

FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“As You Are Going”

Scripture Lesson: Matthew 28: 16-20

*This sermon was preached by Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr. on Sunday, June 29, 2025
at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

Matthew 28: 16-20

The Commissioning of the Disciples

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

As You Are Going

Leader: The word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

Have you ever experienced a “doorknob moment”? It’s that final comment spoken just as you’re about to walk out the door, which ends up being the most important thing said. It is that crucial moment—highlighted by a literal or figurative hand on the doorknob—which gets us to what truly matters.

This morning’s New Testament reading from the end of Matthew’s Gospel presents us with that kind of moment. Matthew 28 inserts us into the story of Jesus’ life... at the end of Jesus’ life! Jesus had already died and been resurrected, and He had ministered as the Risen Christ for some 40 days.

What we read this morning relates to those events that happened at the very end of Jesus’ earthly ministry. These were His final words to His disciples.

Jesus is preparing to ascend to His Father in heaven... He has His hand on the doorknob, if you will, and this is what He says:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore 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. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18–20)

Few words—in the whole of the Bible—are more familiar and beloved than those. What’s more, those few verses have profoundly shaped the Church’s understanding of its mission for centuries.

Interestingly, it was not called *The Great Commission* until the early 1790s, when William Carey, a Baptist missionary to India, used this passage as a rallying cry for global evangelism.

That said, the call originates with Jesus Himself. Now, throughout Jesus' ministry, He inscribed the truths about God upon the soul of humanity:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength..."

"Love your neighbor as yourself..."

"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you..."

"Love one another as I have loved you."

Those teachings and so many more—they still resonate in our hearts. But now, with the glory of the resurrection behind Him and His heavenly ascension awaiting, Jesus chose to deliver that particular and final message—and not just to the disciples who were present, mind you, but to the whole of His Church.

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

Now, that is quite a claim. But tell me, what grants Jesus that kind of authority?

Was it because He was a great teacher? Sure, that's part of it, but that's not the only reason.

Was it because He was a good student? I mean, Jesus was, after all, tempted in every way as we are, but without sin. Indeed, He learned from every aspect of human experience. Simply put, Jesus knew our story because He lived our story.

Of course, as Reformed Christians, we confess that Jesus possessed His divine authority because He was much more than a wise teacher or a good student—He was so much more than an exemplary moral example.

Jesus is the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, and as such, in addition to being fully human, Jesus was also fully divine.

And He revealed that to us in a variety of ways—He calmed the seas, gave sight to the blind, raised the dead, and He even rose from the grave Himself.

Which is to say that Jesus' authority was not earned... it was and is inherent. His authority, we are prone to say, was co-eternal with the Father—which means, at a very basic level, that acknowledging the authority of Jesus is to recognize His Lordship over everything—not just the material, but also the spiritual... not just over things on earth, but also over things in heaven.

This also means that no single part of Jesus' life—be it His teaching, His suffering, His resurrection, or His ascension—none of it should be parsed out and separated from the whole.

Think of it this way: a picture of God the Father does not tell us everything there is to know about God the Son. Likewise, a picture of God the Son does not tell us everything there is to know about God the Holy Spirit—which is to say that it is in the completeness of who Jesus was, is, and who He will forever be, that we gain the truest sense of His authority.

That was the authority with which Jesus spoke... and that is the authority to which we are called to yield. But that's easier said than done, isn't it?

After all, we live in a world filled with competing authorities: culture, politics, economics, work, daily to-do lists... Deacon and Elder responsibilities. I suspect we are all pulled, each in our own way, in different directions—and it is often good and noble causes that vie for our loyalty.

Does this mean we should reject all authority save the authority of Jesus? Should we reject all earthly authority?

What about what the Bible says about the authority that God bestows upon the government?

The Apostle Paul writes:

“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God” (cf. Romans 13; 1 Peter 2:17).

Perhaps the Fifth Commandment comes to mind:

“Honor your father and your mother...”

What about that authority that God has given to parents, about which Paul writes in Ephesians:

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” (cf. Ephesians 6).

On a day like today, we are also reminded of what God asserts in the book of Hebrews. It exhorts the community of faith to respect their church leaders:

“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls.”

That said, even those authorities—parental, governmental, ecclesiastical—must ultimately yield to the authority of Christ. For Jesus’ authority is the only authority that is absolute, eternal, and redemptive.

Every other claim to authority—every single one—must be tested in light of Jesus’ Lordship, which is why you will sometimes hear us pray for the leaders in government, for example, that they would gain a true sense of their authority. Because we know that, in the end, Jesus is the final authority!

And Jesus’ authority is transformative: it moves people from selfishness to generosity, from despair to hope, from guilt to grace; indeed, by grace through faith, it moves us from death to life.

And how is Jesus’ authority exercised in the world today? He tells us: through His Church—through us!

Matthew 28:19 says:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...”

In the original Greek, however, a more literal translation reads like this:

“As you are going, disciple all nations...”

This means it’s not just a one-time mission trip—as powerful as that experience can be in our lives and in the lives of others—it really is a way of life.

Jesus is effectively saying: As you go about your daily life, whether you are working, traveling, teaching, parenting, serving... in all these things: make disciples, baptize, teach... remember!

Friends, the authority of Jesus is made known when the people of God live like Him—when we disciple others not simply with words but with the witness of our lives.

This is a beautiful and holy calling—not just for church officers, but for all of us. However, there is a cautionary tale to tell, because if we’re not careful... we might begin to think that the authority is ours, rather than allowing that authority to guide us.

I’m reminded of what is probably a fictional story that I’ve shared with some of you before:

A battleship was conducting training exercises in some bad weather. One night, the lookout reported a light on the starboard bow.

“Is it steady or moving astern?” the captain asked.

“Steady, sir,” came the reply—which meant that they were on a collision course.

The captain ordered a signal:

“We are on a collision course. I advise you to change course 20 degrees.”

Back came the reply:

“It’s advisable for you to change course 20 degrees.”

Frustrated, the captain had this message signaled:

“I am a captain. Change course 20 degrees!”

The reply came back:

"I am a seaman second class. Change course 20 degrees."

Now furious, the captain signaled:

"I am a battleship! Change course 20 degrees."

And the response:

"I am a lighthouse. You change course 20 degrees."

We can never be the arbiter of authority. We are not the lighthouse. It is not our light to alter or manipulate... we but reflect the light—and the light is none other than Jesus!

And here's the good news: Jesus ends the Great Commission not with a demand, but with a promise:

"And remember, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

What joy there is in knowing that we are not sent out on this mission alone. That the same Jesus who commands us also accompanies us—and by the inward witness of His Spirit, He equips and surrounds and sustains us!

From the moment Jesus spoke those words at the end of Matthew's Gospel until now, the Church has lived under the Great Commission; indeed, the Church lives under the full breadth of God's divine and biblical mandates.

The Great Commission that we have talked about today—we didn't invent it! No! It reflects the very mission of God, and by God's grace, we have been invited to participate.

So, as we go... into our work, our family, our ministry, our friendships, let us go in light of the authority of Jesus.

Let us go knowing that we are not alone—that we bear witness not to ourselves, but to the One who has been given all authority in heaven and on earth.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.