

When was the last time you were on a road trip with a bunch of people? If you've never done it, it can be a good time (if you get along with them all). Laughing and joking, telling old stories, and catching up with each other. It can be fun. But, what if you weren't just going on vacation or fun trip? What if the reason for the trip was a funeral? If it was somewhere close to you all, it might change the mood of the trip. Or what if it's a cross country trip in a moving van? Perhaps that would add a little anxiety or apprehension to the travel. Sure you'd probably still have some good times along the way, but when those little pauses in the conversation pop up, thoughts sort of shift immediately to your destination. What's it going to be like when you get there?

Is that how it was for the disciples? The trip from Jerusalem to Galilee was not a short one, several days walk. If the disciples had a perfect understanding of everything that had just happened in Jerusalem, the trip would've been nothing but a back-patting congratulatory experience. After all, when things had looked bleakest, when their master and Lord Jesus had been dead in the ground three days, they found his tomb empty and had Jesus himself appeared before them, alive and full of the power of God. How could there be anything to worry about after that?

But that old sinful instinct kicks in. They may have been excited and happy about Jesus coming back from the dead and I'm sure talk of that kept them occupied for some time. But when the celebratory talk died off...their minds might've drifted to the future. Things certainly weren't going to be the same anymore, that's for sure! Jesus wasn't just walking along with them, he was appearing and disappearing whenever he chose! And now he had arranged to meet them in Galilee and as the disciples traveled there, I'm sure the main thought in many of their minds was "...now what?"

I think we can all relate to that. Every life involves some major turning points. Graduation, marriage, getting that new job, retirement. Congratulations! ...Now what? We spend so much time wrapped up in preparing for and getting to that big event, we forget there's a whole stretch to go after it! And we don't think about what we're going to do until we get there. The same can be said of our journey as Christians. Before we came to faith in God, we were trapped in sinful turmoil, even if we didn't consciously realize it. But it was there. Life had no real direction for us. We just sort of bounced from one crisis to another, one problem to the next, constantly distracting ourselves with whatever we could find because if we stopped for just one second to think about how pointless it all was, how we were going to up and die any day and all of it would be meaningless, we might just have a breakdown.

For many of us, we too young to remember what that was like, but even believers have those times in their lives when we lose our focus on God, and then we get a glimpse of the sort of directionless despair that haunts the unbeliever. And the fact of the matter is we were on a path, a direct course to hell. We were born sinful, at odds with our Creator. The Father created this world perfect and we ruined it. He made you, formed you in your mother's womb, brought you to life and has provided for your needs every day since then. Our Father is a god of love but he is also a god of justice and he is required to uphold the laws he has set forth. Laws we have broken. For all his kindness we have only ever offended him with our actions and ingratitude. Sinful as we are he would have no choice but to sentence us to an eternity in hell. The Father would rather we be saved. But we are sinful, sinful from conception. How could this possibly be reconciled?

In his son, Jesus. Jesus paid the debt that we owed. He didn't sin. Not in thought, not in word, not in deed. He lived his life perfectly devoted to God. This was the only thing he could do, since he is God. But as a human being, he lived under that law and earned a perfect life as a man. Then Jesus died in our place, suffered hell where we should have and gave his life on the cross. Jesus as man was under the same law as we were. Jesus as God was worth the life of every human ever. Was the payment acceptable to the Father's justice? We have only to look to Easter Day, when the Son rose from the dead to prove that it was indeed acceptable. Our sins are paid in full, and our debt to the Father is settled. And as we talked about last week when we celebrated Pentecost, it is the work of the Holy Spirit that causes you to trust this, that brings you to trust God for your salvation. So congratulations! Through no effort of your own, heaven is now your home. Your eternal well-being is assured and nothing that happens to you in this life can take that away from you. Congratulations! ...Now what?

To figure that out, let's look back at the disciples. They no doubt had the "Now what?" in their minds as well. Even if they understood what Jesus had just done for them, if they understood that his sacrifice paid for their sins and God's plan of salvation had just been accomplished after thousands of years working up to it...even if they got all that, they had to be asking themselves, "Now what?"

Jesus, of course, had the answer for them. He was waiting for them on the mount in Galilee. They saw him, they worshipped him. And he approached and told them, **"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.” (v18-20).

As the disciples were students under Jesus, now they were to make others their students. Everything Jesus taught them they were to pass on to others. As they learned of their redemption from their sin through Jesus' death on the cross, they were to share that message with others. Go out, share the message, baptize and teach. We call it “the great commission”. And let's not imagine that this was some simple assignment for the disciples. This was a huge shift for them. Up until now they had followed Jesus around, doing what they were asked, learning what they could...oftentimes getting confused about what Jesus was talking about or what he was even doing here. And now, these guys, these ordinary guys from rural communities, the fishermen and farmers, were being charged with taking GOD's message to all the people of the world. That in and of itself was a big enough task, suddenly the followers, the learners were going to be the leaders of God's true church on earth.

And then there was their own worldview to get over. For good Jews raised the Jewish way, they were God's chosen people. The ones who had Abraham as their father. The ones from whose nation the Messiah would come. They were God's people. But now Jesus is saying from now on you have to take this message of salvation to all nations. Even if the disciples had come to realize through the course of their travels with Jesus that the Gospel wasn't just for the Jewish people alone, the word Jesus used here must've twisted in their hearts a little. The specific word Jesus used was the word the Jews used to refer to all the peoples that weren't part of the promise given to Abraham. Prejudice like that doesn't just disappear. And now Jesus was telling them to go to everyone else and give them the good news of salvation. Baptize them and teach them, make them God's children, the same as you.

The disciples had a plan now. They knew what they had to do. It wasn't going to be easy, but Jesus finished by saying “**Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.**” Though Jesus wasn't visibly among them, they knew he was with them. And he had the authority to back it up. They knew from his miracles and his resurrection that he had power, and even moreso he assured them that he had all authority in heaven and on earth. They had a plan and the means to do it. It was a big change, but now they knew what to do. And as we saw last week, ten days later, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to give them everything they needed to carry this out.

Guess what? The answer to our “Now what?” question is largely the same as it was for the disciples. Now it is up to us to make disciples of all nations. The great commission is something that is passed on to every one of us as our chief purpose as a Christian. As we said, we've been saved from our sins. Heaven is our home, our eternity is assured. So why are we still here? Because there are others who need to know this message yet. It is up to us to share it. And let's not imagine this is some easy task for us yet either. We have our own fears to overcome. We have our own prejudices to get past. They won't be the same as the disciples, but they will be there. Remember though, we also have Jesus on our side, same as the disciples; we have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit, same as the disciples, and we will carry out our assignment, same as them.

Does this mean we need to leave our homes, travel the countryside and start shouting about Jesus in the street corners? Well, no. Our methods are our own. It's up to each one of us how we choose to carry out the great commission in our own lives. For some of us that will mean sharing the message with that neighbor down the street who just lost a loved one. Or that guy or girl at work who never seems to stop complaining about the constant problems life throws out. You know the answer, share it. For some it means sharing of our earthly wealth so others can go where we can't. Or it may be as much as praying for those who haven't heard Jesus. But the mission is the same to us all. Bring the message of Jesus to everyone who has not heard it. Bring the Holy Spirit to change their hearts and instruct them in the ways Jesus taught his disciples.

And as we are to instruct others in everything Jesus commanded, allow yourselves to be instructed. As we have knowledge of Jesus to pass on to others, others still have knowledge to pass on to each of us. Never stop learning and growing in your faith. There is always room for more learning, there is always room for a deeper and richer understanding of God and his love. Don't allow yourself to be complacent in your understanding. God has given us all teachers in our lives who are able to enrich our knowledge of him. Use them. Strengthen your faith so that you may remain a child of God until death.

And as we do this, we remember we have the same promises to back us up. Promises like Jesus being with us always. Promises that the triune God will be with us always. The Father who cares for our daily needs, the Son who made us holy, earned us heaven and even now rules this world to benefit us. And the Holy Spirit who not only created and preserves our faith, but goes ahead of us in our work to change hearts so they believe in their Savior. We are not alone as we live and we are not alone as we work for God.

So go, make disciples of all nations. And the peace and power of the Triune God go with you. Amen.