

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

As Jesus walked on this earth, He was amazing; He astonished those who heard Him preach and witnessed His miracles. Matthew tells us that when Jesus had finished preaching His Sermon on the Mount, *“the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority”* (Matt. 7:28-29). But He continued, not only teaching with authority, but demonstrating that authority. He cleansed a leper; He healed a Centurion’s paralyzed servant, Peter’s mother-in-law, a woman with a chronic discharge of blood, and others who were sick; He calmed a storm; He healed another paralytic as a demonstration of His power even to forgive sins; He gave sight to two men who were blind; He raised up a young girl who had died. Yes, as we heard in our Gospel, *“Jesus [was going] throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.”*

This is astonishing stuff. Don’t you also marvel at all that Jesus said and did? Jesus had claimed that in His coming, *“the kingdom of heaven [was] at hand”* (Matt. 4:17). In Jesus, the fullness of time had come. Jesus born of woman had come to redeem the world (Gal. 4:4-5). He had come to rescue us from our bondage to sin, death, and the devil. He had come to effect this salvation by His blood, to forgive us our sins, to bestow on us His righteousness, to give us resurrection and life as we hear and believe the good news of God’s grace and mercy.

Yet, as sheep need shepherds and harvest fields need laborers, so the world needed apostles and prophets, and still needs evangelists and missionaries, pastors and teachers, disciples all sent out to its four corners to do the work of ministry, preaching the gospel of Christ, calling sinners to repentance, forgiving sins, building up the body of Christ in faith and love (Eph. 4:11-16), for God had resolved that He would save us by grace through faith, and that *“faith [would come] from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ”* (Rom. 10:17). And so He provided for preachers to be sent, that people might hear and believe and call on the name of the Lord (Rom. 10:14-15).

Indeed, as bread and fish in the hands of the Son of God, Jesus’ own ministry was multiplied as He sent out the Twelve, for He sent them out with the same message and the same authority. *“Proclaim,”* in your going, that *“The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons”* — the same stuff that Jesus was doing! That’s marvelous, too. On another occasion, Jesus sent out seventy-two with similar instructions, and they returned with joy at what they had accomplished in Jesus’ name with Jesus’ authority (Luke 10:1-17).

On the other hand, Jesus told His disciples, you’re not going to get rich this way: *“You received without paying; give without pay. Acquire no gold or silver or*

*copper for your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics or sandals or a staff.*” Jesus told them, some will welcome you, and if they do, be a blessing to them: “*let your peace come upon*” them; on the other hand, some will not receive you, in which case, don’t worry about it. Just “*shake off the dust from your feet when you leave.*” That is, it’s not your fault; the judgment is their own fault, not yours. Jesus also told them, you will experience opposition, but what an opportunity for even governors and kings to hear the good news. And He promised that the Spirit would supply the words to bear witness.

To be sure, Jesus has ascended to the Father’s side, and so, He doesn’t send out apostles immediately any more, that is, without an intermediary. Now, He works mediately through His Church, but through a Church that has itself been sent forth to make disciples as we heard last Sunday. And so the multiplication of Jesus ministry continues. We go forth, but not with the authority given to the apostles to heal and cast out demons and raise the dead. The authority Jesus gives us is to make disciples by baptizing and teaching.

Today, we have three young people coming before the congregation to acknowledge Jesus before you, confessing before you that “*God show[ed] his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Rom. 5:8) as one of their confirmation verses affirms, believing the promise that Jesus will acknowledge them before the Father in heaven (as Jesus would say a bit later in Matthew 10). They are going to acknowledge that they are baptized and that the Lord has gifted them with discipleship through it. They will acknowledge that they have been taught and are ready to confess with us and receive the Sacrament.

As significant as we may think the rite of confirmation is, they know and we know that they are not being made disciples by confirmation; discipleship happened those years back in the waters of Holy Baptism. It’s the Lord’s work, for just as the Lord said of Israel through Moses in days of old: “*You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself,*” so the Lord has led these young people through the Red Sea waters of their baptism, out of their own bondage and into the freedom of Christ. Freely they have received and been set free. As St. Paul says, “*For freedom Christ set us free*” (Gal. 5:1).

Freely now, they are confessing and promising, for the Lord now, as in those days of old, calls upon his “*treasured possession*” to “*obey [His] voice and keep [His] covenant.*” And as “*the people [back then] answered together and said, ‘All that the LORD has spoken we will do,’*” so these young confessors are going to confess: we worship only the Lord, the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; we promise that we are going to remain faithful to Him, to His word, and to His

gifts; and we promise that we are going to strive to live lives of godliness in service and love toward others. *“All that the LORD has spoken we will do.”*

This is what it means to be God’s people, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation: it means living *“as people who are free, not using [our] freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God”* (1 Pet. 2:16); it means acknowledging the mercy we have received from God in Christ; it means proclaiming the excellencies of Him who called us into His marvelous light; it means abstaining from the passions of the flesh; it means living honorable lives of love and good works (1 Pet. 2:9-12). God grant this to our young people; God grant it to us who, by their confession and promise, can renew our own.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.