Sermon - The First Sunday after Pentecost: Trinity Sunday A
The Reverend Dale T. Grandfield
June 11, 2017

Genesis 1:1-2:4a
Psalm 8
2 Corinthians 13:11-13
Matthew 28:16-20

It is a hard thing for us to own that, in the scope of Global Christianity we Episcopalians are the minority and that the language of Christianity we speak doesn’t always jive with the larger tenor of the Faith across the world. On top of that, there’s a near constant stream of blog posts and articles in our magazines talking about the death of the Church here in the United States and in Europe, since parishes are shrinking and the historic powerbase called the “Protestant mainline” is barely keeping its head above water - meanwhile Christianity is alive and well and growing by leaps and bounds the world over in Latin America and Africa and Asia.

Right now the largest senders of missionaries are Brazil, South Korea and India,\(^1\) and I hate to break the news to you, dear ones, but many Christians around the world consider us to be the mission field - in fact the largest number of missionaries globally come here to the United States.\(^2\) That sends a shock of self-righteous indignation through the system, doesn’t it?

But consider that over the past 10 years The Episcopal Church as a whole has slumped in membership over 19% - this diocese alone has lost over a third of its members - and among the only dioceses with substantial growth are Taiwan, Colombia, and Ecuador; that the largest diocese is still by nearly ten thousand the Diocese of Haiti - that a lot of Episcopalians are not Americans, and pray their Common Prayer in Spanish or French creole or Chinese.\(^3\)

Jesus stands on the mountaintop again today and speaks to his friends as he is on the verge of ascension: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them [...] and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you”\(^4\) This is “The Great Commission”, the very end of Matthew’s Gospel. Now, remember, Jesus is speaking to a small group of bumpkins - undereducated fishermen and tradespeople, a handful of middle managers. The farthest they had ever traveled might’ve been from Galilee up north to Jerusalem - all of Jesus’ teaching and healing happened within a radius of about a hundred-and-twenty miles at most.\(^5\) From here to Pittsburgh. So, you’d better believe this Commission was unprecedented - And yet this handful of people must’ve taken Jesus’ command very seriously and gotten right to work with equally unprecedented success - because by the time Matthew’s Gospel was

\(^1\) Melissa Steffan, “The Surprising Countries Most Missionaries are Sent from and Go to” in Christianity Today, (July 2013).

\(^2\) Ibid.

\(^3\) See Baptized Members by Province and Diocese 2005-2015,

\(^4\) Matthew 16:19-20.

\(^5\) For example: http://www.bible-history.com/map_jesus/MAJESUSNew_Testament_Cities_Distances.htm
composed in the 70’s,\(^6\) 40-some years after Jesus’ Resurrection, Christianity had already spread out and around the Roman Empire, possibly as far west as Spain, as far north as England, as far east as India, and as far south as Ethiopia. Indeed, by the mid-50’s Paul is already writing letters to help pastor established congregations throughout Greece and in Rome.\(^7\)

This Good News - the news that, against all odds, a handful of really invested people filled with the Holy Spirit, willing enough to risk it all for the Gospel can literally change the world - that God’s mission, God’s kingdom is unstoppable and can spread just as quickly as we open our mouths to say the words, “He’s here - we have seen the Lord! Come and see” - it is Good News, and we do need to open our mouths to share it.

Bishop Mark has this great formula he recommends for how to invite people to church. He talks about how it begins with saying how going to church helps - how it literally meets a need, “When I go to church I feel better.” And then he says, the second phrase is “I’ll pick you up.” Not just “Hey, all are welcome…” not just “Hope to see you there…” but “I’ll pick you up.”\(^8\)

See, Bishop Mark makes a good point - Episcopalians are often the nice folks who work in quiet ways - handing out water to the parched at the Pride Parade, or feeding the hungry with an introverted smile, being good citizens, or doing any number of good works without much talk, certainly without imposing - Heaven forbid!. We’re quiet - and we’re often quite insular, content to come to our pretty churches with the best music and liturgy in town and listen to our educated clergy talk to us, but we’re terrified of doing what the entire liturgy aims to empower us to do: to get out of here and to bring the world into the healing embrace of Christ.

And I know - we’re all afraid people already have a church or faith. But really, in most cases the majority of Americans today don’t. They don’t have either - not a community to support them, not a fertile way to get to know God in a more mature way.

It is simply not an option anymore for us to rest on our laurels - it is not an option for Episcopalians to just put up a sign that says “The Episcopal Church Welcomes You” or “A Church for All People”; it’s not an option for St. Paul’s! or if it is the option we take, the Good News we have to share of Christ and the Church and the Episcopal way, and even this parish will be so under-tended by us that in not so many years that it will fall to others to proclaim. More than anything else - more than anything else in our life - anything else - as people of the Triune God, baptized in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - it is our life’s purpose, our fulfillment, to go out of here, open our mouths, share the News, and make a way for people out there to come and see.

God is waiting, waiting for you and for me partner with God in the redemption of the world, to invest ourselves fully in God’s mission.

\(^6\) Scholars generally agree on a date of composition for Matthew in the 70’s. See article in the Blackwell Companion to the New Testament.

\(^7\) The earliest Pauline letter, \(1\) Thessalonians was likely composed around 50. The latest, \(Romans\), in 57 or 58. See articles in the Blackwell Companion to the New Testament.

\(^8\) See Bishop Hollingsworth’s Leadership videos, http://www.dohio.org/leadership-videos