

Trinity Sunday

7 June 2020

THE AUTHORITATIVE SENDING

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful and kindle in them the fire of Your love. In love God the Father sends forth His beloved Son into the world. He comes among us full of grace and truth. That's what St. John tells us in the opening words of the inspired Gospel. Jesus Christ is sent by His Father to redeem the world. That is His mission in life. Now He has a mission for the disciples. The stakes are high. The nations need saving. The poor disciples are few in number, and the nations cover the entire globe. How are they going to execute the mission? How are they going to baptize and teach in a world that is hostile to the message of the Gospel? The answer is very simple and straightforward. Jesus will send forth the Holy Spirit. He has been given authority to do this. The Holy Spirit comes to fill the hearts of the faithful. He comes among us even today to kindle in us the fire of His love.

Today's gospel reading from Matthew 28 are the last words recorded by the evangelist to his readers. He ends with a note of authoritative sending. Following the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, He gathers together His Church on a Galilean mountaintop. There the Lord of the Church makes it abundantly clear who's in charge of disciple-making. Pastors don't make Christians. Jesus does since all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him. He is the One who does the baptizing and teaching. He is the One who commands and stays until the end of the age. He is the Word of God incarnate who permeates the hearts and minds of the nations. If you want to know who is the greatest evangelist, it is Jesus.

What is currently going on in our nation is most troubling. You read the papers and tune into your evening news. You see the footage and hear the responses from our leaders. Everyone is looking for an answer, but few have a desire to work together toward peace. The finger pointing and criticism from the top down only serve to fuel the divisions that pit us against one another. It is into this mayhem that newly graduating pastors of our Church are sent forth to serve. What a time to start out in the Office of the Holy Ministry! What with all this unrest it is any wonder that these young men are anxious about the confrontation they will face. In Matthew 10:16 Jesus gives this instruction to His faithful Twelve as He sends them out: "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; therefore be shrewd as serpents, and innocent as doves." As newly ordained and installed, so much is riding on what they preach and teach to their congregations. They have a golden opportunity to make a difference

in their communities of faith, but beware of the backbiting and ravenous wolves! So it is our duty as Christians to pray for them. And how should that prayer go? For starters we resolve in unity to say, “Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful and kindle in them the fire of Your love.” It is this red-hot flame that will keep at bay the gnashing teeth of these wolves. It is this Holy Spirit that will fill to the brim the hearts of the faithful remnant and bring calm and peace in the midst of strife and division.

Jesus has authority over all things in heaven and earth. We often forget that in our congregations. Making disciples does not begin with us. It is channeled through us by God the Holy Trinity. The authority rests with God and not with us. So as we look for answers and solutions to the problems of our fallen world, we go forth under a power not inherent with us. Ours is an authoritative sending that has its source in the Maker of heaven and earth. So then, success is inevitable even with the wolves nipping at our heels and doors get slammed in our faces. Jesus didn’t instruct His disciples to go if the going looks good, go only if the times are opportune for you, go if the ground beneath your feet is good for traveling. No. He commands pastor to go regardless. Go out into the world and among the nations being at the ready “in season and out of season: reproof, rebuking, exhorting, with great patience and instruction” (2 Timothy 4:2). And it is our responsibility as the faithful to listen as they are sent to us. It may at times be very difficult to heed this word of the Lord both as pastor and people, but know this—a great blessing will come of it. How do I know this? Jesus promises you, “Lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the age.”

How much longer we will have to distance from one another is anyone’s guess. As good citizens we are trying our best to abide by our governor’s provisions. Depending on whom you talk to some are reasonable recommendations and others are ridiculous. On the other hand, we know from the Scriptures that God created us in the beginning for one another. Companionship is innately human, and we are given the gift of community from the Father through the Son by the Holy Spirit. It is not an option for us whether or not we gather for worship. The Third Commandment is not God’s suggestion for us to consider. Just as the disciples were not given the option to baptize if it was convenient, so we are not privy to debate whether or not as baptized Christians we should come together around Word and Sacraments. “[Do not neglect] to meet together, as is the habit of some, but [encourage] one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:25). And again the apostle Paul writes, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Colossians 3:16).

So we have this authoritative sending here in the waning verses of Matthew’s Gospel to bring us together and keep us in the unity of Christ’s Church. The disciples are not told to go

and baptize and teach because they didn't have anything better to do. They baptize and teach under authority because the Triune name of God cannot be stifled or ignored in the world. It must be proclaimed among the nations. It must be heard or else we perish. The ministry of the disciples of Word and Sacraments is some nice addition to Jesus' earthly ministry. It is a continuation of what Jesus began here on earth, a continuation of His power to save the lost, raise the dead to life again, heal the sick, and create saving faith in the hearts of people everywhere. This is what we are about here. You want to be part of the decision-making process whether or not to meet together under one roof rather than one camera. Nowhere in the Scriptures are we given this say. Jesus says, "Go!" And the Twelve went. What a great gift to have among us those whom Jesus sends us! In a real sense they stand in His stead and by His command to pronounce forgiveness, bring us life, and immerse us in salvation. And this happens through the waters of Holy Baptism and in the bread and wine of the Supper which are His body and blood for us.

In the midst of these most troubling times within and without, Jesus authoritatively sends forth His Word of hope into a hopeless world. He dispatches the Spirit to kindle our hearts and fill us with love for God and for one another. Through this sending Jesus reveals to us the love of the Father for His children, and we are drawn ever closer to the cross of Jesus. So take heart, dear Christian, for together we have been personally and corporately baptized in the holy name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for eternity. Go forth in peace, you have been set free. Amen.