



# FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“AUTHORIZATION IN PROGRESS”

Scripture Lessons: Psalm 8 and Matthew 28:16-20

*This sermon was preached by Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr. on Sunday, June 26, 2022  
at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

## Matthew 28:16-20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, “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 that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

**People: Thanks be to God.**

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Let us pray...

Almighty and Everlasting God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be pleasing, acceptable, and even joyful in your sight, for you are our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

Our reading this morning comes from the last chapter in the Gospel according to Matthew. Throughout the Gospel, indeed, throughout the expanse of Jesus’ life and ministry, He proved to be the ultimate revelation of God’s love.

What’s more, the truth that Jesus embodied was perfectly aligned with the Biblical witness. In fact, in Jesus’ life, we come to know that God’s story of salvation has come to a crescendo -- a very fulfillment of all the law and all the prophets!

Speaking of the Prophets, they had long foretold the coming Messiah, and it just so happens that Matthew, more than any other Gospel writer, demonstrates how, in the person and work of Jesus Christ, all of those prophecies were fulfilled!

And if that wasn’t enough to convince the masses, Jesus made his own prophecy...that he would be handed over to the authorities, and be killed, and on the third day he would rise again.

We wonder why the disciples lived their lives in the way they did – how it was that nearly every one of them was martyred for their faith, when just prior to the resurrection they were locked behind closed doors / scared to death that what the authorities had done to Jesus might be done to them.

So, what changed? Well, it wasn't because they wanted to profit off of Jesus' life and make a denarii or two...a little bit of money is not worth dying over...nor is some new religious experience worth dying over. Simply put, the disciples gave their lives for the cause because they had seen Jesus die and they had seen him alive again!

...And here in Matthew 28...this is one of the last times that they will see him. Jesus is prepared to ascend to the Father / to be coronated as the very King of Kings and Lord of Lords; but, before he leaves, there is something else he needs to say.

You may find it interesting to know that the words we read this morning have helped the church to understand its mission from as early as the sixteenth century.

That said, these words were not actually referred to as the "Great Commission" until the early 1790's when William Carey, a Baptist missionary to India, wrote a tract in which he used these words of Jesus' as a stirring call to missions.

Now, goodness knows, Jesus had said many important things before now...

- "Love the Lord your God with all of our heart and soul and mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself."
- "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."
- "Love one another as I have loved you."

Jesus said those things and so much more; ah, but at this moment in our Gospel reading...it was time to go! It was time for Jesus to return to the God the Father, but there is apparently something else that needs to be said -- one more important lesson for us to learn / one final and great commission! Listen to it again.

"Jesus said to them, 'all authority on heaven and 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 remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'"

Notice that Jesus says, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me." And how does that happen we may ask? Is it because Jesus was a good teacher? A good student, perhaps -- drinking life to the dregs? Was he given all authority in heaven and earth because he was human like all of us? ...God like none of us?

The truth is, there is not one single aspect of Jesus' life that can adequately encapsulate the full breadth and scope of his Messianic mission, He was the Messiah, after all, which is to say that the authority Jesus possesses...it is none other than the very authority of God!

Which is also to say that the such is the authority that we are authorized to fulfill the Great Commission. What's more, the Great Commission, first spoken to the Jews and the Gentiles in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, while it was spoken to those 1<sup>st</sup> century followers of Jesus, it was also addressed to all believers / to all the body / to the church! Wherever she may be found.

It was as if Jesus were saying, “Just as I have spent my time going out and making disciples, and as I have proclaimed a message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, and as I have baptized people in the power of the Holy Spirit and taught them how to live and how to love...that is what I now expect you to do!

And think about the implications of that for a moment -- Jesus proceeded to live his life with all of the power and authority of God...and he has asked us to go out into the world and do the same -- to teach the Gospel, to challenge the powers of sin and death, to be about the business of healing and restoring people...helping them to see the world rightly!

Friends, the miracle is that we don't do this on our own; ah, praise be to God, we are not left to our own devices, because, when we, by grace through faith...

- Speak not our words but the words of the Gospel,
- and when we set aside our will and assert the heart and mind of Christ;
- Indeed, when we do such blessed work, which proceeds as a commission from Jesus himself...

...we go forth not in our own power and authority, but in the power and authority of God!

Which means that whether we are on the mission field in Ashville or serving as an Elders and Deacons here at First (Scots)...we are all given the awesome responsibility of being ambassadors of Jesus Christ, and living out our lives in a way that can be described as, even incarnational, in the sense that as Jesus lived, so we should live / and as Jesus did, so we should do.

What an amazing responsibility that is, when we really stop and think about it! It is so amazing, in fact, that if we are not careful, we might begin to think that we are amazing, and that, not only are we the authority on Christ, but that we can speak as if we are God!

You may have heard the story of a battleship that was assigned to a training squadron, which had been out at sea on maneuvers in heavy weather for several days. One night the visibility was poor with patchy fog, and so the captain remained on the bridge keeping an eye on all the activities.

Shortly after dark, the lookout on the wing reported, “Light, bearing on the starboard bow.”

“It is steady or moving astern,” the captain called out. The lookout replied, “Steady, Captain,” which meant that they were on a dangerous collision course with a ship heading straight towards them.

The captain then called to the signalman, “Signal that ship: ‘We are on a collision course, advise you change course twenty degrees.’” Back came the signal, “Advisable for you to change course twenty degrees.”

The captain said, “Send, ‘I’m a captain, change course twenty degrees.’” “I’m a seaman second-class,” came the reply. “You had better change course twenty degrees.”

By that time, the captain was furious. He spat out, "Send, 'I'm a battleship. Change course twenty degrees.'" Back came the flashing light, "I'm a lighthouse. Advise you change course twenty degrees." We can imagine who changed course (cf. Max Lucado, *In the eye of the Storm*, Word Publishing, 1991, p. 153).

The Presbyterian Church has historically done well to recognize the limits of her authority / that need to avoid speaking *ex cathedra*, as if, from the Pulpit Chair.

After all, there is power in the words we speak, and seeing as we are frail and human, we forever and desperately must work to ensure that the words we speak are not ours, but rather God's...that what we say and do...and who we are...that it all testifies to God's truth and not our own. We do our very best to speak that truth in love. Thanks be to God, our journey is not without a light; for Jesus says, "Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

I don't know about you, but I find it reassuring that Jesus is with us in all times and in all places, that there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God.

I find it sobering that we are accountable not to ourselves to our own self-appointed authority, but rather that we are accountable to God, and subject to God's authority.

I find it comforting to know that God is with us always, and that He will always lead us, even in the wilderness places...that our Good Shepherd supplies our needs as he has done so from the dawn of time.

The Great Commission sends us on a familiar mission - it is, in many ways, the same mission to which Jesus himself was called.

Jesus was and is forevermore drawing people to faith in Him and welcoming them into the household of God, and God has determined that we are to be about that business as well...and Jesus has authorized us to participate in that mission...to the end that....the mission of the church would be the very mission of God.

Listen again to that sacred appeal which comes from our Savior: "Jesus said to them, 'all authority in heaven and 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 that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'"