

Hope for the Future

Sermon for the 6th Sunday after Trinity

Sermon Text: Matthew 28:16-20



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Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ And when they saw Him they worshiped Him, but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

When parents bring a child into the world, they often have great hope that their child will have a bright future. The child should ideally look pretty. It should be healthy. It should be athletic. It should also still be smart or be able to make an important contribution to human society. At the birth of a child, parents have such great hope for the future of their children. Somehow, such parents automatically believe that their children will only have the best. Now we all know that these wishes of the parents can't always be fulfilled. Some children develop differently than the parents' plans. And sometimes, the situation in our world is such that the children can't always have the best even if they wanted it. Parents and children must accept disappointment. Both with our hopes for the future as well as with the disappointments, God calls to us today: *"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine!"* Our life's path is not just about having parents who love us. Above all else, it's that we may know there is a

living God who wants us, who loves us, and who looks out for us. And that is so even before we were in the world! God had already thought about us before our birth. Yes, the almighty God wanted your and my life! Almighty God wanted you! And He plans only good things for you and for me. And God wants to say exactly this to us today. Beside all the wishes and dreams that we can have in life, what matters is that we are tightly connected with God and know that we are loved by Him. Even things are going badly for us and we have no hope left in this world, we may know that God is there for us. It is He who holds our life in His hand even when we are in danger or can no longer perceive a future for ourselves. God has a plan in your life, even when we can no longer perceive this plan.

As the first disciples met on the mountain in Galilee, they had no plan. They also couldn't recognize God's plan there on the mountain in Galilee. One of them had betrayed Jesus and committed suicide afterwards. The others all fled and deserted Jesus because they saw no more hope. And Then Jesus was crucified. Their dreams for the future were also crucified with Jesus. And furthermore, the 11 leftover disciples were no special heroes! They neither got good grades in school nor did they contribute anything special to society. They weren't suddenly convinced about Jesus' cause! Because Matthew reports that some bowed down before Jesus while others even doubted whether it was even right to be with Jesus! In this situation, Jesus comes to them and gave them only what God could give. He gave them faith for the future – and Jesus did that through His word: *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me”* said Jesus. Meanwhile, the disciples had also understood that Jesus' authority is not to be confused with political or military authority. Jesus' death on the cross clearly demonstrated that that Jesus refrained from violence. No, God's power wants to be effective quite differently than we imagine: God is not strong when people are overwhelmed, manipulated, or controlled by His power. No, God is strong when someone hears and believes the words: *“Your sins are forgiven!”* God's power is active when we grasp in faith that God is with us. God's power is active when a person partakes of the body and blood of Jesus Christ even when dying. And become united with the living Lord of all times through this. And if someone can feel the nearness of God even in death, then for a long time in their whole life! And it is exactly this that Jesus promises His disciples as He says: *“I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

So that we should know this very precisely, Jesus also gave His disciples a special command. They should go out and tell all people about Jesus. At the same time, they should baptize people in the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We receive God's name in baptism! Everything that God is and what God wanted is poured on our head in baptism. God's kingdom and God's future are therefore connected to my future. God's love is infinitely poured onto and into my life! That all happens solely because Jesus said it! Peter and the other disciples learned earlier what power Jesus words had. At the time Peter couldn't catch a single fish, Jesus sent him out once more. He should once again throw his nets during the day when no one catches any fish. At the time, Peter begrudgingly did this task. But then he said: *“At your word I will do this!”* And Christians have continued to do this since then until this day. At Jesus' word, they went out into the world and preached God's word and taught people in all the languages of the world and baptized. To this day that continues to happen. And that also happens when we don't have success – or when people don't want to believe us. That even happens when we are persecuted or oppressed. Christians learned that everything depends on God's Word. That's why baptism is so important because Jesus said, *“baptize them.”* That's why communion is also a power in our life because Jesus said: *“Take and eat, take and drink. This is my body, this is my blood.”* From the

power of Jesus words, we will live even when our feelings and our human situation show nothing of God's power.

Jesus didn't promise the 11 disciples on the mountain that they would be rich. He also didn't promise them that they would be famous. He never once promised that they would be spared danger or persecution. On the contrary, Jesus warned them often enough that Christians would not have an easy life. Just as people persecuted Jesus, they would also do that with His followers. And yet they went out. They've been doing this for centuries. They went to the lonely and the sick. Likewise, to the successful and the wealthy. They went to those who fell into great sins. Likewise to those who believed themselves to be right. They wanted to tell everyone about the nearness of God and they wanted to invite everyone so that they become children of God. We may fulfill this mission as the church even today. We don't want to force people. We don't want to put them under pressure or manipulation. We don't want to treat non-Christians disrespectfully and certainly not despise them. Rather, we want only one thing: We want to show them the love of God.

Even if Jesus did not promise us earthly success, He did promise one thing. And that is that He will always be with us. When parents hold their newborn children in their arms, they imagine a good future for the child. But earthly parents can never promise or guarantee this future. It's different in God's arms. When we are baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, we aren't alone. Furthermore, we aren't facing an uncertain future. The way that we began with baptism may be hard. But this way has a goal. It is our goal to come into the open arms of our God who waits for us and will wipe away all the tears from our eyes. Only then will we be able to see how near He has been to us the entire time. Amen.