

+ Matthew 28:16-20 + Series: Why Are We Here? + Theme: ...To Connect People to God's World +  
+ 20th Sunday after Pentecost + 2 October 2016 +

His end was near. The elderly man had heart problems and was about to go in for surgery, but he knew his heart was tired. His end was coming soon. As you would expect in someone who knows that their life will end soon, he felt a sense of urgency. What would you do if you were in his shoes? Order a favorite meal? Watch the sunrise or sunset? Tell your loved ones how much you love them? Get your worldly things in order?

Well, this elderly man had a unique request as he lay in his hospital bed being prepared for heart surgery. You see, much of his adult life had been spent trying to self-medicate with alcohol the pain from a variety of health issues and the demons that haunted him from the Second World War. Amazingly the Lord didn't let him die in the bottle. Instead, after a major health scare, the Lord allowed the man to enjoy forgiveness and peace and grace in Jesus for nearly 20 years, but his heart was tired.

His end was near. So he told his wife and son. "I want to tell someone about Jesus." Not what you'd typically expect from someone who knows the end of his life is coming soon. Yet this man wanted at least one more person to enjoy what the Lord had so graciously given to him.

If you knew that your end was near, what would you urgently want to do? I'm sure we could come up with a whole bucket list full of things we'd like to do, places we'd like to go, people we'd like to see, but would that elderly man's request be on your list? Would you urgently want to tell someone about Jesus before your life ends? Would you urgently want someone to enjoy what God has so graciously given to you?

In the early years of the Christian church that wasn't even a question. Jesus had said that he would come back soon. So there was always a sense of urgency. We need to watch. We need to be ready. We need to work while it is day. Read through the letters of the Apostles Paul and Peter and John and you'll notice that urgency. The Lord is coming soon. So don't give up. Don't fall away. Remain faithful even to the point of death. Don't stop serving Jesus. Don't stop telling others about him, because the end is near!

Jesus had planted that sense of urgency in the hearts of his followers in the days after Easter. He was going to come back soon, but he had work for them to do. Jesus laid out their mission. ***"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."*** A pretty daunting task for a limited amount of time!

It's no wonder that some doubted. After all, they were fishermen, tax collectors, average citizens, ordinary people called to carry out an extraordinary task by an extraordinary Savior. The fact that Jesus had actually risen from the dead was hard enough for some. Yes, they had seen him with their own eyes. They had touched the nail marks in his hands and feet, but they couldn't wrap their minds around that miracle. Now this?

It was almost too much. "Go and leave home? Really? Leave home to take Christ to the ends of the earth? Are you sure? Make disciples by baptizing and teaching everything you have commanded? And we're supposed to do it in what amount of time?" On their own, they couldn't do it, but Jesus would equip his followers with the gifts, the abilities, and the time to take his saving good news to the ends of the earth. Above all, he would be with them. ***"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."***

A few days later the Lord did equip his followers by pouring out his Holy Spirit on Pentecost. It was time to go. So they went with urgency. They talked about Jesus with everybody—people they knew, strangers they met, people of every tribe, nation, and language—and the Gospel went out. It wasn't just Jesus' return that gave them urgency, but the fact that souls were dying around them. So many people didn't know about their Savior or his forgiveness or about life and peace in him. They had to go!

Leap ahead 2,000 years. Do you and I still have that same sense of urgency? Do we still see how desperately we need to be telling other people about Jesus as those first disciples did—seeing everyone as a blood-bought soul lost in the darkness of sin and guilt and unbelief? Do you still see how urgently you need to tell them about Jesus because time is running out and the end is even nearer than it was 2,000 years ago? Or do you only feel that urgency when you find yourself or others in a situation like that elderly man at the beginning of the sermon—at the end of life?

I'm sad to say it, but nearly every one of us—me included—has to confess that we've lost that sense of urgency that the disciples once had. Two thousand years of history have dulled the urgency of Christ's return that once motivated his disciples to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth while they had the opportunity. We

have to admit that taking the time in this busy life to actually talk about Jesus with a loved one, a friend, a co-worker, a classmate, a neighbor, even a stranger sitting next to you is pretty low on our priority lists. There's so much else to do, so much else that urgently demands my time and effort right now that I just don't have the time or effort to direct that urgency towards the eternal future of someone I know.

That's a trap we all fall into. The only time that telling someone about Jesus seems urgent is when they have a health scare or they're on death's door. We never take the time to realize that their soul has been dying the entire time—and what happens if they do die or if Jesus comes again and it's too late? How can you and I possibly stand before the Lord with all those missed opportunities? It terrifies the conscience, doesn't it?

...But fear and judgment are not how the Lord moves us to carry out the work he gave to his disciples so long ago. Before you and I can tell others about Jesus, we need to spend time with Jesus ourselves.

Why is it that Jesus says, ***“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me”***? It's not like Jesus as true God didn't have that authority before, but remember what happened before he said this. Our Savior with indescribable love had set aside the full use of his divine power and authority so he could put himself in your place. He became a human being just like you. He struggled with the reality of living in a sinful world just like you. Yes, he was without sin, yet he submitted to his own holy Law for you.

Jesus knew the tremendous burden of your guilt from all those missed opportunities—those times when you didn't give him or another blood-bought soul priority or time or effort, and from all your other sins. So he did the impossible. He took your guilt—every last ounce of it—and placed it on his own almighty shoulders. Then he suffered for it on your behalf. He allowed death—the curse of sin—to take his life on the cross. Then with all that guilt forgiven, Jesus crushed death and sin and Satan in the dust and abandoned his tomb on Easter morning for you. That's why he has the authority.

Now the words of comfort he gave to his disciples, he gives to you. ***“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*** He's with you. He's by your side every step of the way, and if you're not sure, he comes to you and me through his Word, through that good news of our Savior. He comes to you and me through water poured over your head connected with that Word in Holy Baptism. He comes to you and me giving his own body and blood with bread and wine in his Holy Supper for your forgiveness and life.

That's time well-spent with Jesus. Now he has work for each of us to do—work that needs to be done right away, not next week or next year. Our exalted and gracious Lord tells us, ***“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.”***

Our exalted and gracious Lord tells us to “Go!” and to “Go!” with urgency! “Go!” with Jesus and watch as his Spirit works faith in hearts through your fumbling, stumbling talk about Jesus. “Go!” with Jesus and see why his good news isn't just for you and your family, but for everyone including people very much unlike you, people with different opinions about this or that, people who come from a different culture or social setting or family background, people you wouldn't expect. Souls are dying in the darkness of guilt and unbelief—people you know, people you love, people who are part of your life here and will only be part of your life in eternity if you tell them about Jesus now. So we go!

We go because Jesus has loved us so much. We go because we really do want others to enjoy what we have right now. We go because Jesus wants us individually and as a congregation to connect with his world. We go because the end is near. Who of us can say that God will grant tomorrow? Who of us can say that Jesus won't return next week? Who of us can say that we'll have another opportunity to talk about Jesus in the future?

None of us can say that. Yet the Lord in his love, in his mercy gives us now, and he gives us the opportunities of now to connect with his world. Perhaps you have a loved one who is really wrestling with guilt. Perhaps you have a friend who just seems to be caught up in the rat race of this life with no idea which end is up. Perhaps you have a neighbor who is struggling with their health. Perhaps you meet someone on a long trip who is missing the one important thing in their life. Perhaps the Lord has given you that opportunity now so that person can enjoy eternity basking in God's mercy and grace.

So who are you going to tell about Jesus today? You have a Savior who has ***“all authority in heaven and on earth.”*** You have no need to fear. You have a job to do, a mission to fulfill. Really the Holy Spirit works through you as you carry out that job, that mission talking about Jesus. Your Savior who controls all things is always with you—a promise guaranteed in blood and an empty tomb. My friends, the end is near, so let's “Go!” Amen.