

Sermon for October 25, 2025 - Reformation/Church Anniversary

Matthew 28:16-20 EHV

Theme: **Christ is with us.**

- 1) His authority overcomes our uncertainty,
- 2) As we proclaim His Gospel to the world.

¹⁶The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some hesitated because they were uncertain. ¹⁸Jesus approached and spoke to them saying, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and gather disciples from all nations by baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and by teaching them to keep all the instructions I have given you. And surely I am with you always until the end of the age."

One of the most powerful scenes of the Reformation shows Luther standing before Emperor Charles V, all the electors of the empire, and papal legates. They demanded he publicly recant (take back) everything he has written and taught about the Gospel. Instead of succumbing to their pressure, Luther boldly declared:

"Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Holy Scriptures or by evident reason... my conscience is captive to the Word of God. Thus I cannot and will not recant.... God help me. Amen."

What you may not know about this scene is that Luther didn't give his bold answer right away. When asked to recant on the previous day, Luther hesitated and requested more time to consider his answer. The emperor granted Luther's request, allowing him to spend the night in prayer, meditating on God's Word.

God's promises strengthened Luther to make his bold confession the next day. He wrote a friend:

"If Christ is with us, what can the devil do to us? Even though the world be full of devils, they cannot harm us."ⁱ

Brothers and sisters in Christ: like Luther, we stand on trial – not before an emperor, but before a godless society that seeks to silence our proclamation of the Gospel. When our fearful flesh tempts us to hesitate in answering those who ask us about the hope we have in Christ,ⁱⁱ let us do what Luther did and prayerfully meditate on God’s Word. Through it, He will reassure us that **Christ is with us**: 1) His authority overcomes our uncertainty, 2) as we proclaim His Gospel to the world.

Part One: Christ’s authority overcomes our uncertainty.

Our sermon text takes place a week or two after Jesus’ resurrection. Do you remember what happened on that first Easter morning? Some of Jesus’ faithful female followers went to honour Jesus at His tomb, only to find it empty! An angel told them that He rose from the dead. As they hurried back to tell the disciples, Jesus appeared to them on the way, saying: “Go, tell my brothers that they should go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”ⁱⁱⁱ The disciples did what Jesus asked.

¹⁶The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had directed them.

Just as the LORD used Jacob’s twelve sons to establish the nation of Israel, so Jesus would use his twelve apostles to establish His kingdom of grace on earth. Sadly, only eleven came – reminding us of Judas’ betrayal and subsequent suicide. The LORD, however, would provide a replacement for Judas in the near future.^{iv}

¹⁷When they saw him, they worshipped him...

Jesus’ resurrection proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that He was *the Christ, the Son of the living God*.^v Even though the disciples all believed this truth previously, Jesus’ resurrection allowed them to experience it in such a profound way that they couldn’t help but fall before Him in divine adoration.

But some hesitated because they were uncertain.

Who were hesitant, and why were they uncertain? The Bible doesn’t tell us. Based on what Jesus does next, many think that the disciples’ doubt was not rooted in unbelief but ignorance. In other words, they believed that Jesus was God’s Son, risen from the dead, but they were uncertain as to what that meant for them. How were they to approach Him – as before or differently? What were Jesus’ plans for them now that He died and rose again?

Aren't we also sometimes similarly uncertain before Jesus? While we confidently worship Him as our LORD and Saviour from sin, thanking, praising, and adoring Him with our whole heart, we can also be hesitant to come before Him. We may feel ashamed of our past sins, even though they are forgiven, uncertain about God's plans for us in Christ, and intimidated by the world around us.

Thankfully, the LORD did not let His disciples wallow in debilitating uncertainty. Instead of waiting for His disciples to come to Him,

¹⁸Jesus approached [them].

Why? To strengthen their faith, dispel their uncertainties, and drive away their fears.

[He] spoke to them saying, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Jesus' job of humbling himself under God's law to save us from our sins was complete. He died on the cross to reconcile us to God and rose again to prove every sin has been forgiven. God the Father took such delight in what His Son did to save us that He exalted Him to the highest place in heaven,^{vi} granting Jesus all authority over everything in heaven and earth! Not only do all the laws of nature bend to His will, but so do every government, spirit, and even Satan himself!

Not only does Jesus have all authority, but He also uses it for you - guarding, protecting, and blessing His church as we faithfully proclaim His Gospel to the world.

What a comfort! How so? Because we are a tiny congregation of forgiven sinners in a big, sinful city. Lacking the resources and people larger congregations have, we are tempted to wonder what role we can play in God's kingdom. How can we overcome the spiritual and societal obstacles the devil puts in our way to destroy us?

See Jesus approaching us through our sermon text, encouraging us not to be afraid or uncertain. He stands with us as our risen Saviour – declaring us forgiven and at peace with God. He stands ready with His power, promising that:

Neither death nor life, neither angels nor rulers, neither things present nor things to come, nor powerful forces, ³⁹neither height nor depth, nor anything else in creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.^{vii}

Part Two: As we proclaim His Gospel to the world.

After alleviating his disciples' uncertainties with His divine authority, Jesus gave them a job.

¹⁹Therefore go and gather disciples from all nations

Jesus didn't live, die, and rise again so his disciples could live a life of ease on this evil earth, unconcerned about all the people around them. No, he saved them for a purpose: to be His ambassadors to the world,^{viii} gathering people from every tribe, people, language, and nation^{ix} to be His disciples. Why? Because the LORD takes no pleasure in the death of anyone,^x instead desiring that all people be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.^{xi}

For this reason, Jesus sends His church to gather His chosen disciples from every corner of the globe. How?

By baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Baptism is foundational to faith. How so? Because God saves us through it^{xii} by forgiving our sins, giving us the Holy Spirit,^{xiii} and granting us a new spiritual birth to receive His rule in our hearts.^{xiv} Because of what God accomplish through our baptism, He no longer sees our sins when He looks at us, but Jesus.^{xv} He puts His name on us, declaring that we belong to Him.

God wants us to baptize all people, regardless of their age, gender, nationality, or social status, promising to grant spiritual life to all who receive this blessed sacrament. But He doesn't want us to stop there. Just as the physical life of a child needs to be sustained after being born, so the spiritual life of the baptized needs to be sustained through continued instruction in God's Word. Therefore, Jesus says:

[Teach] them to keep all the instructions I have given you.

Jesus doesn't just want people to know the basics about His Word. He wants them to know everything. Why? So they can rejoice in how greatly God loves them. He wants people to understand that everything He commands is for our protection and good. He wants us to discern right from wrong so we can avoid the sinful things that try to separate us from Him. He wants us to know about His forgiving love so that, if we do sin, we can return to Him in repentance and faith.

Yes, God wants people not only to know about His Word, but to know it completely. He wants us to see Jesus on every page of Scripture, so we don't stray from His saving love.

God has entrusted our congregation and synod with the mission of gathering disciples for His kingdom. How? Not by using marketing gimmicks or psychological tricks, but by teaching His word and administering His sacraments. As we use these tools, Jesus promises:

And surely I am with you always until the end of the age.”

As we look back upon the past 175 years of our Synod, we can't help but see God's hand through it all. From one seminary in 1865 and one world mission in 1893, Christ has worked through our Synod's preaching of His Word and administration of His sacraments to establish more than 1,200 congregations across North America, missions in 45 countries, and the fourth largest Christian school system in the United States.

Our congregation counts as one of Christ's successes! Through the past 46 years, Jesus has used Divine Word's ministry to baptize and teach hundreds of people his saving truth. And even though we have faced many challenges along the way (some of which seemed insurmountable at the time), Christ was with us – using His divine authority for our protection and providence.

May Jesus' past presence and faithfulness to His promises move us confidently to continue our ministry of gathering disciples for Jesus. How? By baptizing everyone the LORD brings to us, and by faithfully teaching everything His Word proclaims. Through these means, Jesus himself will call, gather and enlighten disciples from every nation for His kingdom – using His almighty power to protect our congregation so we can accomplish His will, all to the glory of His name. Amen.

ⁱ From an April 1521 Letter to Melancthon

ⁱⁱ Cf. 1 Peter 3:15

ⁱⁱⁱ Matthew 28:10 EHV

^{iv} Cf. Acts 2:15-26

^v Matthew 16:16 EHV

^{vi} Cf. Philippians 2:9

^{vii} Romans 8:38 EHV

^{viii} Cf. Galatians 5:20

^{ix} Cf. Revelation 5:9

^x Cf. Ezekiel 18:32 & 33:11

^{xi} Cf. 1 Timothy 2:3

^{xii} Cf. Titus 3:4-7

^{xiii} Cf. Acts 2:38

^{xiv} Cf. John 3:5-6

^{xv} Cf. Galatians 3:26-27