

Trinity Sunday, June 7, 2020, Year A

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Matthew 28:16-20

"Time to Act"

Every Sunday is a celebration – but today we celebrate the Holy Trinity. 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."* I think that is especially important and powerful that these are these last words of the Gospel of Matthew, in chapter 28, and they should remind us of the words found in the very first chapter of Matthew's Gospel. In verse 23: *"and they will call him Immanuel"--which means, "God with us."* God lives with His people – and in doing so He calls them, He cares for them, and He provides for them.

Jesus told His disciples in verse 16 of chapter 10, *"I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves."* They needed to finish their training, they needed to be more seasoned, and for 3 years they would personally learn from Jesus. 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, having risen from the grave, after being brutally crucified. The disciples trusted Jesus when He told them: *"as the Father has sent Me, I am sending you."* (John 20:21)

Jesus called each one of His Disciples by name into their ministry. He taught them to feed and nurture His sheep, even the lost ones, sending them out to love and serve others, and 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 in His church, by name as well, into your own ministry (whatever that might look like.) It might be as a warden in the church. It might be altar, or blessing us with music, or singing with an awesome voice, it might be serving on the Vestry, or teaching, whatever it might be, or serving as an acolyte, or reading the Word of God, it might be getting the ladder on a Sunday morning to reset the camera, however God calls you; it might be serving as "accounts payable" and making sure payments are made, or as treasurer and church administrator; it might be picking up as needed. It is quite amazing how He called you by name, preparing you for sharing the Good News, bringing the one true Gospel of Jesus Christ to His people, in that ministry. To love the unloved, and to trust Him completely and totally. Did you catch in Matthew 28 how it said that *"some doubted"*? That has always bothered me. Here are people that Jesus instructed and they saw Him risen from the dead – but *"some doubted."* Well, there is a time in all of our lives when doubt creeps in. That is not a sin, folks. That is a time when you need to ask Jesus to help you through it – "help me Jesus" for clarity. Even the apostles doubted – and they witnessed it all. It is very tough sometimes to remember that Jesus will not make you obey Him or love Him - and that is why we see that wonderful picture of Christ standing outside a door waiting. It have preached on this all throughout these eleven weeks, and Revelation 3:20. Jesus stands at a door, that has no handle on the outside, no doorknob, in a beautiful garden – the person on the inside has to open the

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door and let Him in – and then let the transformation begin. The people that I see in front of me this morning, and the people who are home and will be watching, people throughout the world, because our services have been seen throughout the world. They are giving of themselves a time to watch and to listen. You are here uncomfortably in mask – I know. I am wearing it because I can't just tell you to wear one, I am wearing one along with you. The person has to open the door; you have all opened the door – thanks be to God. Then let the transformation begin. You witness to them!

I really love the words from today's Gospel that the Risen Jesus, standing on that mountain in His beloved Galilee, ready to ascend to the Father – said to the disciples - as their marching orders – what we call “the Great Commission.” The Lord reminded them that “*All authority has been given to Him in heaven and on earth.*” With the full authority of God – Jesus then told them to Go! It was their time – to GO. It was their time to act; to stop hiding; 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 right now: God's call on people's lives even reaches unlisted numbers! You cannot hide! His call is to and for everyone – the Great Commission is to everyone and for everyone – not just people wearing collars.

It was 21 years ago, this month, I was a lay person, the senior warden of our church in Jacksonville, and my right leg, which had become useless and painful, was healed in the Jordan River. Marilyn and I went into the Jordan on our trip with our kids, and we went down to meet Fr. Neil Lebhar, who was our rector and is now our Bishop. We went to recall our baptisms – you can't be baptized twice, but you can give honor and glory to God by wanting to experience what others have experienced being submerged in the Jordan River. It was amazing. I was able to run up the steps – something that I had not been able to do for several years. And then two days later at Ein Geddi, in the desert, I was called by God to be a priest. Let me tell you – there was no doubt about it; it was clear and it was non-negotiable – there was no way to say – well, ummm – like the rich young ruler – who left when Jesus told him to sell all that you have and come follow me. When I told Marilyn – she was on board as were the two kids, and so was Fr. Neil who supported me all the way to my ordination. Throughout my three years of the process leading up to moving to Pennsylvania in 2002, living outside Pittsburgh in a town called Ambridge, and attending Trinity School for Ministry – I was asked many times by examiners from the diocese and from Trinity, why I felt my call was specifically to the ordained ministry – and not to just continue to bring Holy Communion to the shut-ins, or to lead the church 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. As a matter of fact, just this past Friday – June 5th, I celebrated my 15th anniversary of to the Transitional Diaconate. Thanks be to God! And then coming December 11th will be fifteen years as a priest.

You know, the truth is, there are many calls – and whether you are lay or ordained –all are genuine calls from God. Jesus tells many “*Follow Me!*” Those words are non-negotiable and so are the words that our Lord spoke on that mountain in the Galilee. Jesus Christ makes the path clear; He is “*the Way, the Truth and the Life! No one comes to the Father but through Me.*”

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(John 14:6) Debate it as much as you want to, as many do, but that it the truth – Jesus said it – so believe it! 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) To be clear – some people are called to be fathers or mothers, sons and daughters, using the gifts and talents that God has given us. 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)

You might say that ministry is “following and helping others to follow what Jesus said were the two greatest commandments.” Every Sunday I stand here and say “Our Lord Jesus Christ said,” “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.*” (Matthew 22:37-39) Jesus clearly instructed us to be – “*teaching them to obey everything that I commanded you?*” (Matthew 28:20) Jesus also said, “*My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.*” (John 15:12) We are to follow His example.

Last week we remembered and celebrated Pentecost Sunday, on which the apostles were given the power of the Holy Spirit, to perform their ministry more fully. This was their time – their time to **GO**. Jesus also gave the disciples 3 especially important mobilizing commands – for them to act 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 making more disciples. You know, that often means getting out of our comfort zones – and not just doing good works – but being good people, sharing Christ’s love through living and believing His Word.

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 – taking the good news of Christ as their very own - forever. If you are not wearing a collar – you are going to say, “I can’t baptize!” No, but can you be a witness to baptism? Can you be a godfather or a godmother? Even more importantly, you are asked “will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support these persons in their life in Christ” and you say resoundingly, “we will.” You are baptizing, you are following Christ’s command.

And the third – Jesus commanded the disciples to **teach** – to teach His followers to “*obey everything I have commanded you.*” And **teach** might be the toughest one of all – go, make, baptize, and teach. It is not just teaching people about Jesus, but teaching them about changing

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a lifestyle – changing the way we view and treat others. It seems to me that the world is still working that one. As we have seen from Minneapolis and other cities in the past week or so. Following is easy – but obeying? That means I might have to put aside what I want so that I can do what God wants. That is not easy or also not very popular! And unfortunately, there are so many people who are unwilling to let go of the things of this world that are keeping them from truly knowing Jesus. Once again, there is that image of Jesus Christ waiting for someone to open the door and His 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.”* We really need to remind people – that Jesus is right there waiting for them to know Him. That is Jesus’ call for His 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? God’s answer is simply: “You tell them!”

Jesus says: **go, make disciples, baptize, and teach**: all 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. That, my 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. The one thing we can count on - is Christ. We need to trust Him and we need to put our faith in Him.

I must tell you that I have seen evidence of Jesus calling people closer to Him during these past eleven weeks, as they have been filled with fear and isolation, but also filled with faith. While we were shown evidence of people emptying shelves of toilet paper and other supplies – the media hardly showed us of the empty shelves that were once filled with Bibles. They were going like hotcakes. Thank God that while many were hunkered down at home, people opened those Bibles and were being drawn closer to the One that loves them enough to die for them. We celebrated Holy Week, Palm Sunday, Easter Sunday and more without being able to gather together in person, but the evidence is there that there were many people who watched worship at St. Andrew’s on their electronic devices - with hundreds of people joined us every Sunday worshipping along with us, not just on Sundays, but on days where I led Family Prayer from our Prayer Book. Sometimes in church, sometimes in my office, and sometimes – when we were not allowed to go out – from my home. We turned that into a place of prayer for you. The numbers do not lie – and I can show them to you. I have shown them to the vestry. People are receiving the Gospel in ways that none of us ever expected. It is funny, I said to Bishop Neil, “this is not what we signed up for” and he laughed, saying “isn’t that the truth.” There is true evidence that Jesus is indeed with us. Remember what He said, *“I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*