

Easter (1988) - With You Always

by Mariano Di Gangi

Jesus affirms his authority, gives his people a clear mandate to make disciples, and promises his presence to guide and empower them in their mission.

Duration: 37:55

Scripture: Matthew 1:23, Matthew 18:15-20, Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 4:20

Topics: "Easter"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of fulfilling the Great Commission given by Jesus to make disciples of all nations. He highlights the need for believers to actively go out and share the Gospel, crossing geographical and cultural boundaries. The speaker emphasizes that discipleship requires not only preaching and baptizing, but also teaching and obedience to Jesus' commands. The sermon concludes with a reminder that living in defiance of the Great Commission is living in sin, and believers should be committed to fulfilling this mandate until the end of time.

Transcript

Holy Scripture from the 28th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew, beginning at verse 11. In the earlier part of the chapter, Matthew has related how Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb of Jesus, how when they got there they found that the tomb was empty. They were told not to be afraid because Jesus the crucified was indeed risen from the dead and soon he appeared to them very much alive.

And now we pick up the narrative in Matthew 28 at verse 11 and following. While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money telling them, you were to say his disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.

If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble. So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

Then the 11 disciples went to Galilee, the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, 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 will be with you always to the very end of the age. Our text for this evening is without doubt not one of the most obscure passages of Holy Scripture.

Indeed, it is one of the most familiar verses in the entire Bible. We have heard it over and over again at missions conferences, at times of evangelistic challenge. We have heard it quoted, expounded, and here we confront it once again tonight.

What is there that one could say about a text as familiar as this, where Jesus says, 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 to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always to the very end of the age.

I'm convinced that this is a most fitting text for an Easter Sunday evening, because here we come face to face with the risen Christ who reminds his people, a people constantly in danger of forgetting its mission, reminding his people of what their purpose in this world is meant to be. Notice that in this text Christ affirms his authority. He says, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

The King James Version, venerable as it is, has a different translation here which is open to question. All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth. Well, you might say power, authority, aren't these two the same thing? Well, in popular usage, yes.

But in biblical terminology, there is a difference between the two. An elephant may have no authority at all to break into your backyard and trample your petunias, but he certainly got the power. Power has to do with might.

Power has to do with effective might that accomplishes its will, whereas authority is not so much a matter of might, but of right. Freedom to choose, freedom to act, freedom to dispose, unquestioned, unchallenged, absolute freedom of movement and direction for the person who exercises it. The New Testament speaks a great deal of power, and the Greek term that is used, *dunamis*, is the one that gives us the root for terms such as dynamic and dynamite.

Paul was unashamed of the gospel of Christ because it was God's *dunamis*, God's power, God's dynamic to bring about a lasting change by which those who were lost now are saved through faith in Jesus Christ. The miracles of Jesus Christ are described as his mighty works, demonstrations of divine power. We shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon us, and in that power we will be his witnesses in the world.

But our text speaks of authority, of the right, freedom of action, absolute unqualified warrant which belongs to Jesus Christ. And so what he claims here is authority. All authority in heaven and on earth, says Jesus, has been given to me.

And notice that word given. God the Father has given this authority to his Son. God the Father has rewarded his Son for something that he has accomplished.

And what is it that he has accomplished? He has accomplished the work of our redemption, making his soul an offering for sin, being obedient to every precept of God's will, paying to the full the penalty for man's sin. He humbled himself, made himself of no reputation, became a man, became a servant, was obedient right to the extreme end of the death of the cross. Wherefore, God has highly exalted him.

Wherefore, as the reward for his perfect obedience and abject humiliation, God has exalted him, made him Lord, given him authority. After the suffering, sovereignty. After the cross, the crown.

After the descent into the deep dark valley of the shadow of death, exaltation to the pinnacle of authority in the entire universe. And so Jesus has authority. And that authority has been given to him as the God-man who has accomplished the work of our salvation and now receives a reward.

On the cross, he said, it is finished. And God the Father put his seal of approval on all the work that the Redeemer has done and honored him and crowned him with glory as well as honor. All authority has been given to me.

And this, of course, is a recurring theme in the New Testament letters, particularly, as I've often pointed out, in those letters where the people of God are exposed to pressure and are vulnerable to persecution. Just when you might think that the Christian community would be cowed into a corner because of the oppressive, repressive might of the world, Christians instead think of the kingship, the lordship, and the headship of Jesus Christ. Take Paul's prison epistles, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians.

Just when you think that he'd be overwhelmed with the authority of Caesar, Paul speaks of the super authority of Christ. And so in Ephesians 1, this Christ who men crucified has been by the power of God exalted to the place of dominion over the entire universe and made head over the church. Or Philippians 2, the passage that we've already quoted, he humbled himself and God highly exalted him.

Or the letter to the Colossians, that in all things he might have the preeminence and he is the only king and head of the church. And if this weren't enough, you go to the Apocalypse, to the last book of the Bible, when Christians were facing the persecution of pagan emperors. And what is it that John stresses over and over again? Not Antichrist, but Jesus Christ.

And upon the throne of the universe, worthy of worship, is a lamb that had been slain but now is crowned with many crowns. And so Christ here affirms his authority. All authority in heaven and on earth, universal authority, has been given to me as the reward for my redemptive labors.

The second thing that we notice in our text is that Jesus not only affirms his authority, but he mentions his mandate. It isn't as though he had forgotten to tell us what our mission in the world is to be. It isn't as though he had given us a mandate but left it in a state of vagueness so that it's subject to many subjective interpretations.

It isn't as though he had left us a memo that was trivial. It isn't as though he had made a suggestion that we are free to amend. It isn't as though he had left us an option which we could take or leave at our own choosing.

No, he gave us something very definite, something that would be perpetual, something that would be of universal scope, something that would be absolutely binding on all his people to the very end of time. There's nothing missing, nothing vague, nothing trivial, nothing optional, nothing amendable. For what he says, he says as one who is fully conscious of having all authority in heaven and on earth.

This is therefore a royal proclamation, and to disregard it or to disobey it is treason against the king. Now, men may say we live in a pluralistic age. We live in a different world than the days of the apostles.

We dare not go out and insist on the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and be laughed out of court. But was it any easier for the apostles to do that in their day? Their world was as pluralistic as ours. You had oriental mystery religions.

You had the imperial cult, the worship of Caesar. You had religious bigotry of fanatics that would manipulate mindless mobs to riot against the missionaries of the cross. You had hungry lions out there.

You had flaming pyres waiting to consume God's elect. It was no easier then than it would be now to insist on the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and carry out his mandate. It is definite.

It is universal. It is binding on all believers to the very end of time because the one who gives us the commission is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And the only question that remains is, are we really committed to his great commission? If this is the will of the king, then to live in deliberate defiance of the king's will is to live in sin no matter how we perform our liturgy and no matter how much we uphold our traditions.

He affirms his authority and out of that authority he mentions his mandate in no uncertain terms. And what is that mandate? It is that we should make disciples. We've heard that phrase so many times that the edge is worn off it.

Notice what it does not mean. It does not mean that we can be satisfied merely to dialogue with people of other faiths. Now we certainly ought to dialogue.

Unless you dialogue with people, unless you're willing with courage and with conviction and humility and compassion to enter into conversation with another, how do you know where that person is at in his understanding or misunderstanding of the Christian faith? Unless you engage in dialogue, how can you express appreciation for the positive values which that person may hold? Unless you engage in dialogue, how are you going to clear up misconceptions, prejudices that bind them? Unless Philip had engaged the Ethiopian eunuch in dialogue, could he have led him to a saving knowledge of Jesus the suffering servant of the Lord? I don't think so. But we must go beyond dialogue to the making of disciples. And that means that beyond dialogue, where we share our insights, there has to be a clear and definite call to decision.

People must be presented with Christ as an option and invited to choose him. More than dialogue, a call to decision. But beyond the call to decision, the development of a lifestyle that marks men and women out as disciples of Jesus Christ.

You see, some are satisfied only to dialogue and never to call anyone to decision. Others get beyond dialogue and do call to decision and feel that once you have decided, you have graduated summa cum laude, when all you've done is enroll in the kindergarten of Jesus Christ. Jesus did not say go out and get decisions, though certainly people should be called to commitment.

He said go and make disciples. It's not a matter of the momentary raising of a hand, or the perfunctory signing of a card, or a brief walk down an aisle. It is a matter of walking with Jesus day by day.

It is a matter of looking at Jesus, of listening to Jesus, of learning from Jesus, of living like Jesus. This is what's required. More than dialogue, there's got to be a clear cut call to decision.

And more than decision which can be momentary and evaporate, there has to be the development of a daily walk with Christ. Discipleship, development, growth in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, an entirely new lifestyle that is patterned not after the ways of a world that disregards and defies the Lord, but patterned after the written Word of Scripture and the incarnate Word of Jesus Christ. And that is why the usual procedure in the New Testament epistles is to declare gospel doctrine and then to exhort and encourage people to follow Christ, to live up to the knowledge that they possess, to be obedient to him in the interpersonal relationships of life.

It's a whole new way of living. Go and make disciples. That's the commission.

And it has not been repealed. And our Lord gives no indication that it will ever be canceled. How are disciples to be made? Well, our Lord spells it out with a series of participles.

And I trust we'll leave not a single one of them dangling, unfulfilled. First, by going. Second, by baptizing.

Third, by teaching. And each one of them is important. Disciples are made by going.

How will all the nations be discipled if we sit on our prerogative and wait for everybody to come to us? Somebody's got to leave home and toil and kindred for his dear sake. Somebody has to cross geographical boundaries. Somebody has to cross cultural boundaries.

Somebody has to learn a new language. Somebody has to adjust to new customs. Somebody has to brave the heat, the dust, the flies, and disease of all sorts.

Somebody has got to do it if the nations are to be brought, someone has to go, and they have to be sought. Going. The gospel of the kingdom must be preached to all nations for a witness, and then shall the end come.

There is movement involved. There is nothing narrow about the Christian view. There is nothing egocentric about a church's life.

If it is a biblical and Christian congregation, its focus is on the ends of the earth, and it seeks to go in order that people may be invited to come. Going. Somebody has to go.

Then there is beyond going, baptizing. Baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Baptizing into the name of the one triune God whom heaven and earth adore.

Baptized into union with God, into a relationship with him as our Heavenly Father, into a relationship to him as our loving Savior, into a relationship with the Holy Spirit as our sanctifier. More than that, being baptized into union with Christ so that with him we die to sin, with him we are buried, and with him we rise up in the power of the resurrection to walk in newness of life. It's not the mere performance of a ritual.

There is something far more substantial involved here. It is the baptism of men and women in the name of the triune God, into a relationship with the three persons of the Blessed Trinity, and teaching. Teaching what? Teaching what Christ has commanded.

Now what Christ has commanded may not be very popular. It may not be palatable, but it is certainly profitable, and that is what must be taught. And what is it that Christ has taught? Christ has taught us to regard the Old Testament as the Word of God which cannot be broken, and therefore one of the things that we must teach sooner or later, and the sooner the better, is that all scripture from Genesis to Malachi

is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

And beyond that, people need to be taught that the Apostles who explicated the meaning of the ministry and the death and resurrection of Jesus, that what the Apostles taught is on the same level with what the prophets had promised. And therefore all scripture must be taught because Jesus has put his seal of approval on it. In other words, it's got to be biblical teaching that originates from God and is given through men, rather than originating from men who, like spiders out of their own substance, spin out their own philosophical and theological systems.

Teaching them, not so that their minds might be filled with information, but teaching them so that they may observe, so that they may respect, so that they may obey, so that they may translate into the language of daily living the teaching that I have given them in my inspired and infallible Word. So you see what our Lord is driving at is the making of disciples. And to make disciples, we have to go.

And by implication, those of us who do not go ought faithfully and generously to support. And beyond going, there has to be baptizing. And beyond baptizing, there has to be teaching.

And all for the purpose of obedience. So we're back again to the original concept of discipling. Christ affirms his authority.

He mentions his mandate. One thing more, he promises his presence. I find it interesting that the reference to the abiding presence of Jesus Christ, to his God manifest in the flesh, punctuates the whole content of the Gospel according to Matthew.

Matthew chapter 1, the child conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary is to be called Jesus because he's to save his people from their sins. True. But he's also to be known as Emmanuel.

God come down from heaven to be with us and share our infirmities and face our temptations and endure our troubles. You look in the very middle of the Gospel according to Matthew, Matthew 18, and there you're dealing with the whole matter of discipline in the church and the maintenance of standards of righteousness and holiness. Our world is just beginning to tell the church that it ought to do this with reference to televangelists, isn't it? The maintenance of discipline, biblical standards of morality, so that all our emphasis on grace doesn't turn out in the end to be disgrace that baptizes man's natural instincts, but maintains the supernatural standard of the righteousness of God.

Well now, in that context about discipline in the church, in Matthew 18 20, you've got another assurance of the divine presence, where two or three are gathered together in my name. There am I in their midst. That text was never given to justify a tiny attendance on a Sunday evening.

That text was given to show that whenever Christians meet together to do his business and maintain his honor, he is present as supreme judge in the midst. We begin with Emmanuel chapter 1. Christ in the midst as judge of his people to maintain standards of holiness in chapter 18 and at the end in chapter 28, oh I am with you always, to the end of the world, to the very end of the age, to the end of time. Now this must have meant a great deal to those who heard it for the first time, because Jesus asked them to go into all the world and evangelize the whole creation and disciple the nations.

They must have been struck with a sense of utter inadequacy. Lord, how can we cope with such a grave responsibility? Lord, how can we fulfill such a heavy duty? Lord, how can we face the difficulties that are

bound to crop up when we run counter to the corrupt culture of our day? How can we be your witnesses in a world that is wicked? How can we be your servants in an age that is saturated with sin? Mindful of their inadequacy, they needed to hear the assurance of the Lord. They needed to have the promise of his presence.

I am with you. Serve, witness, struggle, spend and be spent in the knowledge that I am with you every step of the way. That you can do all things because I dwelling in you will make you strong.

That my grace is sufficient for your deepest need. That you shall receive power after that my Holy Spirit comes upon you. Inadequacy may be yours, but all sufficiency is mine.

I am with you always. Therefore, go, serve, witness and fight. But Lord, there will be loneliness.

We will have to leave the familiar and venture into new territory. Solitude is one thing. Solitude is a blessed thing.

Solitude is what we crave in the congestion of urbanized jungles. But this is not solitude. This is loneliness.

This is desolation. This is feeling out of step with the world around you. How are you going to take that kind of pressure when you have to stand alone? Jesus says, no matter.

I am with you always. Out of my sufficiency, your inadequacy will be met. And to your loneliness, Emmanuel will be at your side.

God with us, step by step. And God's people have always needed the promise of his presence. A man like Jacob, a fugitive, needs to have the assurance of the God of Bethel that he will be with him in all his wanderings and bring him safely home.

Joshua, bereft of the leadership of the experienced Moses, finds himself with rabble on his hand that must be led through a wilderness journey and the land of Canaan to be conquered. And he senses his loneliness and he's oppressed by his inadequacy. And the Lord tells him in Deuteronomy 31 and in Joshua 1, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you.

Human leaders come and go, but I will never leave and I will never forsake. That is the assurance that Solomon needed. When as a young man, he not only had the burden of governing a nation, but of building a temple.

And of himself, he knew that he could not. And the Lord gave him the promise of his presence. The Apostle Paul in the city of Corinth became very disheartened, became discouraged, bordered on depression.

So great was the opposition, so scanty were the conversions, he was ready to pack it in. And the Lord appeared to him in the darkness of the night and said, stay put, be faithful, witness on, continue to struggle, continue to serve. For I have yet much people in this city.

In God's sovereign grace, there was a work to be accomplished. And he assured Paul of his promise and presence to stay at it, faithfully, for the Lord would be with him. We don't know what our future holds.

Some of us will have to pass through fiery trials. Others will be assailed by the sharp thrust of temptation. Others will feel totally inadequate to cope with life.

And we need the promise of his presence. Like the three Hebrew children, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, we may end up in a pagan fiery furnace, but let us believe that there will be a fourth one like unto a son of God who will share that time with us and will bring us safely through. I am persuaded that neither life, nor death, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor life, nor death, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in the whole vast sweep of God's creation shall ever be able to separate us from the love of him who said, Lo, I am with you.

I am with you always. Let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ, we are grateful that in this world you do not leave us orphaned, but you come to us.

That by your written word and by your indwelling spirit, you share our griefs and our sorrows. You help us bear our trials, fulfill our responsibilities, endure our temptations. What we cannot do in our own strength, we can and will do in the strength that you supply.

Help us then to be your faithful witnesses and your loving and compassionate servants wherever you send us, whether it be to the Isles of the Sea, or in cross-cultural ministry, or in this vast metropolitan area. Help us to live and love for the honor and glory of Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

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