

Looking Outward, Part 2: The Great Commission or the Great Omission?  
Matthew 28: 16-20,  
Genesis 12: 1-4, Colossians 1:15-20  
Old Testament Reading -- Genesis 12: 1-4 NIV  
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The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. <sup>2</sup>"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." <sup>4</sup>So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran.

Epistle Reading -- Colossians 1:15-20

<sup>15</sup>The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. <sup>16</sup>For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup>He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup>And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. <sup>19</sup>For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup>and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Last Sunday we celebrated Pentecost, the so called "birthday of the church" when the Holy Spirit descended on the believers. The Spirit's coming was accompanied by miraculous "signs and wonders". And there were added to the church that day about 3000 believers who were baptized and incorporated into the NT church. Today, according to the liturgical calendar is Trinity Sunday, and so it is appropriate to consider the Great Commission which includes Jesus' instruction to baptize "in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit!"

**Gospel Reading – Matthew 28:16-20** <sup>16</sup>Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. <sup>17</sup>When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup>Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>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, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

[PRAY]

How many of you have ever tried to break a habit? It's not easy, is it? Studies show that it takes 21 repetitions (or not refraining from something 21 times), for a new habit to replace an old one. That might work for some habits, like biting one's nails. But how much more difficult it is when there is the element of addiction involved!

A friend's father, an Army sergeant, tried unsuccessfully for 25 years to quit smoking. He wanted to stop, as he knew it was compromising his health, but he just couldn't quit. When he saw the doctor for his annual physical, they discussed this.

The physician looked at him and said: "What are these two bars on my lapel?"

"They mean you are a captain", he replied.

"Yes," said the doctor. "They also mean I outrank you, so I am giving you a direct order. Stop smoking!"

My friend's father left the office that day and never smoked another cigarette. He could not quit on his own, even after years of trying. But he understood the power of a direct order from a superior officer. He obeyed the captain's command! (David Gibson)

Here in this passage, Jesus gives a command, but he also gives a commission. What is the difference?

In this instance, Jesus gives this commission to a group—so obedience is a team effort. Also it involves Jesus' authority to delegate to his disciples. For, Jesus gives a very specific commission to them, but he also empowers, and equips them/us to accomplish it. The difference between a command and a commission is that we are given not only a task, but everything we need to get the job done.

In the spring of 2010 Rob and I purchased a new Hyundai Elantra. Fast forward about 14 months, to the summer of 2011. It was the first day of our vacation. We were driving south on Interstate 5, heading down to central Oregon. Aah! We were ready for some well-deserved (if I do say so myself), rest and relaxation! It was a perfect August day, and by the time we reached Kalama on the Columbia River, we were hungry. We pulled off the freeway and headed into town, to Subway for lunch.

Then, something happened. There were no loud noises, no smoke or fluids gushing out, no warning. There was a sudden, dramatic change in the

vehicle's performance and my ability to steer. The power steering had gone out! In fact, later we were told the entire steering column and mechanism was faulty and had to be replaced. (Thankfully it was still under warranty!)

The point is this: while the car could still be driven, it required herculean effort on my part (as the driver), to steer it. Clearly, one could not progress very far under those conditions! Needless to say, that car did NOT get us to central Oregon. (I'll save the rest of the story for another time!)

This lack of power prevented the car from doing what it was designed to do. This can also happen to individual believers and the corporate body of believers called the church! Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit is the answer to that situation—each individual believer is filled with the Holy Spirit in order to em-power us to do what we are designed to do!

Our purpose as disciples is to fulfill the Great Commission! However, if something damages the "steering column" if you will, we can live the Christian life, but we will lack power and effectiveness. We will become stuck.

In Autopsy of a Deceased Church, Thom Rainer studied 14 churches that closed their doors. A common symptom that contributed to their demise was that they got stuck. They lost their connection to their source of power, and they lost their sense of direction. They stopped looking outward. They were content to simply take care of their own needs. They were not going anywhere, nor were they growing. They were stuck.

Our scripture today is the conclusion of Matthew's gospel. The eleven disciples encounter the Risen Christ for a final time. This is Jesus' final shot at getting his most important message across to them.

Matthew describes the situation: *When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.*(v.17)

The natural reaction when encountering the Risen Christ is worship!

Yet I love Matthew's honesty: *"...but some doubted."*

Now this word in the Greek can also be translated "hesitated". That works too. I can understand how those seeing the Resurrected Lord would both doubt and wonder...("How can this be the Jesus I knew and loved? I saw him crucified and buried! People don't just pop back to life after three days in the ground!!") and hesitate (wait a minute...he looks similar but different...maybe if I hear his voice, maybe if I see his hands and feet like Thomas...maybe if he knows me and calls me by name...maybe then I'll see that this *is* Jesus....")

Doubt is not necessarily disbelief. Doubt and belief can coexist.

As I've told you before, my favorite quote of Frederick Buechner's: "Doubt is the ants in the pants of faith!" Doubt can move us toward deeper faith and trust. Questions can do the same. Hesitation? It would be natural under the circumstances. It is part of being human!

It is encouraging to me that doubt and worship can coexist as well! As a matter of fact, Jesus is commissioning doubting worshippers! Jesus is confident that even these imperfect disciples will be able to carry out the commission he will now give them!

To summarize, Jesus says:

***ALL authority...has been given to me.***

*So move out and disciple **ALL nations.***

*Baptizing them into the name of **ALL of God** (Father/Son/Holy Spirit).*

*Teaching them to keep absolutely **ALL that I commanded** you;*

*And look! I myself am with you **ALL the days**, to the end of the world.*

These five "alls" encompass a breathtaking scope—that is why this is called the GREAT Commission! (FDBruner, p. 1094)

Jesus comes up to them...he does not condescend, nor he does not hesitate to trust them to carry on His work, in His name, in the Spirit's power. He accepts these disciples as they are--worshippers, doubters, hesitators, all!

Jesus, the Risen Christ, comes to them, as the CEO of the universe, one in complete control. He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He is the one described by Paul in Colossians as existing before and active in the creation of the world, the one who holds all things together. All authority has been given to Christ. He's the Boss. He's in charge. And this Jesus is entrusting them/us to carry on the work he began. That makes us, Jesus' authorized representatives!

The verb in this passage is "make" and the direct object is "disciples".

But what about that word, "Go"? Isn't that a verb?

In the context, a better translation is "So get moving"...or "as you go out and about your daily life". That is the context in which you and I are to "make disciples".

The word "disciple" means "learner", so we are to invite others to become students of Jesus. Rather than thinking of "evangelism" as a terrifying process of talking to strangers about Jesus, it is more accurate to think of discipleship as an educational process. This takes time, it is not a single transaction! We are to engage others in the process of learning about Jesus and his teachings, trusting that during that process, Jesus himself will show up, and they will fall in love with Him!

"ALL Nations"—means that Jesus' love is inclusive of all the world. This is a fulfillment of God's promise and covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12), that through Abraham's family, the entire world—all nations—will be blessed! God is a promise-keeping God! The family of God, the body of Christ, the church will not be bound by political, social, racial, or geographic or any other boundaries—God is in the process of calling **all** people into a relationship with God-self.

Jesus' command: "make disciples" is followed by two participial phrases: "baptizing" and "teaching".

Baptizing or ritual cleansings were very much a part of the life a practicing Jew during Jesus' day. Just as Jesus took the elements of the Passover meal and infused them with new meaning, Jesus here institutes baptism in the name of the Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—as a sign and symbol of initiation into this new relationship, both with God and with God's people, the church.

I learned this week that the language here, to baptize "into the name of" is an expression that comes from the world of banking. It means "to the account of", or "into the possession of". In other words, to baptize into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, means that the baptized person is under new management! They are transferred into the company of believers and under the influence/guidance/management of the Holy Spirit.

**"Teaching them to obey all that I command"**...while it is important to teach about Jesus' life, death and resurrection, the focus he would have as the curricula for new disciples, is what is called in Greek, the Kerygma—the core of Jesus' teaching. Easiest way to find out what Jesus taught? Get a red letter Bible, because the editors have printed the words attributed to Jesus, in red ink, which makes it easy to see exactly what Jesus said.

The challenge however, is to live what Jesus taught, to obey all that Christ commanded—including obedience to these words of the Great Commission!

Ghandi once said: "I love Jesus. I just wish Christians took him more seriously."

In recent years a movement within the Christianity has grown, and they call themselves "Red Letter Christians". This group strives to do exactly that--to take Jesus seriously, by living the "red letter" teachings of Jesus!

(Check it out here: <https://www.redletterchristians.org/what-is-rlc/>)

This series of messages began with Looking Backward; there is some value in looking back to the way things used to be, but there is danger if we look back with rose-colored glasses. Then we considered Looking Inward, and the danger of becoming focused on ourselves. But today we consider the failure to Look Outward.

Thom Rainer, says that without exception, members of the 14 churches who closed their doors, did not obey the Great Commission, so that it became the Great Omission! He writes: *"They weren't willing to go into the community to reach and minister to people. They weren't willing to invite their unchurched friends and relatives. They weren't willing to expend the funds necessary for a vibrant outreach. They just wanted it to happen. Without prayer. Without sacrifice. Without hard work"....But the bigger issue at the heart of this, is that "members of dying churches really didn't want growth unless that growth met their preferences and allowed them to remain comfortable."* (p.44)

Once there was a light house on a peninsula that was surrounded by hazardous waters. People of the nearby town decided that it was their responsibility to make the light house a life-saving station. They equipped it with all the necessary life-saving equipment: emergency medical supplies, cots and blankets, "meals ready to eat", and so on. Folks were trained in first aid, CPR and so on. It was only a matter of time before a seagoing vessel was wrecked in a storm, but the people were ready. They sprang into action and rather than a huge loss of life, many were saved. Imagine the gratitude of those survivors who were saved!

But gradually the people lost sight of their original purpose. They began to see the light house as a country club. Instead of replacing the life-saving equipment as it wore out, they replaced the cots and blankets with cozy couches, patio chairs and umbrellas. Their life-saving mission was replaced with concern for their own comfort and serving their own needs.

Calvary is strategically located in the center of Enumclaw. On a daily basis there are people in our community that are struggling with the storms of life. Many are lonely, and without hope. Christ has commissioned us to make disciples, to baptize and teach, here and now. How are we doing? How seriously are we taking Jesus' Great Commission OR is it the Great Omission?

When I was a youngster, I was much more likely to obey my mother, when she was right there in the same room with me—not because I feared her judgement, but because I could often enlist her help!

Lest we forget, Jesus' very last words are the promise of His presence!

*"I will be with you always, to the end of the age."*

Jesus does not expect us to go it alone.

Rather, Jesus commissions us to move outward together, empowered by the Holy Spirit, with Jesus himself as our Companion.

Remember when our car's power steering failed? There was absolutely no warning! It was working one minute and not working the next. Usually when a vehicle is developing a mechanical issue, there are warning signs. For instance, on our Dodge Caravan, the "check engine" light would come on, notifying us that if we wanted to avoid major problems we'd best get it to the mechanic for servicing.

In a similar way, Thom Rainer says churches need to pay attention to warning signs—symptoms that the church might possibly be needing a tune-up, if you will. Calvary may need to make some changes in order to thrive, not just experience what the author calls, "slow erosion". Please join the elders and me in praying, in listening, and in discerning how we can best respond to the Great Commission in our community today.

Pray:

Father, Son and Holy Spirit: You created the church, we belong to you. Sometimes we forget that. We forget that not only have you commissioned us, you have equipped us and empowered us to be faithful to this Great Commission. Lives depend upon it. We dare not disobey! May we move out in obedience to you, empowered by the Spirit and with Jesus' presence with us! In His name, Amen!