn guy and big tent revivals, to name just a few. While some people might be called to these methods we'll be presenting a more relational model, and should probably lay out the circle diagram and illustrate it this week. People need to understand that this is a process more often than an event. And at least two other notions bear mentioning this week:

- Lutheran evangelism has generally been understood as inviting people to church. While that's certainly not a bad thing to do, that's not what the Great Commission is about.
- This is not just a suggestion for some disciples. It is Jesus' clear command to all disciples.

What do we want people to know? *What the Great Commission is and isn't, and that it's Jesus' command for all disciples.*

What do we want people to do? *Articulate or write out why faith matters to you, and why it would matter that others have faith.*