

The Lord's Message: The Great Commission

Date: May 29, 2022

Where: Tilghman United Methodist Church

Scripture Reference: Matthew 28:16-20

This sermon is entitled, "The Great Commission." In most Bibles, this is the title that is given to this passage of scripture. There are many commissions that are found in the Bible. Moses' commission to Joshua and the people of Israel is recorded in Deuteronomy 31-33. David's commission to Solomon is found in 1 Kings 2:1-9. David's commission to Solomon and the officials of Israel is reported in 1 Chronicles 28 - 29:1-20. Elijah's commission to Elisa is chronicled in 2 Kings 2: 9-10. Jacob's commission to Joseph and his brothers is documented in Genesis 48-49. There are more found in the Old Testament. I am sure that you can think of others. There are also commissions found in the New Testament. The entire book of 2 Timothy is Paul's commission to Timothy. An excerpt from **2 Timothy 4:6-8**. All of these commissions are final instructions before the person passes away. My good friend, Sam Walls, passed away on Tuesday this week. He had given me instructions about what he wanted for his funeral service. I followed them to a tee. He gave instructions several weeks ago to his son and step daughter. These final instructions were his commission.

Let us pray.

Jesus knows that He is going to ascend to His Father. He needs to give final instructions to His disciples and to those that would come after them; us. We, who believe that Jesus is the Son of God, need to listen to these important words. That is why these final words of Jesus are called The Great Commission.

Let us take time to talk about the elephant in the room. Why are there differing ending accounts between The Gospels? Matthew ends with the Great Commission, and no mention of ascension. Mark has a possible later addition that has a commission and then Jesus ascending to Heaven. Luke has a commission and then Jesus ascending to Heaven. Of course, Luke's second book, Acts, begins with the Ascension. John ends with no mention of an ascension, just that "these things are written down, so that you would know that the testimony of the writer is true." I can understand the confusion that can be developed by comparing these four gospel writers. Even though Matthew and John do not mention the Ascension that does not mean they did not imply it. There are reasons to believe that this was going to happen. In **John 6:62**, it reads. You might be thinking why did the pastor go through all of this. The reason is that a commission, or final instructions, cannot be carried out if the person giving the instructions is still present. There has to be a trust factor, or faith, that the instructions will be carried out.

Jesus knows that His time in human form is coming to an end here on earth. Jesus is leaving. Jesus must leave a commission, or final instructions, for His disciples and the believers that would come after them. Jesus put His faith and trust in His disciples and His believers to carry out His final instructions or The Great Commission.

Jesus calls a meeting on top of a mountain in Galilee with eleven disciples. There were possibly others with them. This reminds me of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. When Jesus took Peter, James and John with Him. There on the mountain they were joined by Moses and Elijah and at the end, God. Jesus' appearance was changed to dazzling white. Jesus may have had that same appearance. In **Matthew 28:17**, the people fell down and worshipped Jesus.

The last part of the verse is troubling, "but some doubted." How could they doubt? They had been with Jesus for 40 days. Jesus had appeared to all of them. They all had, at one time, doubted but now they should have no doubts. Why would the Bible tell us that some doubted? I did some research. The Greek word that is used here that is translated as doubted is "distazo." Distazo can be translated as to hesitate or to waver. The Greek word for doubted as in unbelief or hesitate to believe is "apistia." I think that were so struck by Jesus' appearance that they were hesitant. In **Mark 9:5-6**, Peter was hesitant on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Jesus senses this hesitation or this wavering, so Jesus begins with "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." In other words, "Do not be afraid." Do not hesitate. Do not waver. You can do this. Matthew often used the writings in the Old Testament to bring proof that the Coming of the Messiah, proclaimed in the Old Testament, is fulfilled in his day by Jesus. In **Daniel 7:13-14**, Daniel talks about the Son of Man being given all the power and authority in heaven and on the earth. The person that Daniel sees is Jesus. Jesus has given all the power and authority in heaven and on the earth to His disciples and to us, His believers. What do we need to fear? Nothing.

Without hesitation, without wavering, with all the power that is in heaven and on earth, what is Jesus calling us to do? To go and make disciples, **Matthew 28:19a**. In **Acts 1:8b**, "you will be my witness in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." This does not mean that we are called to be missionaries. Instead, this means that we are all called to be in mission. Missionaries are called to a different area. People in mission are called to work in their area of influence. That means in your family, your friends, your workplace and in your community.

This is where the Body of Christ is failing. I think that we are doing a very poor job of making disciples. The work of making disciples is not easy. It does require work. It does require time. It does require us being vulnerable.

One of the best means that I found for making disciples I learned from the Walk to Emmaus. Their means of making disciples are to: make a friend, be a friend and bring your friend to Christ.

You need to start with make a friend. Who do you know that needs a friend? Is it someone in your family? Is it someone in your workplace? Is it someone in your neighborhood? In order to make a friend, you need to develop a relation with them. You need to know their first name. You need to get to know them. We all have biases, but our biases should not prevent us from starting a relationship. We should see people as God sees people, as His children created in His image. We should also avoid making transactional friendship, and instead authentic friendship. Transactional friendship is to make a friend, so that we can have more people in church or so that they can do something for us. An example of this is the old adage, "I scratch your back, you scratch mine." People will immediately be turned off by transactional friendship. Too often the church opens a food pantry so that they can increase church attendance. Then, when the people that are coming to the food pantry do not come to church, then the church people get upset. The church has opened the food pantry for the wrong reason. They opened the food pantry to increase church attendance and not to meet the needs of those that are less fortunate. Do not get me wrong. This church's outreach program is done for the right reason. We love people and we want people who are hungry to be fed both physically and spiritually.

Now, being a friend requires commitment. Warning, to be a friend does not mean for us to be a door mat. A door mat is a person that allows another to walk all over them. Our new friend is constantly asking us to give them money. Our new friend is constantly asking us to do tasks that they can do. That person has now made us into a door mat. You need to explain to the person that you want to get to know them, but you are not going to be a doormat. If this persists, then you need to end the relationship. This can be a messy situation as well. In order to be a friend we need to be committed to getting to know this person. The best way is spending time with this friend. I do not mean every hour of the day, but calling this friend sometime. When you see the person stop and say hello. Also, we need to be authentic in our walk with Jesus. Our friend needs to see that we place an importance on being a follower of Christ. We need to act on Sunday the same way that we do throughout the week. Let your friend know that going to church on Sunday is important to you. Let your friend know that reading your Bible is important to you. Let your friend know that praying is important to you and that you are praying for them.

This is important, because this leads into our next phase, which can take a long time. Bring that friend to Christ. We should not rush into this. We need to be patient. We need to pray. The more our friend sees us and gets to know us, then this brings us opportunities to talk openly about Jesus.

This is all part of what Jesus calls baptism, **Matthew 28:19b**. I do not want you to think that Jesus wants you to go around throwing water on everybody or trying to immerse everyone in Harris Creek or the Chesapeake Bay. What Jesus is telling His disciples and believers is by making relationship with a person, then your life becomes the mechanism of teaching them about how much God loves them and wants to have a relationship with them through His Son, Jesus. The first step of a new disciple is to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior and to live their life identified with Him. This is what the sacrament of Baptism is all about. In the sacrament of Baptism, we die to self and rise to Christ. It is an outward sign of an inward grace.

The second part of a new disciple is to learn, **Matthew 28:20a**. Jesus says to teach them to “obey everything I have commanded you.” I do not think that Jesus would have wanted these new disciples to learn by classroom teaching. I think that Jesus wanted them to learn by observing how we live our life. We are to set the example for how they will know Jesus and understand how they are to live their lives for Him.

The wonderful part of all of this is that we do not do this on our own. We have all the Trinity to guide us, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, **Matthew 28:19c**. We have the body of Christ, the community of faith, the Church to help us with discipling.

The other Good News is that Jesus will never leave us, but He will be with us always, **Matthew 28:20b**.

So, community of faith, what is stopping us from making a friend? Amen.