

Missions

Matthew 28:18-20

Today, we continue our sermon series, *A New Beginning*. We have been called by God to take a faith journey together. In this journey, there are four important words we should bear in mind: **Grace, Transformation, Missions**, and **the Kingdom of God**. Let us look at the word, Missions.

I still remember a story that my seminary professor shared in a mission class. He was born in Mexico as his father was a missionary serving in Mexico. His name is **Charles VanEngen**. He is a mission scholar for other mission scholars. He told us that whenever he was invited to preach at churches, the senior pastors were usually out of town or on vacation. He thought it was ironic as he was asked to preach on missions, but the senior pastors who are supposed to play an important role in mobilizing their churches for missions were not present.

How about us? How should we think about missions? Our God is a missionary God. The Bible is God's redemptive story for all nations. The Bible reveals God's missionary heart. So, the Bible is about God's missionary work for all nations. The church in itself has a missionary nature, as the church is created to participate in God's mission.

As you can see in your bulletin today, the sermon title is not mission but *missions* with an "s". Why? Let me quote **Timothy Tennent** on the distinction between mission and *missions*.

"Mission refers to God's redemptive, historical initiative on behalf of His creation. In contrast, missions refers to all the specific and varied ways in which the church crosses cultural boundaries to reflect the life of the triune God in the world and, through that identity, participates in His mission, celebrating through word and deed the inbreaking of the New Creation." (Timothy Tennent, *Invitation to World Mission* (2010), p. 59.)

The distinction emphasizes our understanding of and role in God's mission. We are invited to participate in God's mission to redeem His creation. **"Mission is far more about God and who He is than about us and what we do."**

Today's scripture is one of the well-known mission Scriptures in the Bible. It is called **the Great Commission** in Matthew 28:18-20. But do you know that the Great Commission can be found in each of the Gospels in the New Testament?

Mark 16:15-16 (NRSV) “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved, but the one who does not believe will be condemned.”

Luke 24:46-49 (NRSV) “Thus it is written that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised, so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

John 20:21-23 (NIV) “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

All the Great Commissions in the Gospels were given from Jesus to his disciples according to the promises of God in the Old Testament. If each of the Gospels records the Great Commission from Jesus Christ, it means his disciples took his commission very seriously and intentionally carried it over to the following generations.

Now, let us focus on the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20. When Matthew wrote the Gospel to a Jewish Christian community in a Gentile city, the church faced two major problems. First, there were Jews in the community who were hostile toward the Jewish Christians. But the Jewish Christians had to reach out to the Jewish non-Christians to share the Gospel with them. The other problem was that the Jewish Christians were confused about new gentile Christians coming into their church. Both problems are about their Christian identity issue — Jews were against the Jewish Christians while gentiles were starting to embrace Christianity. That is the background of today’s Scripture.

Bible commentators say that the Great Commission is the climax and the summary of the entire gospel of Matthew. It is kind of a manifesto. So, to understand the book of Matthew, we must keep the Greatest Commission in mind as we read other stories in the Gospel.

1. Authority

“And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” (Matthew 28:18 NRSV)

What kind of authority does Jesus have? According to the Gospels, it is the authority to preach, forgive, heal, cast out demons, and perform miracles. All his actions can be explained in the phrase, “forgiveness of sins or salvation” (Matt. 9:6, Dan. 7:14). That same authority is given to us through the Holy Spirit. In the power of the Holy Spirit, we can preach, forgive, heal, cast out demons, and perform miracles.

Biblically, God gives us authority to bless, train, and protect people. In a nutshell, authority is given to us to serve people whom God has led into our lives.

I still remember one of my seminary professors, Charles Kraft, teaching on Christian authority. He said, “Satan is not afraid of Christians because they do not know what kind of authority they have from Jesus Christ. Instead, Satan is afraid that Christians will come to understand their authority and use it over Satan and its spiritual forces.” Are you using your authority from Jesus to participate in God’s mission?

2. Go and Make Disciples

“Go therefore 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 that I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19-20a NRSV)

There are two main verbs in the Great Commission. “Go” and “Make disciples”. If we have God’s grace or God’s love in our hearts, it continually pushes us to go to the world. This is called **centrifugal mission** (Revelation 5:6-10). The phrases starting with “baptizing” and “teaching” are modifying the verb “Make.” By doing so, it intensifies the meaning of making disciples. How can we make disciples? By baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and also by teaching them to obey everything that Jesus has commanded us.

We are a disciple-making community. Jesus’ disciples are simultaneously learners and teachers at the same time. They learn from their master to be more like their master. We are to learn Jesus’ teaching and live out his teaching to be a model of Jesus’ life, a token of God’s Kingdom on earth, and an ambassador of God’s grace *to heal, forgive, reconcile, and transform human hearts, communities, and the entire creation.*

3. I Am With You Always

“And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20b NRSV)

We are very familiar with this last scripture. It is Jesus Christ's promise to us about his constant presence, which means his grace is with us at all times until the last day of the world. We need to pay attention to the fact that this verse is given in the context of the Great Commission. This means that as we obey our roles as God's missionaries in the world, we can repeatedly experience the grace of His presence in our lives. His grace is given to us to heal, forgive, reconcile, and transform human hearts, including ours, communities, and the entire creation.

Let us remember that Jesus Christ's authority and presence (or grace) will empower us to fulfill the Great Commission. We don't have to worry about anything. We will participate in God's mission throughout our lives, especially through Carleton UMC.