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**Advent 1 C, December 1, 2024**

**"Called to Reach the Nations "**

**Read: Luke 19: 28 – 40 and/or Memorize: Luke 19: 39 – 40**

**What's happening around the world today? All we need to do is watch the news, read the newspaper, search the Internet and you're going to hear any of recurring themes. All around the world, people are hurting, afraid, lonely, overwhelmed, and in many instances trying to escape from bondage to sin. They have little or no hope, and unfortunately, for many of them, they're looking in the wrong place and direction to find some.**

**What's a person to do? Well, that's where we are ahead as Christians. We have an answer, and a command to proclaim that answer to the nations. It seems appropriate that on this first Sunday of the new church year, we should talk about our answer and our mandate.**

**Unless you've been living on another planet, you've probably heard of Jesus' command to go make disciples in Matthew 28:16 through 20. He gave that commission to eleven disciples. Judas unfortunately, had killed himself. They were on a mountain in Galilee, where Jesus had told them to meet Him after his resurrection.**

**Just imagine what it must've been like for them. They had experienced the disappointment of the crucifixion. For three days, they moped around, locked themselves up in the upper room, where they had celebrated Passover with Jesus. Then they come back to that upper room on Easter Sunday, not because it was Easter, and they expected to see Jesus, but because they were afraid of the Jews and they didn't know what else to do.**

**The women had come to them and told them they had seen Jesus. They didn't believe them. Luke even goes so far as to say that it was idle chatter by hysterical women. In light of that, we probably could forgive the disciples, for not believing.**

**But now we're beyond that. Matthew tells us that they were obedient to Jesus and His instructions to meet Him. They went to that mountain in Galilee. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him even though Matthew says some of them doubted. It's here in the midst of all those highs and lows, that Jesus makes an incredible statement.**

He tells the disciples that all authority has been given to Him. He is, in fact, the Lord of all because God has put Him in charge of His creation. He is going to give them some of that authority to be able to carry out His mission.

He makes a great command: He has come for all people. His message is not just for Jewish nation, but for all nations.

He makes promise: He will always be with those who follow Him. He tells them what the mission is. We, who are followers of Jesus are to go, but I think we need to interpret that a little bit. So often we think that going means we have to pick a destination and get there. A lot of times we think it means leaving where we are to go to a new destination.

But the Greek gives us another perspective also. It's not that we need to go somewhere, but rather, as we go, because we're all going someplace, we're to carry out this mission that Jesus has given us as we are on our way.

It's not that we have to go to some foreign nation. We might just cross the street, because there are people who don't know Jesus there. We might go on vacation and find someone who wants to know about Jesus. We might intentionally invite a friend who we know doesn't know Jesus to have dinner with us.

So, as we go and meet people are we supposed to just spring Jesus on them? No! We're trying to develop a relationship with them. We want to get to know them and let them get to know us. And in the course of things, they might ask us questions like, how do we deal with all the problems we face in life? How do we deal with the separation between people in our family? How do we break through the barriers that separate us from one another?

In those conversations we get the opportunity to talk about how much Jesus loves them and us. That's how we can begin to intentionally make disciples. When you make something, you normally start out with a plan. You work to make the plan take shape and you continue to form it as you're going through it.

Sometimes you learn what you're doing isn't working and you have to do something different. Other times, you're really excited. The plan is working. The reality is we are all, "a work in progress" waiting for God to finish His good work in us.

I think sometimes that's one of the problems that we, the Church, face. People on the outside, sometimes think that we believe we are the insiders, who have arrived. The truth is, none of us "arrives" on our own. We need the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to guide and direct us.

**We also need some other thing that's really important. We need the family of God, to help and pray for us because we are all definitely, a work in progress. We don't have it all together for ourselves. We're still trying to learn and grow and be what God wants us to be.**

**We're on our way, we know there are some things we should be doing: we are to baptize. Why do we do that? Because Jesus tells us to and we want to be obedient to Him. Baptism paints a picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Paul reminds us about that in Romans 6, the great baptism chapter. Paul says that in the waters of baptism, we die to sin to become alive to God.**

**We want to teach others to obey. We want them to understand also that that's not just a one-time thing. The Greek word is that we are to keep on teaching them, just as we are to go along the way. Growing in Christ is not a destination, but a process. You are never too old to learn something new about Jesus. In fact, it would be startling if we ever knew everything about Jesus.**

**The other thing we want to remember is that God is with us. That's another part of the promise of Jesus. He says He will always be with us. We're not on our own in this going, teaching and baptizing. Day after day, through peaks and valleys, God goes with us through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.**

**Here's where we face a problem: we sometimes want all the privileges of God's love, without accepting the responsibility of fulfilling God's command to go to all the nations. Obedient Christians equal active minds and feet. Every local church has a part in that global mandate: Who are we to share Jesus' truth with? Our neighbors, and the nations. It's not an either or the other choice.**

**Whether we recognize it or not, wherever we go, we are a witness for Jesus. What kind of witness depends on what we do. This is how Matthew tells us to go make disciples, "Go, be my witness." The Ascension of Jesus was a big red launch button, launching the church into the Roman Empire, which was thought to be all the world at that time.**

**The story of the Gospel is Jesus' moving towards Jerusalem and the cross. The story of Acts is the church's moving beyond Jerusalem into the mission field of the world. It was never an option to not do that.**

**And here's the thing: it's not that we go to those around us first, and when we've taught all of them all about Jesus, then we can start thinking about maybe going to Bloomfield or Shortsville. Once, we told all of them about Jesus, then we can move out farther.**

**It's that we're doing it all at the same time. Sometimes we do it personally. At other times, we are the supporters of those who go. In a few minutes will be praying for our missionaries and their families whom we know, and who many of us support in helping us to accomplish the mission Jesus has given us.**

**So, what does it mean to be a missionary? It is someone who crosses the boundaries. It might be the invisible line between the yards in your neighborhood. On the other hand, it might be the geopolitical lines on a map. It might even be talking to people who don't talk our language, or live according to our social or economic status or ethnicity.**

**We meet people where we go to school, where we go to work, or where we go to the Y or Wegmans. The work of spreading the Gospel is not just to be done by professional people, like pastors or "missionaries." It's done by every one of us. It's a good thing for us to remember as we begin this church year. God will give us the opportunity. The question is, will we take it?**

**Remember, that when Jesus ascended, the disciples were standing there, looking up into the sky, just wondering what to do next. An angel asked them, "What are you doing standing around?"**

**If you're not sure if you can do the task of the Great Commission, remember these words of Jesus first of all: Matthew 28: 20: "I am with you always." Jesus is not asking you to do this on your own. He's asking you to do it with Him.**

**If you wonder if you can do it, here's some great news for you in Acts 1: 8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you." God is with us. Gives give us His power. We have no excuse not to be obedient to the Great Commission of our Lord. As we begin this year, let us recommit ourselves to being Great Commission Christians.**

**Count me in: In obedience to Jesus' command, will you intentionally seek to share His love with others, so that they may know Him also?**