

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, April 18, 2021.

“The Great Commission in Luke”

What is your mission in life? I know, heavy question for early on a Sunday morning. Have you thought much about your mission lately? I know, with this pandemic, most of us are just trying to get through as unscathed as possible.

If you have kids, your mission might be to provide for and protect your kids from harm as best you can. For others, your mission might be to take care of your spouse, or aging parents, or pets. For others, just locating your next meal might be your mission.

I am part of that sandwich generation. You never seem to stop worrying about your kids and aging parents.

I had a great experience Friday as I got to celebrate my parents and my brother's April birthdays in Stevens Point. We had a homemade fish fry and birthday cake. It was lovely afternoon.

My guess is we haven't thought of our mission in life lately due to the unknown nature of the pandemic.

But as Christians, in our Gospel for today, Jesus reminds us of our mission as individuals and as a church when he appears to the disciples after the resurrection.

Jesus' mission must continue, now through the faithfulness of his followers... through us.

But first, in Luke, Jesus makes two resurrection appearances to his disciples after Easter to get this done. One is the beautiful Road to Emmaus story when Jesus makes the 7 mile journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus incognito. He opens the scriptures to them on the road but they couldn't recognize Jesus until he broke bread with them.

Then we get our text for today. Jesus comes among the disciples and says, “Peace be with you.” They thought they were seeing a ghost. But like in the Doubting Thomas story, Jesus says, here, touch and see, here are my hands and feet. Showing the scars from his last week. Luke says “in their joy they were disbelieving.”

But then Jesus does something extraordinary... he asks for something to eat. Wow, even after the resurrection Jesus is hungry. So they gave him a piece of broiled fish. Maybe that's why we love Fish Fries so much in Wisconsin... it's biblical. Speaking of that, on Friday night, I picked up a Fish Fry at the Dome and saw 8 or 10 of our members there. I joked, we could have church here on Fridays.

But really, we confess in our creeds that we believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Resurrected life is embodied life. Jesus is the first fruits of the bodily resurrection. We have this promise of a bodily resurrection as well.

The disciples still had a hard time believing it was Jesus, especially after the trauma they went through the days leading up to Good Friday. They couldn't wrap their heads around a suffering Messiah.

But Jesus gave a Bible Study. He started with the books of Moses, then the Prophets, and then the Psalms and tried to explain how his life, death, and resurrection are a fulfillment of all these things in scripture... that the Messiah is to suffer and rise from the dead on the third day."

But the good news is... they didn't have to rely on their own ability accept these things.

It says, "Jesus opened their minds to understand these scriptures." This is a passive verb. The disciples were passive recipients of having their minds opened by Jesus through the scriptures. They couldn't do it on their own. They had help.

And that's how faith works in us. The Holy Spirit awakens and creates faith in us when the story of Jesus is told or shared. Romans 10:17 says, "Faith comes through what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ." Learning the story of Jesus in the scriptures opens our hearts to a changed life and faith.

So back to mission. Jesus commissions the disciples in the last part of this text to go out into the world... "that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in Jesus' name to all nations beginning in Jerusalem. You are witnesses to these things."

There it is. There are our marching orders. Are you out proclaiming repentance and forgiveness of sins in Jesus name to all nations?

My guess is we need a little reminder of what it is Jesus is asking us to do as Christians.

First, repentance. Repentance means to have a change of heart. To change your ways. To have a terror in the heart of things you have done and left undone. To have a broken heart over things you have done or left undone. To come to grips with your own sin and realize your need for God's grace. The scriptures are filled with the law of God that convicts us of our sins and drives us to the foot of the cross.

Then there is forgiveness. Not only do we proclaim repentance, but we proclaim forgiveness as well. When someone comes to a place of repentance, forgiveness is abundantly proclaimed. The church is a place where forgiveness is spoken and shared. We experience forgiveness in Holy Communion because Jesus said so. "This cup is the new covenant in my blood shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sins... do this in remembrance of me."

And finally the word "Proclaim". It can also be translated as preach or make known. I like the translation of make known, it has a more than words feel to it.

As followers of Christ, who abundantly loves us and forgives us, we are called to go out into the world to make this known. Instead of Jerusalem, it can start in your own homes, repent and forgive each other, and branch out to places of work or neighborhoods, or across the globe.

Amen.