

Trinity Sunday, June 19, 2011, Year A

St. Bartholomew's Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Associate Rector

Scripture: Matthew 28:16-20

"Answering the Call"

In the final words of today's Gospel - Jesus said: "*I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*" How incredibly important and powerful are these last words of the Gospel of Matthew, reminding us of the prophetic promise found in the very beginning chapter of that same Gospel. In verse 23: "*and they shall call him Immanuel*"--which translated means, "*God with us.*" God dwells with His people – He calls them, He cares for them, and He provides for them.

Jesus told His disciples in verse 16 of chapter 10, "*I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.*" They needed to finish their training, they needed to be more seasoned, and for 3 years they would personally learn from the Master. They would witness the Truth, firsthand, and then tell others. They would trust in Jesus, beyond all human comprehension – especially when He came to them in the upper room, all except Thomas – **alive again, risen from the grave**, after being brutally crucified. The disciples trusted Jesus when He told them: "*as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.*" (John 20:21)

Jesus called each one of His Disciples by name into their ministry. He taught them to feed and nurture His sheep, even the lost ones, sending them out to love and serve others, and preach the Gospel. He showed them the transforming power of His love – which totally changes people from their old lifestyles to new lives in Christ – so that **they** could do the same for others.

And you know, Jesus has called each one of US in His church, by name as well, into your own ministry (whatever that might look like–) preparing you for sharing the Good News, bringing the one true Gospel of Jesus Christ to His people, to love the unloved, and to trust Him completely and totally. Faith in Him **can - and does change lives – if we let Him**. It is very tough sometimes for people to remember – that Jesus will not *make* you obey Him or love Him – and that is why we see that wonderful picture of Christ standing outside a door waiting. There is no handle on the outside – the one on the inside has to open the door and let Him in – and then let the transformation begin.

I really love the words from today's Gospel that the Risen Jesus, standing on that mountain in His beloved Galilee, ready to ascend to the Father – said to the disciples - as their marching orders – what we call "the Great Commission." The Lord reminded them that "*All authority has been given to Him in heaven and on earth.*" With the full authority of God – Jesus then told them to Go! It was their time – to go. It was their time to take action; to stop hiding; to start doing the work they were born to do! Many times people think these words were only for Jesus' disciples, or even just for the clergy. I want to clarify this right now: **God's call on people's lives even reaches unlisted numbers! His call is to and for everyone** – the Great Commission is to everyone and for everyone – **not just people wearing collars.**

It was 12 years ago, this week, that as a lay person – I was healed in the Jordan River – and then two days later at Ein Gedi I was called by God to be a priest in Christ's one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. Let me tell you – there was no doubt about it; it was clear and it was non-negotiable – as I heard the words "**You must do this, in grateful obedience.**" Throughout my three years of the process leading up to moving to Pennsylvania in 2002 and attending Trinity School for Ministry – I was asked many times by examiners why I felt my call was specifically to the ordained ministry – and not to just continue to bring Holy Communion to

the shut-ins, or to lead as a Warden of the church, or to read God's Word as a teacher and Lay Reader. The more I told my story – the clearer it became to everyone.

Just this past week, I was in Ambridge, PA for a board meeting of the New Wineskins Missionary Network, and then the Fairfield Alumni gathering at Trinity. (By the way – Emily and Fr. Hubbard send their love!) It was during this gathering that Bishop Bill Frey from San Antonio, Texas told us of the young man who came to him many years ago wanting to enter the process for ordained ministry. The Bishop asked him to explain why he felt called. The man said that he experienced God's transformational love personally and in his family – and that he wanted to give himself totally to the Lord. Bishop Frey then said to this young man **“Ok – you've told me why you were baptized – now tell me why you want to be ordained a priest?”**

There are many calls – and whether lay or ordained – they are all genuine calls from God. Jesus tells many “Follow Me!” Those words are non-negotiable and so are the words that the Lord spoke on that mountain - before He ascended to the Father. Jesus Christ makes the path clear; He is *“the Way, the Truth and the Life!”* (John 14:6) The Apostle Paul reminds us that answering the call can be for *“some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ”* (Ephesians 4:11-12) To further clarify – some are called to be fathers or mothers, sons and daughters, using the gifts and talents that God has bestowed upon us. Paul tells us in Romans 12 *“Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.”* (Romans 12:4-8)

You might say that ministry is “following and helping others to follow what Jesus said were the two greatest commandments.” *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.”* *“This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”* (Matthew 22:37-39) Jesus clearly instructed us to be – *“teaching them to observe all that I commanded you?”* (Matthew 28:20) Jesus also said *“This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.”* (John. 15:12)

The apostles would soon be given the power of the Holy Spirit – which we remembered and celebrated last week on Pentecost Sunday, to more fully perform their ministry. This was their time – **their time to GO**. Jesus also gave the disciples 3 very important mobilizing commands – with which to take action in their ministry.

Jesus instructed the Apostles to **“make disciples”** - to bring people to faith and obedience; making *followers* who in turn would spread the One true Gospel and so make more disciples, which means getting out of our comfort zones – and not just doing good works – but being good people who share Christ's love through living and believing His Word. St. Francis of Assisi is often credited with these great words – *“Preach the Gospel always – and if necessary, use words.”* Isn't that the Truth!

Jesus also told them to **baptize** – through plunging new believers into water at baptism, they would be dying along with Jesus and coming to share in His new life. In public – they would be marked as Christ’s own – taking the good news of Christ as their very own - forever.

Lastly – Jesus commanded the disciples to **teach** – to teach His followers to “*obey everything I have commanded you.*” **Teach** might be the toughest one of all –**go, make, baptize, and teach** --- it is not just teaching people about Jesus, but teaching about changing a lifestyle – changing the way we view and treat others. It seems to me that **the world is still working on processing this one.** Following is easy – but obeying? That means I might have to submit what I want and lay it aside so that I can do what God wants. That’s not easy or very popular! And unfortunately, there are so many who are unwilling to let go of the things of this world that divide them from truly knowing Christ. Once again we have that picture of Christ waiting for one to open the door and the powerful words from the book of Revelation 3:20 “*Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.*” We need to remind others – that Jesus is there waiting for them to know Him. That is Jesus’ call to the church. That is our job and we must never forget it. Some people raise the question “what about the people who do not know Jesus or have not heard about Him? God’s answer is simply: “**YOU TELL THEM!**”

Jesus says: **go, make disciples, baptize, and teach:** important reminders for each one of us – in our everyday lives – that the things we do are under His authority, His power, and not ours. We need to put our trust in Him and not in our own devices; **that, dear friends, is a huge step of faith.** There is so much ahead of each one of us – and we are unsure where, or what our tomorrows might bring. The one thing we can count on - is Christ. We need to trust Him and put our faith in Him.

There was a man who was injured in a chemical accident and unfortunately lost the sight in both of his eyes. His reaction to this terrible accident: to remain in his room and vegetate, feeling sorry for himself and doing very little to learn how to cope with his new way of life. One day his Dad came into his room and told his son that he was going to work but that he expected him to get up and put up all of the storm windows. This was his job and he needed to do it before his dad got home. The young man was filled with anger – and kept thinking “I’ll show you!” - all the while muttering how unfair this was. He felt his way out to the garage and found all of the storm windows. One by one he took baby steps in getting each of the windows installed, complaining the whole time. He figured that he might fall off the ladder and then wouldn’t his dad feel terrible. He would later learn, after getting the job done, that his father was never more than 4 feet away from him the whole time – ready to jump in and keep his son from harm. Isn’t that how the Lord is? No matter how impossible the task or how big the mountain seems to be He is always with us, ready to carry us, never to leave us or forsake us. That is the character of God: “I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)

May each of us - today - consider what exciting challenges God has in store for each one of us – and remember that as He is sending us – He is standing with us. In that we can put our trust and our lives. God has laid out a way for you and all of those whom He has called. Following His way is never easy. It requires grateful obedience and it is a huge step of faith. May God bless all of us in our ministry together, here at St. Bartholomew’s in the days ahead – and that He will bless and guide you, always along His Way.