

Apprentices Of The Master - Teaching

Bible Reading:
Matthew 28: 16-20

PREPARED BY
KEN GEHRELS
PASTOR
CALVIN CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH OF OTTAWA
ONTARIO, CANADA

We're in a sermon series entitled *Apprentices Of the Master*.

Being a Christian means that we are followers of Jesus. Students of Jesus. Seeking to learn more about living life on His terms. Praying and longing and obeying to have characters and personalities that are, over time, becoming more like Jesus.

Which is sort of like being an Apprentice - following the master around the shop, learning the skills from his work-worn hands, practicing them under his watchful eye.

The words from Scripture that direct us in this series come from Matthew 28:16-20.

MATTHEW 28: 16-20

In our first message we talked about the authority of Jesus, and submitting ourselves to that authority as apprentices - even when we don't fully understand it all; even when we wrestle with doubt.

Three weeks ago we focused on these words:

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations.....

We considered the challenge of

- going & making disciples

the challenge to look at our life as a congregation. How intentional are we at evangelism? How many "on ramps" to the faith - open doors - do we offer? How deliberately active are we in growing more welcoming to people of other backgrounds?

Two weeks ago we heard the following words:

baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

And we heard the challenge to claim our baptism, to own it proudly, and treasure it deeply.

Last week we hear the call from Jesus to His apprentices

teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.....

And we remembered how teaching involves the ears, the eyes and the hands - what people hear from us, see in us, and experience with us. We heard the call from Hebrews 5&6 to deep Christian teaching - which is teaching that impacts daily living.

So now - as we bring this series to a close - what about all this?

What about all the authorizing, and going, and baptizing and teaching?

How do we view it all?

What difference does it all make?

How worthwhile is this endeavor, anyway?

We conclude our series, *Apprentices Of The Master*, with the word

HOPEFUL.

Jesus said,

And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

I

am with

you.

Right there is the absolutely most profound
most beautiful

most strengthening
thing that any believer can ever hear.

I
am with
you.

It is the essence of Christmas.
Immanuel - *God is with us.*

That is what we believe. That is what we celebrate.

Henry Nouwen remarked that "songs, good feelings, beautiful liturgies, nice presents, big dinners, and sweet words do not make Christmas. Christmas is saying yes to something beyond all emotions and feelings. Christmas is saying yes to a hope based on God's initiative." [Henry Nouwen, *New Oxford Review* (November 1986)]

It is the initiative that sends His Son to be among us, one with us.

The Master never leaves His apprentices alone. He will always be there, His strong, experienced hands there for our hand as we live our apprenticeships.

I am with you always.

Let me suggest three things tonight.

He is with us

- to empower us
- to guide us
- to comfort us.

He strengthens us in our hearts, our minds, our bodies so that we can live the life and do the work of an apprentice.

He points us in the right direction, guiding us through a maze of choices in a world that is so confusing and complex, guiding us towards the ultimate, final and wonderful goal that He is preparing, for us and for Creation.

He dries our tears and holds us long and tight when it seems like we've got nothing left to hang on to; when life seems to be one hurricane after another blowing everything to bits.

Empowering.
Guiding.
Comforting.

I am with you always.

You know, sometimes I catch myself reading the life of Jesus, visualizing the place of the disciples, and becoming envious of them – they got to actually hear Jesus, to see him heal the sick and raise the dead, to be there at the empty grave. How much easier for them to believe and to live as his apprentices.

Then I realize - how I must grieve the Holy Spirit.

Philippians 1:19 refers to the Holy Spirit as "*the Spirit of Jesus Christ.*"

Romans 8:9 speaks of the Holy Spirit as "*the Spirit of Christ.*"

As does 1 Peter 1:11.

Before He went to the cross, Jesus gave his disciples - and us - key teachings about the place and work of the Holy Spirit

of that Holy Person who would be His personal Presence and Power after the ascension.

Can anyone say, off the top, where that teaching is found?

John 14 and John 16.

Let's read the key verses together:

JOHN 14: 25-31

JOHN 16: 4B-15

Earlier I had listed three key themes -

Empowering.

Guiding.

Comforting.

I didn't just suck them out of the end of my thumb.

Can you see each of these themes in these verses?

Begin with empowerment - giving us the energy to do the work, and bringing effectiveness to the work that is done. Understand the difference? Running a car, for example, needs power. There has to be an engine with enough horse power to move that ton of metal and plastic down the road. But raw power is not enough. Set the car in a bed of deep, loose gravel and all you'll get is spitting, flying bits of limestone and granite from under the wheels. Won't go anywhere.

The Holy Spirit gives us spiritual horse power. He also sets us on a firm surface so that we can actually move forward in the work of the Kingdom.

Holy Spirit strength - so that we can live the life and do effective work as Apprentices of Jesus.

John 14:30 - the ruler of the world has no power over Jesus. Jesus holds the power. And in that power He does the will of the Father. He does it so that the world would be drawn to Him – **to** Him, and **away**, therefore, from the illegitimate ruler of the world, Satan.

John 16:8 - the Spirit is going to prove human thinking wrong about sin and righteousness and judgement. In other words, He has the final truth and the final word.

He will not be sidetracked.

He will not be confused.

He will come out on top.

It is the Holy Spirit, says 1 Corinthians 12, another great Holy Spirit chapter, who

- gives our minds the faith and our lips the ability to say "*Jesus is Lord.*"

- gives our being different gifts and abilities.

And then the Spirit takes individuals who say and believe, "*Jesus is Lord*", gifted believers, and He arranges and organizes them into a community,

into a family of faith-filled apprentices known as the Church.

And He directs us in doing His work.

So, if personal service or church ministry doesn't show results or bear fruit we are probably out of step with the Spirit's presence and direction.

If the resources aren't present in a congregation for doing a certain type of ministry, count on it that the Spirit doesn't want this congregation doing that certain ministry — at least, not right now.

And if a particular ministry is proving to be terribly draining, with limited fruit and joy - then you just have to ask questions. Just because the Spirit wanted it done 30 years ago, doesn't mean He wants it done today.

Converse is also true - just because 30 years the Spirit said, "*Not yet!*" doesn't mean He said, "*Never.*"

Do we take time to prayerfully ask, "*Spirit of Jesus, what do you want us as a congregation to focus on?*" and then to arrange our life's rhythm so that there is room for Him to answer without having to shout over the din of human-arranged activity?

The Spirit empowers, and guides.

He points us in the right direction, guiding us through a maze of choices in a world that is so confusing and complex.

He points us to ministry to do today.

And He continues to remind us of the goal towards which we work, the return of Christ when all Creation will be purged and renewed.

John 16:30 *When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth...*

We need the reminder and guidance of the Spirit because it is so easy to get turned around. I was watching a program the other night about airplane crashes. Turns out that the vast majority of them are caused by pilot error. And many of the pilot errors are the result of pilots with basic training, with VFR *visual flight rating*, getting into situations where they have to rely on instruments; flying through fog, thunderstorms, darkness - whatever. They become disoriented, and lose control of the aircraft, with often deadly consequences.

Sometimes as Christians we can be distracted by the wealth and peace of our society. Or by the lack of enthusiasm from coworkers or friends for the gospel. Or by personal failures and weakness. These things can disorient us spiritually away from the gracious forgiveness that is ours in Jesus; away from the marvelous welcome that the Heavenly Father grants us; away from the security of the Fellowship of the Saints which the Holy Spirit prepares for us here in His Church called Calvin.

It takes the Holy Spirit to hit the spiritual <ctrl><alt> and get our memory rebooted properly.

He gives us, as Brian McLaren notes, a far larger and far better sense of reality - one that spans beyond this age, this time, this life on earth. [*More Ready Than You Realize*, p.182].

And -

through all of this, we gain comfort.

He dries our tears and holds us long and tight when it seems like we've got nothing left to hang on to; when life seems to be one hurricane after another blowing everything to bits.

This past week I had to visit one of the several chronically sick members of the congregation. Before going I was praying, "*Lord, what should I say to this person?*" And the words came to me:

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid."

I went on the visit and shared these words. The person smiled and said, "*I know.*" Just a short time earlier, when they were in a very difficult situation - hours before - their eyes had fallen on a day-calendar that a friend had given. And written across the top of the calendar were the words:

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid." - John 14.

We're talking about living as apprentices, and living with hope.

Understand it right.

Christian living doesn't mean we don't lose our jobs, we don't get cancer and we breeze through school with straight "A's".

It means that as we search for meaningful employment, and as we head out for the doctor visits and chemo treatments, and as we struggle to master the concepts and write the exams -

- as we work through the tangled web called "Life", we do so with an always present Friend.

One who said, "*I am with you always*".

One father said, after burying a daughter that he and his wife had named "Hope," a girl born severely challenged and living for less than a year -

he said, "You know, I think we expected our faith to make this hurt less, but it doesn't."

His wife added, "Our faith gave us an incredible amount of strength and encouragement while we had Hope, and we were comforted by the knowledge that she is in heaven. Our faith keeps us from being swallowed by despair. But I don't think it makes our loss hurt any less...."

God...allows good and bad into our lives and we can trust him with both....Trusting God when the miracle does not come, when the urgent prayer gets no answer, when there is only darkness—this is the kind of faith God values most of all....

Nancy Guthrie, *Holding On to Hope* (Tyndale, 2002)

Sheila Walsh, former co-host of the 700 club, said in an interview,

Christianity is not this nice "everything's going to work out okay" attitude. When you think of Christ at the tomb of Lazarus, he wept because it wasn't supposed to be like this. He had spoken this beautiful world into existence and it was so broken, so messed up. I think one of the greatest gifts we can give is just a dose of reality that life down here is disappointing, that God doesn't always give us answers, but he does always give us himself.

Sheila Walsh, *Leadership Journal* (Summer 2002)

Right on, Sheila!

I WILL be with you always., to the end of the age.

Right until that day spoken of in Revelation 21:

the day when Jesus will return and.....

wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.... "See", he says, "I am making all things new."

In the light of that truth -

- that reality -

we hope.

and live.

as Apprentices of the Master.

wrestling with our doubts.

going to make disciples

living in our baptism

teaching of life in Jesus.

Hear the Master once more:

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.