

THE FOUR “ALL’S” OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

Matthew 28:16-20, Trinity Sunday, June 11, 2017

Today is Trinity Sunday – a day when the Church shouts out loud to the world our central belief—that there is only one true God, whom we call because of self-revelation to us the Triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit; our Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. But this is also a good day for us to remember that long before those 27 different books that now comprise the New Testament were circulated as one volume—that these different writings—including the four Gospels and the letters of Paul, Peter, James and John and Hebrews were all circulated independently of each other.

Therefore, it is possible, that some of the early Christian communities may have had access to the Gospel of Matthew, but not necessarily to Luke’s Gospel or John’s.

Remembering this can sometimes give us a much greater appreciation for the Biblical text when we read it and seek to understand.

Certainly, Jesus did make numerous appearances in his Risen body as the Risen Lord to his disciples—during those 40 days—until he was taken up again into his rightful place in glory—though there is some discussion as to when and where Jesus made these appearances to his disciples.

Take our Gospel lesson this morning: Here St Matthew has just told us that on that first Easter Sunday, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were making their way down to the place where Jesus’ body had been entombed. They left very early in the morning. And just as the sun was peaking over the horizon, they saw in the distance Jesus’ tomb—when suddenly they see an angel descending from the sky in bright apparel like lightning. There is an earthquake. The Roman soldiers who had been guarding the tomb fall-down like dead men—which could mean that they all fainted. The angel rolls aside the stone and proceeds to sit down upon it—not so that Jesus could get out—but so that they could enter the tomb and see that Jesus’ body was no longer there!

The angel has a powerful message for these women: *“I know that you are seeking Jesus of Nazareth! He is not here! He is risen even as he has said! Come see the place where they had lain his body down! Go and tell his brothers that the Risen Lord is going to meet them in Galilee! Then on their way back to wherever it was that they were staying in Jerusalem, the Risen Christ meets them on the way! He gives these gals the same message! “Go and tell my brothers that I am going to meet them in Galilee!”*

If all we had to go on was Matthew’s Gospel—the next thing that Matthew mentions is that Jesus did meet his disciples at a specific mountain in Galilee and appeared to them there. Was this also something that happened that first Easter afternoon, or much later, as some people conjecture, right before Jesus ascended into heaven? We can’t say for sure!

But if all you had to go on was Matthew’s Gospel, it appears that this post-resurrection appearance to the eleven disciples in Galilee, in that part of Israel where the majority of these men were from, would have been the first time that these disciples see Jesus alive with their very

own eyes. Therefore, we read in Matthew 28:16, *“The eleven disciples went into Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had appointed for them. When they saw him, they worshiped him but some doubted!”* Their initial reaction to the Gospel—that the One who was crucified for our transgressions has now raised again for our justification (Romans 4:25) is MET with doubt and apprehension.

Of course, these disciples worshiped Jesus! There he was gloriously alive and standing right before them in his glorified body. But they were mystified too! These disciples probably had a very difficult time putting two and two together! All throughout their lives they had never experienced anything like this before! When Jesus was crucified on Good Friday they believed he had lost all influence upon their lives and this world—but such was not the case! If the Roman soldiers fainted like dead men—these disciples must have found themselves in a profound sense of human shock! The Greek word for doubt here is *distazo*—which can also be translated into English like this: *“When they saw him, they worshipped him but some hesitated!”*

It’s kind of like the experience of that traveler in Robert Frost’s well-known poem *“THE ROAD NOT TAKEN.”* A traveler comes to a fork in the road upon which he is traveling. He is not sure which way to go, but has no doubt that there would be two different outcomes for him—if he traveled one way instead of the other—but he isn’t sure which road to take—but he can only take one of them!

As I was studying these words of our Gospel lesson again recently I discovered something that I am not sure I have ever noticed before. That here that little three-letter English word *“all”* is used four times in the words of Jesus great commission!

I. **ALL AUTHORITY.** First Jesus says: *“All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth!* Here Jesus is indicating to his disciples that he is the One who has come in fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy about the coming Messiah. In Daniel 7:14 we read: *“And he will be given all glory, dominion and kingship that all people, nations and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom is the only one which will not be destroyed!”* All throughout Matthew’s Gospel he repeatedly teaches us that Jesus is the Holy Son of God (Matthew 16:16) and that he is indeed the Promised Son of David; the King of Israel.

In Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus, Matthews traces his heritage all the way back to King David. In chapter 2, Wise Men from the East come quite some distance to worship him as the newborn King of the Jews, though he is only a toddler by this time living in Bethlehem. They worship him Matthew says and they give him gifts fit for a king: Gold, frankincense and myrrh.

After Jesus is baptized, he is led into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan for 40 days and nights. The devil took Jesus to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world, saying: *‘Bow down and worship me and all these shall be yours!’* But Jesus responded by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, *“Behold it is written you shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve!”* Satan was promising our Lord Jesus something that he could never have delivered, but now God the Father has indeed now seated his Son at his right hand in glory from on high!

Oh, many people don’t believe in our world today—don’t believe this that’s for sure! But we know the day is coming when St. Paul tells us in the second chapter of Philippians that: *“Every knee shall bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father!”*

Crowns and thrones may perish! Kingdoms rise and wane! But the cross of Jesus constant will remain. Gate of hell can never, 'gainst that cross prevail, we have Christ's own promise and that cannot fail!

Pilate said to him, *"So you are a king!"* Jesus replied, *"My kingdom is not of this world!"*

Those at the foot of the cross mocked him: *"He is the King of Israel! If he is the King of Israel let him come down from the cross and we will believe him!"* But it was in our Lord's staying up there on that cross that he proved himself to be what the hymnwriter declares him to be: *"The King of Love, my Shepherd is, whose goodness faileth never! I nothing lack if I am his and he is mine forever."*

II. GO MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS! Though Matthew was writing his Gospel account primarily for a Jewish audience, he stresses repeatedly that Christ took time to direct his ministry also to those people who were Gentiles. One point in case is that lovely episode mentioned in Matthew 8, when a Roman centurion, who has a dear servant who is ill, comes to Jesus and asked for Jesus to heal his servant. Some of the Jewish people there said to Jesus, *"He deserves to have you do this for him; for he built our synagogue!"*

When Jesus begins to walk toward the centurion's house, the centurion interrupts him: *"You are a man of authority, just as I am... You don't have to go there in person. Just speak the word and my servant will be healed."* And then Jesus talks about how all the peoples of the world will one day be welcomed into his kingdom. ¹⁰ *When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel^[d] have I found such faith. ¹¹ I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven!*

¹³ *And to the centurion Jesus said, "Go; let it be done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed at that very moment.*

Baptism – and baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit!

III. TEACH THEM TO OBEY ALL I HAVE COMMANDED YOU.

It's not enough once we become Jesus' disciples to say, *"Okay I believe Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of the world!"* Over and over again, we need to be fed continuously on him who is the Bread of Life come down from heaven to give life to the world!

In John 8:31-32, Jesus says: *"If you continue in my Word then are you truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free!"*

In his Sermon on the Mount Jesus says, *"Not all those who say unto me 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my Father" (Matthew 7:21)!*

Christ commands us to forgive those who have wronged us in some way, but do we forgive? Christ has commanded us to be merciful in our relationships with others, but are we merciful?

IV. I WILL BE WITH YOU ALWAYS, EVEN UNTO THE END OF THE AGE: ALL THE DAYS. Back in the first chapter of Matthew, Joseph has a very hard time believing that the child conceived in Mary's womb was really conceived there by the Holy Spirit—and that Mary was a

virgin. But God had an angel speak to Joseph one night in a dream! *“Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived within her is of the Holy Spirit!”* And then the angel speaks to Joseph those ancient words of Isaiah 7:14, *“Behold a virgin shall conceive a son and you shall call his name Immanuel—that means ‘God with us!’”*

In this GREAT COMMISSION—when Jesus says “ALWAYS” the most literal translation of the Greek text would be: “ALL THE DAYS.”

Jesus is teaching us that the good news of God salvation freely given to us by the grace of our God through our faith in him---is far too valuable and precious for us to keep simply to ourselves! We need to go out there share with others! Do you believe receive spiritual strength for your journey in the week ahead by attending Bible classes and worshiping with us on Sunday morning? If so have you ever thought of inviting a friend to come here and worship with you? Yes, Luke tells us that after Ascension and Pentecost the disciples were continually at the temple as they: *“Devoted themselves to the apostles; teaching and to the fellowship and to the breaking of the bread together and prayer” (Luke 2:42)!* -- I came across a great analogy not long ago that I do believe is pertinent to our wanting to do our part to help fulfill the great commission.

It has to do with the word “huddle” and most of us are familiar with that word, I am sure: “h-u-d-d-l-e.” It is often used in connection with the game of football.

Do know that on average now...there are some 64,000 people who attend games of the NFL and who also pay on average \$100 per ticket to attend those games of the NFL in their stadiums? Of course the fans in the stadium understand that the team has to spend 30 seconds in a huddle, in a close tight-knit group, facing away from the opposition where the quarterback can announce his next play, as part of his strategy in moving the football further towards the field in hope of a TOUCHDOWN. But no one comes to see the team spend too much time in the huddle! They want to see some action on the field!

Perhaps there are times when we are gathered together for worship service, for Bible study, for fellowship—which in some ways is kind of like being gathered together in a huddle! But do we also take the Gospel to the outside world.

Brothers and sisters, have you ever been at a table in a restaurant and picked up the salt shaker to season your food; only to have nothing come out of that saltshaker? Nothing came out of that saltshaker either because the saltshaker was empty, or because the humidity in the air had caused all the salt in the saltshaker to become hopelessly stuck together!

Jesus tells us still, who are his followers today: “You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything—except to be thrown out and trampled by people” (Matthew 5:13).

God has called us to faith in his Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—not only that we might receive by his grace this “more abundant life” (John 10:10) that he came to bring us—but that we might also be empowered by that same Spirit to share this abundant life with all other peoples around the world!

One day, a young salesman was disappointed about losing a big sale and as he talked, rather openly, with his sales manager, about that very disappointing experience, he lamented, "I guess it just proves you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink."

The manager replied, "Son, take my advice: your job is not to make him drink. Your job is to make him thirsty." So it is with evangelism. Our lives should be so filled with Christ that they create a thirst for the Gospel.

I am going to close by sharing with you one of my favorite literal illustrations of this great Biblical truth by telling you about the gigantic paper mill that is located in Brunswick, Georgia, not far off of Interstate 95. Many times, if you are driving through that section of I-95 on a very windy day; the horrific smell of that paper factory—can easily find its way into your car! Even if you have your air-conditioning in the car turned on with all of your windows rolled up as tight as they can be!

This reminds me of those mother skunk and her four baby skunks that were all walking past that gigantic paper mill one day and the wind was blowing something fiercely! One of the baby skunks as it mother! "What is that fantastic smell in the air, Mama?" The mother skunk replied, "I don't know! But whatever it is we have to get some of it!"

Paul said to the Corinthians one day: *Thanks be to God who leads us, wherever we are, on his own triumphant way and makes our knowledge of him spread throughout the world like a lovely perfume! We Christians have the unmistakable "scent" of Christ, discernible to those who are being saved and to those who are heading for death. To the latter it seems like the very smell of doom, to the former it has the fresh fragrance of life itself.*

Who could think of themselves, therefore, as adequate for a responsibility like this? Only that person who loves the Word of God—that person who speaks as we do, in the name of God, under the eyes of God, as God's chosen ministers (2 Corinthians 2:14-17)!

May God grant this to us for Jesus' sake always! Amen