

May 16, 2004

Easter 6C

This is the 5th is 7 part sermon series looking chronologically at the events between Jesus' resurrection from the dead on Easter...

and the coming of the Holy Spirit to
the disciples 50 days later on Pentecost.

We have looked at how the women on Easter morning found the empty tomb...

How Jesus appeared first to Mary
Magdelene,
then to other women on the road
to see the disciples.

And then to Cleopus and his friend as they were walking to Emmaus.

We heard how Jesus appeared to a group of at least 17 people on Easter night...

including 10 apostles...
everyone but Thomas.

And how a week later...the following Sunday, Jesus appeared again among them...

This time with Thomas there too.

Sometime during the next several weeks after Easter,

Jesus appeared to a group of disciples
at the Sea of Galilee..
as they were fishing.

He called them over....told them where to fish...

And fixed them a breakfast of fish and
bread.

As Jesus began to prepare the disciples for his departure....

his ascension into heaven 40 days after
Easter...

a feast we celebrate this coming
Thursday....

He took them to a place near Bethany....

not far from Jerusalem...
to a mountaintop.

He told them to meet him there...

and they did.

When they saw him there they worshiped him....but we are told that some doubted.

Interesting, isn't it, that after all of these appearances...everything that has happened...

Some were still not sure of what was happening.

Which group would have been among?
The believers at this point...
or still doubting?

A good question to ponder I think.

And then Jesus...sitting on that mountaintop said to them...
"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
and teaching them to obey
everything I have commanded you.*

And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Let's look at those words and what they meant.
That's a huge statement Jesus
made there!

The words, *"Go then"* literally means, *"Having traveled then."*

It has the force of a command.

Jesus pronouncement had a "sandwich" construction.

First, Jesus declared his power and place in the Kingdom.

Next, he gave the eleven a command
"to make disciples of all nations."

Last, he assured his followers of his presence until the Last Judgement.

The middle sentence in the "sandwich" had a single verb ("to make disciples of all nations").

Jesus used the word, DISCIPLE.
Make DISCIPLES.

A disciple is a student or an apprentice.
Simply someone who has decided to be with another person,
under appropriate conditions,
in order to become capable of
doing what that person does or to
become what that person is.

How does this apply to discipleship to Jesus?

What is it, exactly, Jesus, the incarnate Lord, does?

Well, the answer is found in the Gospels...

He lives in the kingdom of God,
and he applies that kingdom for
the good of others and
even makes it possible for
others to enter the kingdom
themselves.

That's what Jesus means when he says, "*Follow me.*"

In Peter's first sermon after Pentecost, we told the Jews about Jesus saying...

"He went about doing good and curing all those under oppression by the devil, because God was with him."

And as a disciple of Jesus I am with him, by choice and by grace, learning from him how to live in the kingdom of God.

This is the crucial idea.

That means how to live within God's will, his life flowing through mine.

Another way of putting this is to say that as a disciple...as a student and apprentice of Jesus...

I am learning from Jesus to live my life
as he would live life if he were I.

I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did,
but I am learning how to do everything
I do in the manner in which he did all
that he did.

Those are the kinds of followers Jesus was telling the disciples to make for him.

And how were they to do this
disciple-making???

By GOING...BAPTIZING and
TEACHING.

To make disciples, the eleven were sent out... They would go on missions.

In foreign lands, they would preach and baptize new followers.

Then, they would "teach" the new tradition as Jesus taught them.

There is a real significance to the fact that
Jesus met them on a mountain.
the closest place to heaven on earth.

When people climbed a mountain in the Bible, they desired to encounter God.

On the mountain top, God would reveal himself and his will to the person.

In the Beatitudes, Jesus gave his greatest teaching on the mountain.

In the Transfiguration, he revealed his true nature and mission on the mountain.

And in his Agony, he prayed in the garden on the Mount of Olives.

Jesus shared these mountaintop events with his followers.

Now, on a mountaintop, he would commission his followers.

Jesus approached his followers and announced a command (like a royal decree) in three parts.

First, he declared the obvious;
he had the power of God.

Second, he gave his disciples the command to teach and baptize in the name of God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Finally, he insured their success by promising his presence.

Whenever they spoke or acted, the disciples did it with the power of God.
Let's break these passages down into their components.

First, Jesus approached his followers with a message. He was given authority over heaven and earth.

The power of Jesus extended beyond his word, however.
His power was in his risen presence.

Ancient people placed great weight in presence; the way someone dressed and acted spoke of social power.

When the disciples saw the Risen Lord, they bowed down in worship.

Having defeated death, the limitations of life no longer had hold of Jesus.

Jesus was all-powerful...
an attribute Jews only gave to God
himself.

And the disciples witnessed this power.

So, Jesus' risen presence confirmed his statement of power.

Next, Jesus sent his followers out with a command, make disciples wherever they traveled.

How?

By baptizing in God's powerful name!

Ancient people also chose names carefully; they believed a person's name defined their strength of character.

In 28:19, Jesus revealed the inner power of God in three names...
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The three were listed together to express
the unity of God and as equals expressing the all-powerful nature of each of them.

When believers were baptized in the name of the Trinity, they became intimate with all that God was:
God above them (Father),
God beside them (Son), and
God within them (Holy Spirit).

With God so close to them, they became God's instruments.

Then after baptism, Jesus' followers would teach others...new believers, to pass along the tradition.

What tradition?
The entire Christian lifestyle.

It included not only stories of the Lord and worship of the Father,
but it had a strong moral component
too.

In this way, Christians evangelized by both word and deed.

So, new Christians received a faith unbroken from the apostles...
who learned at the feet of the Lord
himself.

And these new Christians would pass the faith onto the next generation and so on.

The faith grows throughout the world from the past into the future.

In the end, Jesus promised his personal presence with his followers in their mission until he comes
again in glory.

Making disciples may not be easy.
But Jesus assured it would happen.

The power of his presence guaranteed
the power of his command.

Christ commands us to evangelize....

He tells us to bring new members into
the Church and teach them to do the same.

He promises to be with us in our mission.

All that Jesus did over these six weeks since his resurrection,
was to provide evidence to his
followers that he was indeed God...
and indeed risen.

Paul tells us in his letter to the Corinthians written 30 years later...

*“After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time,
most of whom are still living, though
some have fallen asleep.”*

So clearly Jesus appeared many more times than those recorded in the four gospels.

He did it all that we might be in his kingdom.

So, let us invite others into the Kingdom too...
through our prayer,
our word and
our example.

Let us be the presence of Christ to others.

Amen.