

What the Church Must Remember (Matthew 28:16-20)

Today is Trinity Sunday. What is Trinity Sunday? Trinity Sunday is the first Sunday after Pentecost to honor the Holy Trinity—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Although the word “trinity” does not appear in Scripture, it is taught in our Scripture reading today in verses 18-20 and in 2 Corinthians (13:14).

On Trinity Sunday, the Christian Church brings to remembrance how Christians should respond to the love God has shown us, praising him, and giving him glory. We remember the Father as our Creator, the Son as our Savior, and the Holy Spirit as our comforter.

Now let's get to our Scripture reading from Matthew. The disciples worshipped, but they doubted. Doubted what? Jesus was standing right before them, talking to them! Maybe Matthew doesn't mean that they doubted whether Jesus had risen from the dead. Maybe their doubts were about

themselves. Could they really continue Jesus' ministry without him?

What the Church Must Remember
of 9

page 2

Jesus did not share their worry. Instead, he sent them out with a Great Commission—to make disciples of all nations, to teach, and baptize in his name. It was a tall order. And he left no plan B.

By extension, we are called to carry on that same work—to make disciples. Or, as may be more grammatically correct in the original Greek of Matthew's Gospel: *to disciple*. To engage in this work, we must understand what it means to be a disciple, and dive in to how we can best disciple others.

There is still no plan B. We are Jesus' plan. How does that responsibility feel? Do we wonder whether we are up to it? Do we have doubts about our ability? We're in good company. Even Jesus' closest companions, the ones who had apprenticed under him for three years, had their doubts. But he

called them anyway. He calls us too. He calls you.
He calls me.

What the Church Must Remember
3 of 9

page

Best of all, we don't do it alone. Jesus promised to be with us always, even to the end of the age. We are never alone!

Today's Scripture reading is the dramatic conclusion of Matthew's Gospel, and the final words of the risen Christ. And I believe a person's last words are immeasurably valuable. The words before death are significant because often they crystalize the actions of the individual's life. They can also reflect the priorities of that person's life. Here are some examples of the last words of famous people. Beethoven's last words were "Too bad! It's too late." St. Francis of Assisi's last words were "Welcome, Sister Death." Knowing death was imminent, John Wesley said, "The best part is God is with us."

When Woodrow Wilson's physician told him he was dying, President Wilson replied, "I am ready."

This morning we look at the last words of our Savior. Jesus talks to the church about his work in the world.

What the Church Must Remember page
4 of 9

He reminds the church of its task to do his work. He wants *the church to remember* some important things.

First, the church must *make* disciples. In the first part of verse 19, our Lord says just before he ascends, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations." The imperative verb "teach" expresses the command: "Go make disciples."

Who is to be discipled? Jesus says that all nations are to be discipled. The gospel is for the whole world. How are we to disciple? It is to be done by evangelism—by sharing the good news with others.

A tender story about John A. Broadus, former president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary,

illustrates the point. When Broadus was only 16, he became a Christian. Encouraged to talk to his unsaved friends about Jesus, young Broadus spoke to a mentally retarded friend named Sandy about his need to be saved. Sandy made a confession of faith.

What the Church Must Remember
of 9

page 5

Whenever they met after that, Sandy would smile and say, "Howdy, John. Thankee, John."

Broadus later related, "And if ever I reach the heavenly home and walk the golden streets, I know the first person to meet me will be Sandy, coming and saying again, "Howdy, John. Thankee John."

It is our business to make disciples.

Second, the church must mark disciples. When persons enter military service, they swear allegiance to the constitution of the United States. That makes them soldiers. When they're assigned to a base,

they're given uniforms. That marks them as soldiers.

Baptism is that initial act in the life of new believers that marks them as believers. Jesus is referring to this in verse 19: "baptizing then in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

Who is to be baptized? The answer is clear: those who have been taught. Why are they to be baptized? Jesus commands it. Cornelius, Lydia, and the Ethiopian

What the Church Must Remember
of 9

page 6

eunuch all responded to the teachings about Christ with baptism. How is it to be done? It is to be done publicly, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Third, the church must strengthen its disciples. Verse 20 mandates that the church strengthen its disciples, "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Too many of our churches are strong in making and marking

disciples, but weak in maturing them. The neglect is tragic.

What needs to be taught to strengthen disciples? Jesus gives us the answer in the reassuring words of verse 20, “All things whatsoever I have commanded you.” He gave these words because he knew how lonely they would feel when the full burden of the task of spreading the gospel became theirs. He would no longer be present with them physically. They would no longer see his look of encouragement or hear his comforting voice.

Knowing the weakness of human

What the Church Must Remember

page

7 of 9

nature, he consoled them with the truth that he would still be with them in the person of his Holy Spirit, and would assist them in preaching, teaching, living and witnessing. As you walk the Christiann pathway, remember that Jesus is always with you. Because as Christ sends us, he always goes with us. As the Lord was with Peter, James and John,

Paul and Barnabas, so he will be with us as we continue to make disciples, until the end of the age.

What are these things to be taught? Jesus has commanded believers to “observe all things,” More than the sacrifice of fatted rams, the Lord God wants the obedience of his people.

No one can say, “The Lord hasn’t called me.” Today we have heard the Lord’s command. Some will leave the comfort of home and go where Christ is not known. Most of us will make disciples where we live. But having heard the good news of Jesus, we must now make him known to the world.

What the Church Must Remember

page

8 of 9

When Pompeii was destroyed by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79, the heat and ashes suddenly overwhelmed many of the citizens of the city. They were killed instantly—while even in motion—and were preserved in their activity. Among those suddenly turned to stone was a Roman soldier. When evacuated centuries later, he was

standing at his post guarding the doomed city. We must not be dead-frozen soldiers, who only stand mechanically at our posts. Rather, we must be alive and vigorous, remembering the things that the church must remember as told to us by Christ.

So, what are the things we can learn from this Scripture reading from Matthew?

Before ascending to heaven, Jesus reassured his disciples and that promise of his continual presence provides comfort and strength, reminding us that we are never alone in our journey of faith. The Great

What the Church Must Remember page
9 of 9

Commission of verses 19-20 challenges us to actively share the gospel and nurture others in their faith, expanding God's kingdom on earth. The mention of the disciples' doubt is an honest portrayal that faith is a journey and that it is okay to have questions, but we are encouraged to seek answers and grow in our understanding of God.

Please bow your heads in prayer.

Heavenly Father, it is our desire to know you more, to learn more of you, and to become a true disciple of Jesus Christ. Give us a teachable spirit, so that we may grow in grace. And we pray that you would enable us to go and disciple others in your strength, so that together we come to a knowledge of the truth in Christ Jesus. We ask this in the name of your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**