

Today, I'm very impressed with the lectionary.

Creation and the Great Commission. Two passages that I probably wouldn't have had the insight to put side by side, but they really go together perfectly – they sort of need each other to be properly understood.

You know we often think about the Great Commission as an inconvenient burden – that we have to put aside things we'd rather be doing and risk looking like religious nuts to normal people. For most of us, it's uncomfortable to think about telling people who don't believe in Jesus that they should, and this discomfort is compounded when the prevailing culture tells us we have no right to impose our beliefs on anyone else. But I want to do a couple of things this morning. First, I want us to think about how the eleven disciples would have received this Great Commission from

Jesus to ‘go and make disciples of all nations;’ and then I’d like for us to think about the message of the Great Commission in light of the account of Creation from Genesis 1.

You may’ve thought it strange as you’ve read through the Gospels that after miraculous events, we often read something like, ‘and Jesus charged them strictly to tell no one who he was.’ Do you remember that? He gives sight to a blind man and says ‘Don’t tell anyone who I am.’ It’s verses like these that Episcopalians have held up as the cornerstone of their evangelism efforts – Don’t tell anyone.

No, he said this because of what they expected in the Messiah. See the Israelites in Jesus’ day expected the Messiah to come as a military king, and they thought he was going to lead an uprising, and overthrow the Romans,

and return Israel to the glory days of King David and sit on the throne in Jerusalem. But Jesus wasn't going to be a Messiah like that – He wouldn't be a king by military force, by being a servant, and He would be a king for all people and all nations, not just Israel. So Jesus didn't want to be pegged as the Messiah, until He had accomplished what He came to do, until He had died for our sins and had been resurrected to glory.

But here in the Gospel passage this morning, He *has* been resurrected. The two Marys went to the tomb and found it empty, then Jesus appeared to them and they fell down at his feet and worshipped Him 'with fear and great joy!' And Jesus said to them, and you can just see the joy and love in His eyes, he says, 'Don't be afraid, go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee and they will see me there.'

And so we see in verse 16 that the 11 disciples went to Galilee and saw Jesus, resurrected from His awful crucifixion. Just imagine the surprise and joy and wonder and doubt and fear and exhilaration of seeing Jesus alive after having watched Him die. What a strange and wonderful reunion that must have been! And Jesus says to them, “All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. And *NOW*, you can finally tell people who I am. Go and tell everybody you can think of, anyone who will listen. Make disciples of ALL nations, every tribe, every tongue, and baptize them in the name of God the three in One, out of the death of a godless or pagan existence and into life as I created it to be lived. And you’ll never again have to worry about me leaving you, even in the tough times, because I will be with you forever!”

And you can just feel the excitement in the eleven disciples, like they'd just heard a Vince Lombardi pre-game speech and they're ready to go out there and give their lives for this eternal championship. And they're jumping up and down and high-fivin' on the mountain, because God has just revealed His true Messiah and He's opened the gates to everyone on earth, and *they* get to be the ones to go tell everybody. It's not a burden, it's an *honor*, an incredible privilege to carry the banner of salvation in Christ to those who've not yet received it. They've encountered the risen Christ, they *believe* the message to their core, and they can't wait to finally share Him with the waiting world. Doesn't mean it won't be scary, or uncomfortable; doesn't mean that everybody'll listen. But it means that they believe the message is so important, so true, so GOOD that they're willing to get

through the scary and uncomfortable. It's the GOOD NEWS!

So that's how I think they would've received this Great Commission, in the joy and amazement of the resurrection, and I believe that that's also the way we should receive it. If we've encountered the Risen Christ, if we do believe it to our core, then why would we keep it to ourselves? It's the GOOD NEWS!

But now let's look at this Good News in the light of Creation, because as John Eldridge has said, we hear an awful lot about Original Sin, but we hear much less about original glory. The Good News is that Jesus died for our sins to reconcile us to God; what that supposes is not as good'a news – that we're all sinners (though that's not

really *news*, is it?). But what comes before *that* is that we were created for the garden. That sin wasn't God's plan or intent for us. That we were created out of the goodness of the heart of the Father for perfect communion with Him.

There was chaos, then there was order; there was darkness, then there was light, there was lifelessness, then there was life – all because God spoke the word. Let there be... and there was. And it was good. It was good, not because it was pretty or original, or even because it worked, but because it reflected the character of God. God did it, so it was Good. It proved His sovereignty, it reflected His character and nature as a God of order and beauty and creativity and power. But it didn't share His personality. It wasn't made in His image. *That* was saved ... for us.

Humanity was the pinnacle of creation – First light, then

water, then land, then vegetation, then the sun and the moon, then fish and birds, then animals to roam the jungles and the plains – then, in a concert of roars and shrieks and splashes and vegetation and light – God created humanity in his own image, *their* own image, the image of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; male and female He created them. And he blessed them. And he spoke to them directly. And he bestowed authority to them, and he gave them instruction, and behold, it was *very good*.

We weren't created for life *after* death – we were created for life *before* death. Or rather before death ever was, we were created for LIFE. To participate in His glory, to receive His blessing, to speak with Him directly, to receive authority and instruction from Him. And it was

very good. That was God's intent for humanity; that was God's intent for you, and for me.

And so the message of the Great Commission, the Good News that we are to take to every nation and baptize them into, is that in Christ, God has restored us to the garden, to the very goodness, of our original creation. As we put on the righteousness of Christ given to us at the Cross, salvation becomes not merely an escape from the muck of this life, but an undoing of it. Jesus Christ fulfilled, where Adam failed. And in Christ we return to the image of God that we were created for. We return to the blessing we were created for, we return to the perfect communion with God that we were Created for; think about that. If we're reconciled to God in Christ, then when we pray we're in a conversation with the Creator! With the eternal and

sovereign Lord who made **everything** out of **nothing**. But that conversational intimacy with God is just what Adam and Eve had in the garden.

Now I want you to be clear that I'm not saying that life is perfect for Christians. We have messy relationships like everyone else, we suffer hardships like tornadoes and disease and tragic loss like everyone else, because we live in a broken world like everyone else. What I am saying is that eternal life in Christ doesn't start after you die, but that in Christ, we begin to see life as it was meant to be lived right now. That even in the midst of hardship there's joy, there's fellowship with God and there is true, real, life. And it is very good because He is with us always, even to the end of the age. And that's a message worth sharing! You don't have to go shout on the street corners or knock on

doors. You just live your life like you're the pinnacle of Creation and give Him all the glory for it, and people will start to take notice.

Let's pray.