

Worship at home
May 29, 2022
7th Sunday of Easter



“The Great Commission”

God calls us to worship:

The Lord is risen!
He is risen indeed!

Psalm 97 (*read responsively*)

Hymn: #262 “Come to us, beloved stranger”

We offer our prayers:

Prayers of Praise and Supplication:

God of glory and majesty,
God of mystery and mercy,
in Christ Jesus
you came to live among us, sharing in our joys and sorrows.
After he suffered and died for our sake,
you raised him and took him up in glory so that he might fulfill all things.
As our ascended Lord,
he gives hope to your people in all places,
in every generation and every situation.
So we claim that hope this day,
for ourselves and for the world you love,
offering you our praise and worship in the name of Jesus Christ,
who now lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. Amen.

Prayer of Confession (unison):

**God of mercy:
you have called us to be thankful
for your good gifts to us,
but too often we have taken them for granted
as if we deserved them.**

**You have called us to be hopeful
through the gospel of Jesus Christ,
but too often despair has come upon us,
and the cares of the world
have weighed us down.**

**You have called us to be joyful
in the wonder of your presence among us,
but too often we become mired in the mundane
and lose the gift of reverence.**

**By your saving power, O God,
enable us to celebrate your love for us
with joy and thanksgiving.**

God offers His assurance of grace:

We offer our lives and resources:

Offering plates are positioned as you enter and leave the sanctuary. If you'd prefer to use e-transfers, please speak with Rev. Ian, Judy Armstrong (St. Andrew's), or Howard McKellar (Knox)

God speaks to us:

The Great Commission

Throughout the Easter season we've been reflecting on the 40 days Jesus spent with his disciples after he was resurrected from the dead and before his ascension to the throne of heaven and earth.

This past Thursday, May 26th, was the 40th day since Easter Sunday. So, properly, we are now out of the Easter season and in the very short season of Ascension which lasts until Pentecost – which we'll be celebrating next Sunday. However, I don't know that Ascension is ever marked as an independent liturgical season, so we can consider that we are now in the final week of the Easter season!

Today's, therefore, will be the final sermon in this series. Thus far, we've considered Luke's record of these 40 days, and Mark's record, and we spent 3 weeks with John's record. In this final sermon of the Easter season (although, we must always remember that every Sunday is the Day of Resurrection), we'll consider Matthew's account.

1. First, however, I want to read a passage from the Old Testament book of Daniel. In Daniel 7, there is recorded a dream of Daniel's which depicted the progression of 4 kingdoms which ruled over the people of God. Each of these kingdoms is represented by a fantastic beast: a lion to represent Babylon, a bear to represent Media, a leopard to represent Persia, and a particularly grotesque beast to represent Greece. The dream then depicts a heavenly court scene in which the Ancient of Days sits in judgment of the various kingdoms whose dominion is subsequently taken away and given over to another: one like a son of man (or, as the NRSV rather mundanely puts it: one like a human being.)

READ DANIEL 7:1-14 (Red pg. 851 O.T., Blue pg. 828 O.T., Large Print 1393).
MATTHEW 28:16-10, 16-20.

Matthew and John are unique in having the disciples meet with the resurrected Jesus in Galilee. You'll recall, that in John's version, the disciples returned to Galilee from Jerusalem and went fishing. Jesus met them on the shoreline and gathered them around the breakfast fire. In Matthew's version, Jesus gathered his disciples to a mountain in Galilee. And, the first thing the resurrected Jesus said to the disciples, in Matthew's account, was:

*All **authority** in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*

The carpenter's son from Nazareth has appeared before the Ancient of Days who has given to him everlasting, imperishable, universal, and cosmic dominion and glory and kingship. The Ancient of Days has taken away the authority and power of all earthly rulers in all times and has given it to Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, the Son of God and Son of Man.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

2. Although all dominion has been taken away from earthly rulers and given to the One who is simultaneously the Son of God and Son of Man, their lives are prolonged – as Daniel dreamed – for a season and a time. In other words, even though Christ is king of all creation and one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, in this present age, people still rule the nations, sometimes as representatives of Christ, often not.

We live, therefore, in an age of tension. On the one end of the tug-of-war rope is the good news that God's Kingdom has come and Christ is king. On the other, is the daily experience that human-centric powers still struggle for authority.

3. Jesus' incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension assures us the tension will be resolved. Sin has already been forgiven. We have the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to the King of kings and Lord of lords who will one day return to wed heaven and earth at the Resurrection of all that is good and holy.

4. The king requires his representatives to go into all the nations and make known **his** kingdom, **his** power, **his** grace, and **his** mercy – which, in the end, will be the only enduring government.

*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go **therefore** and make disciples of all nations....*

This is the Great Commission.

It is the universal mission statement for the Christian church.

It is our purpose: To make known the reality and goodness of God, his everlasting dominion and uncorruptible kingship, and that Christ is King. Full stop.

Over the past number of weeks, we've learned how Jesus has given this commission in slightly different ways over and over again.

In Luke, Jesus commissioned his disciples to *proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sin*; to proclaim the response to and the consequence of his dominion, glory, and kingship. Because all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus, sin is forgiven; therefore, turn to the Lord in body, mind, and spirit. He cautioned them, however, not to do any form of ministry until they had been "clothed with power from on high." Ministry undertaken without heeding the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit, will ultimately become a human-glorifying exercise and will implode.

Turning to Jesus as Lord, and operating in the power of the Holy Spirit, proclaim repentance and the forgiveness of sin.

In Mark's account, Jesus commissioned the disciples to a *ministry of holistic healing: body, mind, emotions, and indeed the healing of the non-human world as well - that confirmed their proclamation*. The church has a message and a ministry. They were to proclaim that because all authority has been given to Jesus, demons, poisons, illnesses, afflictions, etc. have no power over God's beloved creation. Again, like Luke, Mark stressed that any effective and faithful ministry happens only because the Lord is working with his disciples to confirm the message with the signs that accompany it.

Trusting that the Lord works through his disciples and his church, proclaim the good news of salvation in its fullest sense, cast out demons, lay hands on the sick, and baptize those who believe.

In John's account we are given a more subtle and multi-layered commission. The church is sent by Christ into our daily situations as Christ was sent by the Father. As the Son was sent to make known the Father, we are sent to make known Christ through whom we can know the Father in which fellowship we can experience Christ's own peace. This includes forgiving sin and *encouraging the belief that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God*. Then John describes Jesus *inviting his church to*

join him in a Round-the-Fire and Shepherding ministry in which seasoned disciples and new converts can encounter Christ and enjoy the blessings of such fellowship for themselves and in community. The Great Commission is thus woven with both evangelical and pastoral threads.

John noted that although we are not all called to the same types of ministries, we are all called to ministry; to feed Christ's sheep in our own contexts, around our own fires.

As with the others, John stressed that we can only fulfil our commission in the degree to which we "receive the Holy Spirit" ourselves.

In Matthew's account, Jesus commissioned us to *encourage and teach* anyone we meet the ways of Christian discipleship and welcome them into the holy community by the sacrament of *baptism*. Like the others, Matthew recorded Jesus' affirmation that the success of our ministry is not dependent on us alone. Although we can't see him, Jesus continues to work through those who, by faith, step out in his name to teach the nations to obey everything that he has commanded us.

In each of their unique ways, the four gospels describe for us the Great Commission – the purpose of the church:

Through proclaiming, teaching, healing, gathering, and baptizing in the power and under the direction of the Holy Spirit, we are to encourage each other within the Christian community, and those who have yet to join to believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the Son of God – who eternally holds all dominion, glory, and kingship – so that through believing, all may have life in his name.

Hymn: #774 “God forgave my sin”

We respond in prayers of thanksgiving and intercession:

Faithful God,
We give you thanks for your steadfast love
that provides courage and comfort for your people in every challenging time.
Continue to surprise us with your grace, O God,
and breathe your Spirit upon your church once more,
to draw us together in worship and witness.
Renew our faith so that we may serve you with courage and creativity,
offering the hope we know in Christ Jesus
to this struggling world.

God of peace,
thank you for sending Jesus into the world,
to reconcile the world to you through the forgiveness of our sins.
May the fruits of the reconciliation and peace he offers
continue to work in places of hatred and hostility.
Today we name before you the places on our minds and hearts these days,
and relationships in need of your reconciling grace:

*Hold at least 20 seconds of silence, inviting people to speak out names
or concerns.*

Offer situations of conflict or crisis in the recent news.

O God, do not let us be resigned to injustice or indifference.
Inspire us to build renewed relationships in these days of deepening divisions.

God of fellowship,
we pray for our church and our community.
Renew our life together as we gather again socially as the pandemic shifts
around us.
Inspire our congregation with a fresh vision for our ministry.
Comfort those who mourn the loss of dear ones,
and support those who are sick,
and those recovering from setbacks or failure.
Give strength to people who are worn out or discouraged,
and calm the anxiety or anger that can keep us apart.
Bless and encourage any who are struggling in their faith,
and guide those with questions to your truth.

God who calls us into our future,
we pray for students who will be graduating this year,
filled with anticipation and uncertainty about the future.
Guide their choices.
We remember the graduates from our theological colleges.
May they always remember that you called them into ministry,
and that you will provide them with the wisdom, strength and grace needed
to live out their calling in ever-changing contexts.

Faithful God,

By your Spirit, fill us with the faith and courage to do the work
Jesus commissioned his followers to undertake wherever he leads us.
For we are bold to pray together the words he taught us, saying

The Lord's Prayer

God sends us with God's blessing:

Hymn: #755 "Go ye, go ye into the world"

Blessing: