

## “Go!”

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*<sup>16</sup>Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup>When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup>And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>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, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

*(Matthew 28:16-20)*

Now that it's June, everyone seems ready to GO. Conversations are focused on summer plans, anticipation and excitement over all kinds of adventures that people have in the works. It is also graduation season, which means that high school and college graduates are doing a lot of thinking about next steps – where they will go from here... what they want to do now that school is done. I don't know if things have changed but for many years one of the perennial favorites for graduation gifts is the Dr. Seuss classic, “Oh, the Places You'll Go.” In a nostalgic way it seems to summarize so much of what graduates are feeling:

*Congratulations! Today is your day.*

*You're off to great places; you're off and away.*

*You have brains in your head; you have feet in your shoes.*

*You can steer yourself any direction you choose.*

*You're on your own and you know what you know*

*And you are the [one] who will decide where to go.*

Interestingly, these Seussian words are not that far removed from the ones Jesus spoke to the disciples at the end of Matthew's gospel. In a way, the disciples are graduating, too. They had studied at the feet of Jesus and journeyed with Jesus. They had gone out on some internships, when Jesus sent them out in teams of two to heal the sick and proclaim the kingdom of God, but they would be gone only a while, and Jesus was always the home base. They had lost him once to crucifixion, but he had miraculously returned to them at Easter. This time, however, it seemed different. Jesus was going away, and the disciples would have to set their own course from now on.

If there was any doubt about that, Jesus removed it with his clear instruction to “Go! ... Go find people to join you in your work. Go teach them what I have taught you. Go beyond the little circles of your life – venture far and wide in the name of God. And as you go, remember that I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

For good reason, these words from Matthew 28 have become known as the “Great Commission.” It is the charge that Christ gives to each and every disciple – to go out and live as Christ lived, love as Christ loved, serve as Christ served, and teach as Christ taught. That is, after all, the meaning of the Greek word for “apostle.” *Apostolos* literally means “one who is sent off.” From the very beginning, it has never been the destiny of a disciple of Christ to stay rooted in one place. The charge for every true disciple is to Go!



So, as we get ready to have all kinds of adventures this summer... as our graduates ponder where to go and what is next... what are we all being commissioned by God to do? This text actually gives us some pretty clear and helpful instructions for what we ought to be doing as we go...

1. The first thing we are called to do is **WORSHIP**. In this passage, we have to notice that the Great Commission – the command to “Go!” -- is given in the midst of worship, while people are worshipping. In the life of faith, in the life of the church, worship is at the center. For centuries we have used the Westminster Shorter Catechism to teach the faith to children and new believers, and the very first question in that catechism – the place where all of the teaching begins, is with the question: “What is the chief end of man?” In other words, what is our primary purpose as human beings? What is the goal and meaning of life? And the answer given is this: our “chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy [God] forever.”<sup>1</sup>

It is not an overstatement to say that everything we do as the church begins with worship. Worship inspires and motivates everything we do. And in the same way, everything we do and experience in the world brings us back into worship. Our joys, our pains, our successes and our failures – we bring it all back here to process it, try to understand it and make sense of it, and to offer it to God. It is like breathing. Like air from our lungs, worship exhales us out into the world, and then it draws us back in to be refreshed and reset.

And so, as we go, we are called to worship. But here is the thing: that does not mean that we have to know all the answers. Verse 17 says that, when the disciples realized it was Jesus standing with them, *“they worshipped him; but some doubted.”* That suggests that some of them believed, but others didn’t. It was either A or B – Belief or Doubt. But that is not what the original Greek says. A better translation of the original text would be that *“they worshipped him, but they doubted.”* In other words, wasn’t that you were either a Believer or a Doubter. Everyone was, at the same time, a Believer and a Doubter. All of us have questions that we struggle to answer. All of us have times when our faith feels stronger or weaker. Having all the answers is not a prerequisite to worship – if it was, no one would be able to do it. So, as you go out and roam about – remember that, every now and then, you need to come back in to worship to catch your breath. And don’t worry -- you can bring your hopes, your pains, even your doubts with you – God is strong enough to handle them.

2. The second thing we are called to do as we Go! is to **SERVE**. Christ sends us out to do certain kinds of work – specifically, to “make disciples,” to “baptize” and to “teach.” This seems daunting to many of us, especially if we imagine that this is some kind of call to get up on a soapbox and evangelize to strangers. Don’t get me wrong -- that may be your calling, but most of us don’t feel very comfortable with that kind of thing. To be honest, I’ve never felt like it helps that much, really – to have someone who doesn’t know me at all bark at me through a megaphone that I “better get right with God or else.” No, I think we can satisfy all three of these duties – to make disciples, to baptize, and to teach – by simply doing our best to be guided by love. I think that is what the Apostle Paul had in mind when he gave this guidance to the church: *“As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved,”* he wrote, *“clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience... [but] Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”* We see

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<sup>1</sup> *Book of Confessions*, PC(USA), 7.001.

this clearly in the life of Christ – to serve is to love, and to love is to serve. So, as we Go, we carry with us the commission to love.

3. Last, but certainly not least, is the call to **REMEMBER**. “Go!” Christ says, but as you go, “*remember I am with you always, to the end of the age.*” When Jesus sent the disciples out, he would often remind them that not everything out there is good, not every place is safe, every person is not kind. “I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves,” Christ said.

Or, as Dr. Seuss puts it...

*You'll get mixed up, of course, as you already know.  
You'll get mixed up with many strange birds as you go.  
So be sure when you step. Step with care and great tact  
and remember that Life's a Great Balancing Act.  
Just never forget to be dexterous and deft.  
And never mix up your right foot with your left.*

Because of the strange things we can encounter out there, and because it is easy to get mixed up in all kinds of ways, Jesus assures every traveler that we will not be traveling alone – that, when we go out as disciples and Christians, Christ will not leave us orphaned, but be with us every step of the way.

And this is the main reason that we also read the 121<sup>st</sup> Psalm this morning. Over the centuries, that ancient poem has been lovingly referred to as “The Traveler’s Psalm.” It was one of the psalms that faithful Jewish pilgrims would recite out on the road when they were traveling from their homes to the Temple in Jerusalem. But it stands above the other pilgrim psalms because of its call-and-response format. It reads as if uncertain and worried pilgrims, getting ready to start a potentially perilous journey, were calling out to their spiritual leader for reassurance, and they receive from that spiritual leader a strong reminder that they will not be alone on the road.<sup>2</sup> We see and hear the pattern in the pronouns: the first two lines use the first-person pronouns “I” and “my,” but the rest of the psalm responds in the second-person with “you” or “your.”

*“I lift up my eyes to the hills— from where will my help come?”* the pilgrims cry, answering their own question with the hope to which they cling: *“My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.”*

In turn, the priest who is sending them off on their journey affirms that hope and reassures them in their fear: *“He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber or sleep... The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.”*<sup>3</sup>

As our minds turn to the road in so many ways, it is the perfect time to take a fresh look at this Great Commission that we are all given. A disciple was never meant to stay put, or to keep our lights hidden at home underneath a bushel basket. As disciples we are called to GO – to go forth in **WORSHIP** – in belief and in doubt, with certainty or uncertainty... to go

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<sup>2</sup> *The Interpreter’s Bible: The Holy Scriptures in the King James and Revised Standard Versions with General Articles and Introduction, Exegesis, Exposition for each Book of the Bible.* Editorial Board: G.A. Buttrick, and others. N.Y.: Abingdon Press, 1951.

<sup>3</sup> <https://edfromct.wordpress.com/2009/05/13/bible-study-psalm-121-the-travelers-psalm/>;  
<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/second-sunday-in-lent/commentary-on-psalm-121-6>; [http://wordandworld.luthersem.edu/content/pdfs/5-2\\_Psalms/5-2\\_Limburg.pdf](http://wordandworld.luthersem.edu/content/pdfs/5-2_Psalms/5-2_Limburg.pdf)

forth to **SERVE** God and serve others in loving kindness... and to **REMEMBER** that God will be with us on the road, even to the end of the age. With this commission, this knowledge, and this promise, "Oh, the Places You'll Go!"

*And will you succeed? Yes! You will, indeed!  
It's 98 and three quarters percent guaranteed.  
Kid, you'll move mountains!*

[Which by the way, is the very promise Christ makes to us. "For truly I tell you," Jesus says, "if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you."]<sup>4</sup>

So, "Congratulations! Today is your day. You're off to great places; you're off and away." And if I might be so bold as to borrow the spirit of Dr. Seuss, I'll send you off with a little something to help you to remember who you are...

You're a disciple here, You're a disciple there,  
You are a disciple everywhere.  
On each road that you travel, you still have a call,  
to share God's love with the great and the small.  
But as you go, you will not be alone;  
God will be with you and will make himself known.  
Up over the hills and in the valleys below,  
God's help will be with you wherever you go.  
As you take every step, your life God will keep,  
and you know the Good Shepherd will not fall asleep.  
So, today is your day! You're off and away!  
You're off to Great Places and to hit the highway.  
And whatever's in store, whatever you do,  
The love of this place and this people will be waiting for you.  
So get ready, get set, to go Seize the Day,  
Your mountain is waiting, so get on your way!

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 17:20.