

**Matthew 28:16-20**

**By Grace I'm Saved:**

**Evangelism**

**"Lord Keep Us Faithful to the Word"**

**Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church**

**Winchester, VA**

**Pastor Paul Krueger**

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I had a little discussion with Arlene yesterday at our Community Day event about how I used to sell Cutco Knives. I worked for Vector Marketing Corp. selling those knives for about two months one summer during high school. Now, I can stand here today and tell you without a doubt in my mind that Cutco is some of the finest cutlery available on the market. But at one thousand plus dollars for a set of knives, as great as they may have been, it wasn't a product I felt 100% confident selling. I just wasn't convinced that the people I was marketing to—the parents of my friends, the friends of my parents, members of my home congregation—families in financial situations not unlike most of yours, needed to be spending a grand on kitchen knives. Not when there are so many other brands out there that cost far less and can still chop the same vegetables even if not quite as efficiently.

I'm a lot more confident about the job I have now. It's true that there are a lot of different "brands" of church out there today. But am extremely confident in promoting the Lutheran church and particularly our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, whether that's here or as I'm out and about living my daily life, because I know that the teachings we believe and confess in this Lutheran Church are the very same teachings that God has given us in His holy Word. So while having a four-month-long preaching series on our Lutheran heritage might seem a little pretentious from a worldly standpoint, I'm not ashamed at all to have done it, because I know that "brand" that we're "selling" here is really Lutheranism, it's Jesus. The product, if you will, that I promote from this pulpit, and that we promote from this church, is the commands and promises of God which He has given us in His Word.

We've seen those commands and promises over the last four months. We started on July 2 by looking at the biblical teaching of Original Sin. God shares with us in His Word this amazing plan, that one changeless thought which He has had from all eternity. That He would be our God and we would be His people and who would dwell together with Him forever in perfect fellowship and harmony.

But no sooner had God created this world and our very first parents, Adam and Eve, than that plan was interrupted... interrupted by something called sin. Now, sin is a word that gets thrown around a lot at church and sometimes we maybe start to think of it as simply, "sins are the bad things I do." But the words we find in the original languages of the Bible that we translate as "sin" really have a number of different pictures behind them, concepts such as "missing the mark," like shooting an arrow at a target and falling short of it. In other places sin is described as "trespassing" or "transgressing" when we step outside of the boundaries that have been set for us, and in still other places God speaks of it as wandering aimlessly off the side of the path that has been set for us.

All of those come back to the idea of this perfect thought that God has for us to be His holy people and for Him to be our God. Adam and Eve and every single one of their sinful descendants all the way down to you and me, have fallen short of being that holy people of God. We've fallen short because we've stepped over the boundaries He's given us in His law and we've strayed from

the amazing life that He wanted for us. That happens when we decide to live our lives to please ourselves and to live for ourselves rather than living for our God. We call it “Original Sin” because it’s an attitude, a life-style that we inherit from our sinful parents at the moment of our conception, even before it ever manifests itself in the way we think and live our lives.

And because God is perfect and holy, because His entire essence is wrapped up in one good, eternal thought, He cannot remain true to Himself and at the same time have anything to do with those who have fallen short of, stepped beyond, or veered aside from that plan which is everything that He is. Because He is perfectly just, those who have deviated from His plan are subjected to the judgement we know from the Bible as hell. Hell is a separation from God, removal from that plan. It is being cut off from those blessings, cut off from God Himself.

But because God is perfectly loving, because His entire being revolves around this changeless plan, the moment sin entered into the world He provided a way out from under it. He promised to save us. And so, when the time was just right, according to God’s infinite wisdom, He came into our world, taking on human flesh, and placing Himself under His own law. Jesus, the Son of God, yet God Himself, lived a life in perfect fellowship with God the Father, never falling short, never stepping across the boundaries of the law, never veering to one side or the other. And then Jesus subjected Himself to that punishment due those who had separated themselves from God’s plan. He was cut off from the God the Father, and forsaken by Him.

Jesus died so that you can live. Because His life, the life of the Creator, is worth immeasurably more than the lives of all of His creatures, He was able, with His death, to credit both His life of perfect obedience to God and His payment for the debt of sin to you. And as proof that through His life and death He was able to accomplish that, God raised Him from the dead so that you can be sure that death itself has been destroyed and you have received, through Jesus, the gift of everlasting life.

God has given us that eternal life and the forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus. Faith which He creates in our hearts through the miracle of His grace which He effects through the message of His Word and through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism and which He strengthens and confirms in us through continued study of His Word and through the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

That miracle-wrought faith changes the way we live our lives in our homes and in society and drives us to seek out other Christians as we continue to study His commands and His promises and as we build our lives around the fact that Jesus alone is the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one else is able to reconcile us to God; no one else is able to make us once again a part of that perfect, changeless plan where we are God’s holy people and He is our God.

As the Holy Spirit works in our hearts and transforms us with the miracle-working power of that message of salvation, He leads us to come as God has both commanded and invited us to speak to Him in prayer laying all our needs and concerns before Him as we trust the promise that His will for us is to save us, to dwell with us in perfect love forever, and that He is going to do whatever is best for us toward that end.

And so we listen to His cautions to watch out for false teachings and to separate ourselves from anyone who would put anything between us and that awesome plan by teaching anything that goes against what He tells us in His Word. And finally, as we saw last week, we take stock of all of the blessings that our generous master has filled our lives with to find out how can we use those

gifts best to serve the God who has rescued us from the depths of our own sin—the God who sent His Son to save me, when I had turned aside from His perfect plan for me.

Those are the truths we've studied these past seventeen weeks. And I felt confident and privileged to teach them to you and remind you of them because they aren't just the best option out there among different brands of religion or teachings, they are the only option. God's Word given to us to make us wise for salvation through Jesus. That brings us to our final lesson in our series this morning. The text we have before us is a rather familiar passage, one many of you know as the Great Commission. I'd like to read those words again: **Then** [that is, some time after Jesus appeared to the disciples on Easter Sunday, and before His ascension] **the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.** <sup>17</sup>**When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.** <sup>18</sup>**Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.** <sup>19</sup>**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,** <sup>20</sup>**and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."**

The familiar part is that last bit, really the last three verses. I don't know about you, but those were passages I memorized in Sunday School as a child. What isn't so familiar, what might even come as a bit of a surprise are the words in verse seventeen: **When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.** They doubted? What does that mean? These are the eleven disciples, (The Twelve minus Judas). Jesus had appeared to them after the resurrection. He had let them touch His hands and His feet, let them feel where the spear had pierced His side. He had eaten and drank in front of them. Did they doubt that He had risen? Did they doubt that He was the Son of God? No. Jesus had opened their minds to understand what it was that the Scriptures said concerning Him, those same truths that He has been reminding us of over these past months. They knew He was truly risen, knew He was the Son of God their Savior, and so they worshipped Him. And yet they doubted.

What they were questioning still at that point, I believe, are the same questions you and I have. Jesus, I believe that You are my Savior, but when am I going to see you again face to face, and what am I supposed to do in the mean time?

The words Jesus spoke were in answer to those doubts, those lingering questions. "Yes, I am God the Son, your Savior from sin. **All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me**—authority over life and death, authority on the basis of my perfect life and innocent death to proclaim to be children of God and to bring you peace—authority to commission you, whom I have purchased with my lifeblood, to be my servants; to invite you whom I have made my friends, to participate in the one, perfect, changeless, and eternal thought that I have had for all people since before the creation of the world. **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. And** [do be afraid because you do not go alone, for] **surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.**

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Those are some pretty important words for you and me, aren't they? They're important, because in those words we find our identity. Those are the words that were spoken over you at your Baptism. It is the name of the

One True God who washed from you the guilt of your sins and gave you a new and everlasting life.

That's why we revisit those words at the beginning of our gatherings for worship here—that's why we hear them in the words of forgiveness after we confess our sinfulness—because it is that Triune God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who has made you who you are today, a blood-bought child of God who can come into His presence to praise and worship Him and hear once more the joyous news of the salvation He won for us.

Those words are important, because not only do they communicate to us our identity, they were used, right here by our Savior Jesus, to tell us our purpose. Our purpose is to make disciples of that Triune God, through Word and Sacrament.

So as we celebrate 500 years of faithful proclamation of the truths of God's Word in the Lutheran church we pray, Lord, Keep Us Faithful To Your Word. Give us a holy desire to continue learning and taking to heart everything that you have commanded us and promised us in Your Word so that we may continue communicating it faithfully to the souls of those whom you have placed into our lives.

To close, I'd like to leave this thought with you: Evangelism—sharing the good news of what God has done for us is not only the greatest privilege we have this side of eternity, it's the only reason that we're here.

Martin Luther put it this way, **We have no other reason for living on earth than to be of help to others. If this were not the case, it would be best for God to kill us and let us die as soon as we are baptized and have begun to believe. But He permits us to live here that we may bring others to faith, just as He brought us"** (Luther's Works, vol. 30, p. 11).

The Apostle Paul, who had an even greater understanding of our purpose here in this world than Martin Luther did, wrote in his letter to the Philippians, with words that were breathed into him by the Holy Spirit, **For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far, but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.**

Heaven, where God's perfect plan for you is brought to its ultimate fulfillment, is better than here—by far! Wouldn't you like to be in heaven right now? I would. Yet even recognizing how vastly superior our lives in heaven will be to our lives here on earth, Paul says it's difficult to choose between the two. He says he's torn between them. And that wasn't because of opportunities like the one we're sharing right now. We'll still be able to worship God in heaven, and that worship will be far more glorious than anything we have here. But here, we have an opportunity, a purpose, a mission, which we only have here. Here we have one blessing that we will not have in heaven. And that is opportunity to let other people know about the plan God has for them, telling them of the depths He went to in His love, through the life, and death, and resurrection of His Son Jesus, so that they can be His people and He their God, living with them and together with us in perfect fellowship, unity, peace, and love forever.

I desire to depart and be with Christ, and so do you. But it is necessary for us to be here. Because there is work that needs to be done. The blessings of our God be with you as you set about that amazing work. Amen.