



Assembly Weekend Sermon, June 11, 2017

This sermon by Bishop Jon Anderson has also been created to allow its use in the coming months for worship supply to be read or to show the video.

Greeting –

I greet you, sisters and brothers in Christ, from all the baptized ones, congregations, and institutions of the Southwestern Minnesota Synod. God has embraced us in God's mission for this world. God's Spirit is at work equipping God's people. Together we have what we need to deepen congregational vitality, enhance local and global mission, and develop servant leaders. Thanks for your personal and congregation's ministry in Christ's name.

The Great Commission –

Matthew 28:16-20 ¹⁶Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Grace to you and peace, sisters and brothers in Christ, from our Lord Jesus, who calls us to follow him, make disciples, baptize, teach, and love in God's Triune name. Grace to you and peace from our God and Lord, who promises to be with us always. Amen.

Are you ready to have your church grow?

At an ordination last week, I heard a guest pastor ask the congregation this question. His disciple, now a soon-to-be new pastor who had worked with him for four years, sat before them. The pastor spoke with confidence – with faith. The question was inside of one of the better ordination sermons I have heard. His question has really agitated me.

Are we ready to grow our congregations and synod or just try to sustain them? Are we willing to do what it will take to live deeper into this Great Commission?

It took my breath away. It was so bold. The preaching mentor believed God will use the new pastor and the congregation in dramatic ways. His question has stuck in my heard, mind, and imagination since that day. Are you ready to have your church grow? God wants to grow your congregation. Are your ready to grow as Christ followers? God wants to grow your faith deep and wide. Jesus commissioned his disciples to grow his movement deep and wide. Today's lesson proclaims the law of Christ's longing and promise of his presence and empowerment.

God wants to grow your synod. Are we ready to grow? I think if we are honest, we don't know if we can. Many are discouraged. We are tired. Many of us are defeated by the fact our friends and children are less committed to the faith than we are. Too often our congregations get stuck in the patterns and history of the past instead of working together to accomplish our commission. Our souls are weary, fragile, and broken. The tide seems to be flowing away from us. Yet, inside of every crisis is an opportunity. It is ultimately God who will grow God's Church. God is at work in our midst so that we could grow in more ways than numbers...

so we could grow by expanding our mission...

so that we could become more effective and fruitful in stewarding the Good News we know in Jesus through his cross and resurrection...

and grow the number of Christ's disciples, too.

When you are feeling anxious, afraid, unsure, remember Jesus' promise, "I will be with you always...even to the end of the age."

I am going to dare to use the E word...because the Great Commission is about the E word – EVANGELIZING. In a world full of dangers, dread, anxiety, alienation, growing hateful rhetoric and actions, we need the Good News Jesus brings. God is not against us. God wants to turn us around when we get lost. God wants to dig us out of whatever

we are stuck in. God wants to set us free in a time when many want to turn the Good News into bad news of judgmentalism and fear. We need to hear the Good News.

In a world of crushing law that stinks of decay and death, we need to hear the Good News. God loves you and me. The promise of Jesus is, "I will be with you always...even to the end of the age."

I need to hear the Good News every day; it is not just people outside the church or faith. For some of us, we have fragile souls wounded by the intensity of life and a world that feels like it is spinning out of control. Others of us have broken souls that have been damaged by tragic death, our foolish mistakes, or others that have led to damage and despair. Others of us are weary from running as fast as we can trying to stay ahead of the threats in our life and in this world. In our anxiety, we lose the joy of soaking up life's beauty and accepting our limits while claiming our gifts and capacity to make a difference in the many callings God has given us each in our way. The great news is that Jesus promises to the disciples, his followers back then and to us now, that we will not be left as orphans. Jesus promises, "I will be with you always...to the end of the age."

Jesus commissions us in today's lesson to make disciples. We know that while our efforts at inviting, sharing the Good News, and practicing our faith matter, God ultimately is the one who inspires people to learn from and follow Jesus. "Disciple", the word, is as simple as being someone learning from a teacher. God's Spirit is sending us with today's text to engage in disciple making, disciple developing, inviting people to learn from Jesus with us. Jesus commissions us to share what he has taught us in his actions and words. People learn from our words and actions. How we live and act matters. God's decision to reach out to all people and to love us are the most important.

As Eugene Peterson translates it, God authorizes you all to go and train everyone you meet in this way of life. God wants to see God's Church multiply. Now, I am not just talking about the Lutheran ways of growing families. I am talking about our actually reaching out and inviting, reaching out and listening, reaching out and serving together, reaching out and being the little Christs with skin on them that people need. Like is

often said, you may be the only book people get to read about the one who God sent to re-connect, transform, and set free people.

Don't make it too difficult; it is as simple as God's grace washing us in our baptism. Don't make it too difficult; it is as simple as God feeding us with a foretaste of the kingdom around the table of grace. Don't make it too difficult; it is as simple as learning from our teacher, Jesus. Don't make it too difficult; as Luther said, it is as simple as telling another beggar where to be fed.

God is reforming us personally. God is reforming our congregation and the larger church. It is hard to be in the birth canal of change, where we cannot see where God is leading us. But the way we best observe the reformation anniversary is to beg for God's reforming grace to do its work on us – on us all – because we know that Jesus promises to be with us always to the end of the age.

Disciples like the ones in today's story both worship Jesus and live with uncertainty. Faith lives with a mixture of faith and doubt. To be a strong Christian means you know your weakness and own it. To be a strong church means you know you are far from perfect and beg that God would continue to work on you. To be a missional and healthy synod, we know that our only hope is the promise of Jesus. "I will be with you always"...the crucified and resurrected one..."to the end of the age." Amen.