

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commings+ Rector

Scripture: Matthew 28:16-20

“Four Important Action Words”

In the final words of today's Holy Gospel - Jesus said: *“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* How incredibly important and powerful are these last words of the Gospel of Matthew, reminding us of the prophetic promise found in the very beginning chapter of that same Gospel. In chapter 1, verse 23: *“and they will call him Immanuel”--which means, “God with us.”* God dwells with His people, in the person of His Son Jesus Christ of Nazareth; He calls them, He cares for them, and He provides for them.

Jesus told His disciples in verse 16 of chapter 10 of Matthew's Gospel: *“I am sending you out like sheep among wolves.”* The Apostles needed to finish their training, they needed to be more seasoned, and for 3 years they would personally learn from Jesus, the Master. They would witness the Truth, firsthand, and then tell others. They would trust in Jesus, beyond all human comprehension – especially when He came to them in the upper room, all were there except Thomas – alive again, risen from the grave, after being brutally crucified. The disciples trusted Jesus when He told them: *“as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”* (John 20:21)

Jesus called each one of His Disciples by name into their ministry, teaching them to feed and nurture His sheep, even the lost ones, sending them out to love and serve others, and always preach the Gospel. He showed them the transforming power of His love – which totally changes people from their old lifestyles to new lives in Christ – so that they could do the same for others.

And you know, Jesus has called each one of us, by name as well, into your own ministry – your own ministry (whatever that might look like) preparing you for sharing the Good News, bringing the one true Gospel of Jesus Christ to His people, to love others, and to trust Him completely and totally. Faith in Him can - and does change lives – if we let Him. It is very tough sometimes for people to remember that Jesus will not *make* you obey Him or love Him – and that is why it is so touching when we see that wonderful picture by a man named Warner Sallman called “Christ at heart's door” which shows Christ in a garden standing outside a door waiting. There is no door knob or handle on the outside – the one on the inside has to open the door and let Him in – and then let the transformation begin.

It is amazing that we hear from some people who say “Jesus loves you just the way you are!” But – He loves you too much to leave you that way! I really love the words from today's Holy Gospel of the Risen Jesus, standing on that mountain in His beloved Galilee. Jesus is saying to His disciples – giving them their marching orders – what we call “the Great Commission.” The Lord reminded them that *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”* With the full authority of God; let's take that word authority – and really look at it – it means the full power of God. So here is Jesus, the risen Jesus, saying *“All authority in heaven (all power) and on earth has been given to me”* and with that power and authority Jesus told them to go!

- It was their time – to go.

- It was their time to take action;
- It was their time to stop hiding;
- It was their time to start doing the work they were born to do!

Many times people think these words were only for Jesus' disciples, or even just for the clergy. I want to clarify this for you right now: God's call on people's lives even reaches unlisted numbers! His call is to and for everyone – the Great Commission is to everyone and for everyone – **not just people wearing collars.**

It was 18 years ago, next week that as a lay person, my useless and painful right leg was healed in the Jordan River. I was able to run up the steps out of that river. And then two days later at Ein Gedi I was called by God to be a priest in Christ's one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. Let me tell you – there was no doubt about it; it was clear and it was non-negotiable – as I heard the words “***You must do this, in grateful obedience.***” Throughout my three years of the process leading up to our moving to Pennsylvania in 2002, to a town called Ambridge (named for the American Bridge Company) and attending Trinity School for Ministry from 2002 to 2005. I was asked many times by church examiners why I felt my call was specifically to the ordained ministry – and not to just continue doing what I was doing, to bring Holy Communion to the shut-ins, or to lead as a Warden of the church, or to read God's Word as a teacher and Lay Reader. The more I told my story – the clearer it became to everyone.

There are many calls – and whether lay or ordained – they are all genuine calls from Almighty God. Jesus tells many “*Follow Me!*” Those words are non-negotiable and so are the words that the Lord spoke on that mountain – just mere days before He ascended to the Father from the Mount of Olives. Jesus Christ makes the path clear; He is “*the Way, the Truth and the Life!*” (John 14:6) The Apostle Paul reminds us that answering the call can be for “*some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up*” (Ephesians 4:11-12) Some might be called to be Lay Readers, some might be people with a great gift of hospitality to make a dinner for 60 people, some might be Acolytes, some might be in the Music Ministry blessing those with the gift that God has given them, some may be Lay Eucharistic ministers who stand and give the Sacrament of Jesus Christ to those who believe and love Him. (Let us not forget the ladies of the Altar Guild who spend their time preparing the church for each and every service.) In essence some people are called to be fathers or mothers, sons and daughters, using the gifts and talents that God has bestowed upon us. The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 12 “*Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.*” (Romans 12:4-8)

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You might say that ministry is following and helping others to follow what Jesus said were the two greatest commandments. Every service right at the very beginning you hear me turn around and say to you *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”* Those are Jesus’ words from Matthew 22:37-39. Jesus clearly instructed us to be – *“teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you?”* (Matthew 28:20) Jesus also said *“This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.”* (John. 15:12)

The apostles would soon be given the power of the Holy Spirit – which we remembered and celebrated last week. Those of you who were here were wearing red. We celebrated on Pentecost Sunday, that they were given the gifts to more fully perform their ministry. This was their time – their time to GO. Jesus also gave the disciples three very important mobilizing commands – with which to take action in their ministry.

Jesus instructed the Apostles to **“make disciples”** - to bring people to faith and obedience; making *followers* who in turn would spread the One true Gospel and so make more disciples, which means getting out of our comfort zones sometimes – and not just doing good works – but being good people who share Christ’s love through living and believing His Word. St. Francis of Assisi is often credited with these great words – *“Preach the Gospel always – and if necessary, use words.”* Isn’t that the Truth!

Jesus also told them to **baptize** – through plunging new believers into water at baptism, they would be dying along with Jesus and coming to share in His new life. In public – they would be marked as Christ’s own and sealed by the Holy Spirit as His forever – taking the good news of Christ as their very own - forever.

Lastly – Jesus commanded the disciples to **teach** – to teach His followers to *“obey everything I have commanded you.”* **Teach** might be the toughest one of all –**go, make, baptize, and teach** --- it is not just teaching people about Jesus, but teaching about changing a lifestyle – changing the way we view and treat others. It seems to me that the world is still working on processing this one. Following is easy – but obeying? That means I might have to submit what I want and lay it aside so that I can do what God wants. That’s not easy or very popular! Unfortunately, there are so many who are unwilling to let go of the things of this world that divide them from truly knowing Jesus. Once again we have that picture of Christ standing at the door, waiting for one to open the door and the powerful words from the book of Revelation 3:20 *“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.”* As I reminded the adults at VBS on Monday Night – and we need to remind others – that Jesus is there waiting for them to know Him. That is Jesus’ call to the church. That is our job and we must never forget it. Some people raise the question “what about the people who do not know Jesus or have not heard about Him? Or as we saw in the news – a certain senator was asking a Christian – “does that mean that Jews

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aren't saved? Or that other people who aren't Christians and don't believe in Jesus aren't saved? We read what the Bible says; what the Gospel says – and so it is our charge to take those words and go and tell them the truth! You don't have to convert people – that is not your job. It is our job to tell them. Sharing the Gospel is all we need to do. Who does the rest? The Holy Spirit! Just as a farmer takes a seed and plants it – then waits for rain (thank God we have finally gotten rain). There are many here today that are familiar with this - and the Holy Spirit breaks open the kernel of that seed and makes it grow – or not.

Jesus says: **go, make disciples, baptize, and teach**: those are important reminders for each one of us – in our everyday lives – that the things we do are under His authority, His power, and not ours. We need to put our trust in Him and not in our own devices; and that, my dear friends, is a huge step of faith. There is so much ahead of each one of us – and we are unsure where, or what our tomorrows might bring. A very wise young lady reminded me of that just the other night, that we need to deal with today and God will take care of our tomorrows if we trust Him. The one thing we can count on is Jesus Christ. We need to trust Him and we need to put our faith in Him.

May each of us - today - consider what exciting challenges God has in store for each one of us – and remember that as He is sending us – He is standing with us. In that we can put our trust and our lives. God has laid out a way for you, for me, and for all of those whom He has called. Following His way is never easy. It requires **grateful obedience** and it is a HUGE step of faith. May God bless all of us in our ministry together, here at Saint Andrew's in the days ahead – and we pray that He will bless and guide each one of us, always along His Way.