

Trinity Sunday
June 4, 2023
Genesis 1:1-2:4
Acts 2:14, 22-36
Matthew 28:16-20

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This is the name into which you have been baptized. Nearly two-thousand years ago, Christ gave the Great Commission to His church, and since then, the Kingdom of God has been encroaching on more and more enemy territory. This reality should be front and center for your worldview. The growth of the Kingdom does not bear exclusively the name of the denomination you prefer. It does not consist exclusively of your countrymen, your political party, your Western culture, your economic theory, or your Eurocentric liberal tradition. If you have come to equate any of these with what it means to be Christian, you have badly misidentified the reality of what the Church is and what it means to be a disciple. As easy as it has been for many of us to live as Christians in America, we should not forget that Christ's Kingdom is not measured by percentages of a population within a particular border. Nor is the Church made according to our design or biases. To speak of the Church as if it is in decline is to ignore the reality of the Kingdom in the world. The authority for the Kingdom did not have a time-limit, and the mission of the Church has not reached its expiration date.

The authority for the Kingdom of God is derived from the Father and passed onto His Son. In our reading today, Matthew captures the fulfillment of Daniel's vision that he had while living in exile in Babylon. Daniel saw one who looked like a Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven. This Son of Man was given authority, glory, and sovereign power; all peoples, nations, and men of every language worshipped him. "His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed."¹ "Son of Man" was a divine title for the Messiah in some Jewish circles. They anticipated that this vision of Daniel's was a divine revelation of the Messiah. It is a fairly common mistake to assume that Son of God refers to Jesus' divinity and Son of Man refers to Jesus' humanity. The opposite is how the terms were understood. Jesus, properly appropriated the title, Son of Man, to Himself and declared, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."²

Jesus passed up a previous offer of a kingdom, the one offered to Him by Satan. That was an offer of a kingdom without the cross, merely temporal in nature. Now, after suffering the cross and setting the stage for the redemption of humanity, speaking as the victorious King, Christ extends to His people divine marching orders. There are

¹ Daniel 7:14.

² Matthew 28:18.

three parts to the orders He gives, and they constitute the Church's mission statement. First, He says to go and make disciples of all nations. A disciple was a student of a teacher. Discipleship required a surrendering of one's identity to that of the teacher. When Christ calls us to discipleship, it is a call to surrender our national, cultural, and ethnic heritage to Him. Discipleship is more than conformity to certain religious practices. It is about being transformed by Christ, learning from His teaching, and living according to His will. Make disciples; that is part one of the mission statement.

The second part of the mission statement is to baptize all nations in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Baptism is a rite rich in symbolism and analogs. For example, circumcision is related to baptism, so it can be seen as the rite by which God brings children into a covenantal relationship with Him. It is allegorically connected to the flood, so baptism is a sign of God's preservation of life and redemption. It is a washing of rebirth, so baptism is how we are born again. Baptism was also the way Gentile converts to Judaism marked their conversion, so baptism can be seen as how Gentiles become the ingrafted branches of Israel in Christ. Baptism is also related to the mikveh, the ritual bath taken by an unclean Jew before being allowed to participate in the religious life of Israel, so it can be seen as the rite of purification allowing us to participate in the priesthood of all believers. Far from a perfunctory rite assuring access to heaven, baptism is a concrete step along the path of following Christ. Baptism is where you are crucified with Christ, where you die to your old self, and where you rise to a new life which is wholly identified with His. Baptize the nations; that is part two of the mission statement.

The third part of the mission statement is we are to teach others to obey what Christ has commanded. If we are to teach obedience, we ought to demonstrate obedience. This brings us back to discipleship because discipleship is about obedience in following Christ. Admittedly, we do not always obey perfectly. If we could, we would not need Jesus, and we would have our own gaggle of disciples chasing after us, making us their gurus. It is all too human to veer off into disobedience, even after becoming a disciple, even after baptism. We allow ideology to take the place of wisdom and truth. We seek to have the Church operate alongside the politics of power, and consider it a moral loss when our party is not in charge. Nationalism blinds us to what God is accomplishing in His Church, diminishing it because it is not being done among us, as if we matter more. None of this reflects humble faith in Christ. None of this demonstrates obedience in His Kingdom. None of this is in keeping with His mission statement to us.

Just as things start to come unglued for us, Christ reminds us of who He is and what He came to do. He doesn't leave us to fly off the rails of obedience. He draws us back toward obedience in Him. I worked for a guy who had this sign that said, "Rule #1: The boss is always right. Rule #2: The boss is wrong sometimes. Rule #3: If you

believe rule two, see rule one.” The solution to our disobedience is to return to parts one and two of our mission statement. Forgiven and renewed, we take up part three again. That is what repentance looks like. You are never done being a disciple. You are never done with your baptismal life. You are certainly never done with obedience. Repentance is to turn toward Jesus, to turn away from sin and toward His cross. Being drawn before the cross, where the ground is level to all people, is the way of discipleship, the way of baptism, and the way of obedience.

By holding to this mission statement, Christ expands His Kingdom as His Church shines His light into the darkest corners of the world. The Church makes disciples by proclaiming the Gospel to all people with the assurance that Jesus is with us. “Surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Do you believe it? If we believe it, why is there so much anxiety and insecurity among Christians in America? The Euro-American emphasis we have on church history has made us short-sighted and narrowly focused. No continent can claim to be the center of global Christianity today. We ought to have a broader, more historical perspective of what the Church is, and our understanding of the Church ought to be shaped by His mission statement for us. When viewed from this perspective, we need not be pessimistic about the success of the Great Commission.

On what authority is our confidence built? Our confidence is in the God and Father of all creation. Our confidence is in the Son of Man, the Messianic King. Our confidence is in the Holy Spirit, the breath of God that gives life to all life. The Father has given authority on earth and in heaven to His Son. His Kingdom is everlasting and cannot be destroyed. It is false to assume that this reality only awaits us in heaven. This reality is the one that exists in Christ, in this life and into life everlasting. There is no other authority which is greater. It is under His authority that we operate, sometimes in the formal institutions of denominations, but for millions of Christians, His authority reaches into quarters where there is no formal structure. God’s work in the world continues as His name is proclaimed openly, and in some places where it is whispered in dark corners. But the light of His truth breaks through the darkness and reveals the glory of Christ as the world’s Redeemer either way.

There is a lot of handwringing about what can be done to reverse the trends in the West. We already know the solution. It is found in our mission statement. Make disciples of all nations, baptize them into the faith, teach them to follow Christ, and show them what that looks like. Christ is the One with all authority over heaven and earth. His Kingdom is not in retreat. And we are still His baptized obedient disciples, residents under His gracious rule, redeemed and restored to this life we live together.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.