

When I was a kid growing up, I don't think I ever went anywhere without my mother saying, "Jonathan, there is one more thing I want to tell you." It didn't make any difference where I was going. I could have been going to camp, I could have been going to spend the night with a friend or I could have been going to a party. I don't care what it was, before I got out of the car, my mother would say, "There's one more thing I want to tell you." It was never really one more thing -- but several things. The last time I spoke to my mother, she was in the hospital getting ready for surgery. She was giving me another one of those lists and I figured that she would just review them after the operation so I really didn't pay attention. Well, she did not survive the surgery and to this day 18 years later I wonder what she wanted me to do.

One more thing which my mother would say before I got out of the car. She would look at me, her eyes would soften and she would say, "Remember, I love you." Even to this day it is my family tradition to end any conversation of visit with the proclamation that we love each other. I suppose that I will always remember my mother's concern for me and her way of saying, "There's one more thing I want to tell you."

When we look at the scripture for today, the gospel of Matthew is coming to a close and Jesus has one more thing he wants to tell his disciples and so many people focus on one thing and not the other things that Jesus wants us to do. The parting words of Jesus have done more to emphasize his teaching. The parting words of Jesus have done more to give us a vision of a world-wide church. The parting words of Jesus have done more to send disciples into all nations with the good news of God's love in Jesus Christ. The parting words of Jesus have done more than any other part of the Bible in presenting the magnificent theme of God's salvation available for all people.

Whenever we read this particular scripture, we have a tendency to see only the Great Commission which says, "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." However, when we look closely and listen carefully, the last words of Jesus to his disciples really did three things. *There is a claim of power. There is a great commission. There is the promise of a presence.*

The one more thing which Jesus had to say to his disciples was a summation of his teachings. Today, as we look at the parting words of Jesus to his disciples and to the whole church, I want us to look at all three things.

I. Jesus Assured Us Of His Power

When you read Matthew 28:18 in different translations, you will notice that one key word is different. Most translations have Jesus say, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

Jesus was claiming the power to accomplish a purpose. Power is not power unless it can accomplish the purpose to which it is applied. A chain saw is great for cutting fine wood, but it can't be used by a man to shave his beard in the morning. Dynamite is a powerful device for blowing away part of a mountain, but for the purpose of blowing out candles on a birthday cake, it is not very effective. Atomic bombs and nuclear-tipped missiles are great

for destroying life as we know it on this planet, but if the purpose is to cleanse our hearts of hate and to help people to find their way to peace with God and with each other, then the atomic bomb is not the kind of power that is needed.

The power that is needed is the power to accomplish a purpose. This is the kind of power that Jesus claims. He does not claim a power of coercion, but the power of persuasion. He does not claim a power of force, but a power of devotion from within. He does not claim a dictatorial power, but the power where people can freely choose.

In a courtroom one day in Jerusalem, Pilate, representing the kingdom and force of the Roman empire looked at Jesus and asked, "Don't you know that I have the power?" Jesus, standing before Pilate with his hands tied behind his back, and the spittle of a Roman soldier on his face said, "My kingdom ... my power ... is not of this world."

Think about the difference there in Pilate's hall. We are a people who have been obsessed with Pilate's kind of power. But Pilate, Caesar, Alexander, Napoleon and Stalin founded their empires upon the power of force and they are all gone.

Jesus Christ used another kind of power -- the power of love -- and his kingdom has grown from a small group of disciples to literally millions and millions of men and women who have freely chosen to follow him.

If we want God's power in our hands, we must have his kind of power in our hearts -- power to accomplish his purpose.

II. Jesus Gave Us A Commission

Jesus sent his disciples out into the world with the commission to win men and women to faith in him. This commission was not just for those first disciples, but is for all disciples -- including you and me.

I know a man who had been successful in life. And then, everything started to go wrong. He lost his business. He lost his money. He lost everything he had worked for in life.

One day, in the midst of his discouragement and despair, he tried to commit suicide. But, he failed! While he was in the hospital recovering, one of his friends came in the room and simply asked, "Why did you do it, Joe? Why did you do it?"

Joe looked over at him and said, "Because there isn't any good news left in the world. If there was, someone would have told me."

This is what the great commission is about -- one person telling another the good news. Jesus expected his disciples to go throughout the world with the good news that would transform the world, change the world and convert the world. And he expected the same of us as his modern day disciples. But, we have become so comfortable at sitting in our pews that we no longer are going out into the world and telling the good news.

Jesus commissioned us as his disciples? We gather in this church to worship. We gather in this church to grow in our faith. We gather in this church for fellowship with one another. We gather in this church to sense our oneness in Jesus Christ. Then, we go out into the mission field -- the world where we live and work and play. It is in the mission field of our world where we are to proclaim the good news. It is in the mission field of our world where we are sent to set at liberty those who are oppressed. It is in the mission field of our world where we are to proclaim this to be the time to take up your cross and follow Jesus Christ. We have a commission from Jesus. Our commission is to be his witness and make disciples in his name! Will you be obedient to his commission?

III. Jesus Promised Us A Presence

But, no sooner was the command given than the promise followed. They were sent out -- as we are -- on the greatest task in the world. But, there was also the promise that they would not be alone. The promise of Jesus was "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

Almost 20 years ago, the attention of the world was focused on three men who were close to a quarter of a million miles away from the earth. The Apollo 13 spacecraft was making a trip to the moon. Somewhere, out there in the darkness of space, there was an explosion aboard their spacecraft. They lost power. They were not generating oxygen. They didn't know if they would have the fuel to return to the planet earth.

Everyone held their breath and said their prayers, as the NASA scientists and engineers tried to figure out a way to bring these astronauts home. In order to conserve oxygen, the astronauts were ordered to crawl into the lunar lander and remain in there for the three-day trip back toward home. These men were not sure if they would make it home. They didn't know if their oxygen would hold out. They didn't know if their thrusters would fire for re-entry into the earth's atmosphere. They didn't know if they would skip off the earth's atmosphere like a rock skipping across the pond and wander for eternity through the darkness of space. But, they did make it home.

After their splash down in the ocean, they were taken aboard an aircraft carrier for medical exams. As they were sitting in the examining room, one of the astronauts looked at the other two and said, "I don't know if you felt the same thing I did or not. But, when we were cramped in that lunar lander wondering if we would make it home, I felt as though we were not alone. I don't know how to put it into words, but I felt the presence of God was there with us."

The promise of Jesus is a promise that we will never be alone. He said to his disciples and he said to each of us, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Can you sense God's presence with you now? Where is God? Here within!

Today is Mother's Day, a day when we honor our Moms. We learn many things from our Moms.

My mother taught me religion. She used to say things like, "You better pray that comes out of the carpet."

My mother taught me medicine: "If you don't stop crossing your eyes, they're going to freeze that way."

My mother taught me how to be a contortionist: "Will you look at the dirt on the back of your neck!"

My mother taught me to appreciate a job well done: "If you're going to kill each other, do it outside. I just finished cleaning!"

My mother taught me about genetics: "You are just like your father!"

My mother taught me logic: "Because I said so, that's why." (1)

I don't know if any of you had mothers like that. Maybe we all had a mother like that. But here's a more profound question: Do you know anyone whose mother prays for them daily? Several of you are in that category. Let me tell you about a young woman who became one of the most important women in the history of the church simply because of her faithfulness as a mom who prayed.

Her name was Monica. Some of you recognize that name and you already know who I'm talking about. Monica was born in 331 A.D. in North Africa in what is now Algeria. As a young girl, Monica converted to Christianity, still a relatively new faith. Her parents, who were not religious and not in sympathy with her new faith, married her off to a Roman pagan named Patricius.

Both Patricius and his mother, who lived with them, were hot-tempered people . . . and difficult to deal with. Nevertheless, Monica did her best to be a good wife and daughter-in-law. While Monica's prayers and Christian deeds bothered Patricius, he respected her beliefs and not long before his death, both he and his mother converted to Christianity.

Monica and Patricius had three children, two of whom entered religious life as young adults. The third was a son named Augustine. Augustine was more of a challenge. By his own admission he was a wayward youth, giving in to most of the pleasures of his day. One writer describes him as lazy and uncouth. But Monica kept praying for her son. Her watchful, prayerful persistence paid off when Augustine finally became a Christian. Monica lived to see her son baptized into her faith. She died shortly thereafter. She could not know that Augustine would go on to become one of the towering figures of the church of his time whom we now generally refer to as St. Augustine. From a sinner to a saint--simply and solely because of the prayers and the influence of his mother. (2)

Do mothers play an important role in society? Tell me who else is more important than a mother? St. Augustine was one of millions of people who have come to know Christ through their mother's never-failing love and prayers. Some of us are here today because we had that kind of mother. And so it is appropriate that we honor our moms this day, whether they are still with us or whether they are now with God.

Jesus loved the church like a mother loves her child. He offered this prayer shortly before his betrayal by Judas. Listen carefully to his words, for Christ is praying for you and me: "Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one . . ."

It was important to Christ that the church, his body, remain unified after he was gone from them. Obviously he knew that would be difficult. We enjoy singing, "We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord; we are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord; and we pray that all unity will one day be restored. And they'll know we are Christians by our love, yes they'll know we are Christians by our love." And that's true in most churches, but all through history we have also been known by our squabbles.

In his book *Let's Quit Fighting about the Holy Spirit*, Pete Gillquist tells a delightful tale about two men who lived in Jesus' day. Both men were healed of blindness, and, when they compared notes, they discovered that Jesus was the healer in both cases.

They discussed the method and technique of the way in which Jesus healed them. To their dismay, they discovered that Jesus used two entirely different methods when he healed them. One of the men was healed almost instantly by Jesus merely saying to him, "Go, your faith has healed you." However the other man was healed using a totally different approach. Jesus spat on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes and told him to go to a certain pool and wash the mud off.

And since this was church, they got into an argument over which was the authentic way to be healed. Both men were frustrated, but both were positive of one thing: Jesus could not possibly have used the "other" method to heal than the way they were healed. In great disbelief, one man said to the other man, "There's no way it could have happened like that!"

And then Pete Gilchrest adds: "And there you have it, folks. The start of the world's first two denominations. The Mudites and the Anti-Mudites." (3)

Now, of course, such a silly argument couldn't possibly happen in our church, but they've happened in some churches I understand.

Someone once compared his church to Noah's Ark. "If the flood on the outside weren't so bad," he said, "you couldn't stand the smell on the inside."

Conflict in most churches is not that bad, but it can happen. People turn against one another--relationships are broken--even in the holiest congregations. We are, after all, only human.

Jesus prays that we will all be one. In other words, that we will be united. Considering the present fragmentation of the Christian community, Christ is probably still praying that same prayer today.

What is it that holds together the body of Jesus Christ? What is the source of our unity where it exists?

Obviously we are united, first of all, by what we believe and by what our Lord commissions us to do at the Ascension. We believe in God. And we believe that through Jesus Christ and his Holy Spirit we can know God and experience God and we can bring others to God. One of the mottos of the Chaplain Branch is Bringing God to soldiers and soldiers to God.

An episode of the TV show *Murphy Brown* years ago. Do any of you remember *Murphy Brown*? Here's a trivia question for those of you of a certain age: who played the character of Murphy Brown, an investigative reporter for a fictitious television station? It was actress Candace Bergen. Now for trivia question number 2: Who was Candace Bergen's famous father in real life? That's right, the well-known ventriloquist Edgar Bergen. Remember Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy? Like I said, you have to be of a certain age.

Anyway, in this episode *Murphy Brown* is, for some reason, asking the staff about their thoughts or feelings about God. Each of the characters had a different response--one was an agnostic, one was a Baptist, and so on. But the response of the character Jim stands out. Remember, this was on a secular television show. Jim said he was a Presbyterian and went to church every Sunday with his wife. He said something on the order of, "I haven't had any experience of God. I go because it is obvious to me that the people who attend are experiencing God, and I am hoping that one day I will too." (4)

That is a beautiful and refreshingly honest response. I wonder if a TV character would say that today. Television has become somewhat hostile to organized religion.

Some of us have experienced God in quite a profound way. Others of us are yearning for such an experience. Regardless, we are united in our belief that Christ is the way to God. And we gather here each week in the hope that God will make Himself known to us--that, if we have not already done so--we will one day experience God in our lives.

We are not perfect people. And no group of people is going to agree on every little matter. Sometimes there is conflict in the church. But when the dust settles, no matter how uncomfortable it makes us, there is a common bond that unites everyone who takes upon himself or herself the name Christian. That bond is this: We believe that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in him shall have life everlasting. We believe that and that unites us with millions of believers around this planet. That is the first thing that unites us--our beliefs.

We are also united by our love for one another and for the one whom we serve.

There was a television interview with members of the Hell's Angels motorcycle gang. A member expressed their Creed. 'We're a family. We're together. We live together, fight together, die together. We stick together.'"

You would think that saints of God would at least be as committed to one another as the Hell's Angels motorcycle gang--and I believe we are.

I see people in our church doing little acts of kindness for one another all the time. The first thing that unites us is our beliefs. We are also united by our love for one another and for Christ. Like a person in human love, we look at the world differently and we want everyone to share in our joy.

We love Christ. He is the inspiration of our lives. He is the living presence who works within us. He is the Lord and Master of all we are and hope to be. We are his. It is in his steps that we walk.

In the book *Faith, Lies, and the Opinion Polls* tells the story of a husband and wife team who made a significant impact on the world of science, Pierre and Marie Curie. They were the French scientists who discovered radium. They worked closely together in their laboratory until the day Pierre absent-mindedly walked in front of a wagon and was run over and killed. Marie was devastated. Pierre had only recently been appointed to a prestigious chair in the Academy of Science.

A few days after Pierre's death, Marie was invited to take that chair in his place. She accepted with gratitude. A great scientist in her own right, she entered the hall that day to an overflow crowd. They all wondered, "What will she say? Will she eulogize her husband?"

When she mounted the platform she began reading these words, ". . . when I consider the vast progress which science has made . . ." The crowd was startled. Then they realized that she had picked up exactly where Pierre had left off when he had been interrupted while reading a paper he had been presenting to them before his untimely death.

Then this observation, "As Christians, we should bear with pride the fact that we pick up where Jesus left off, because we are His body in the world." (5)

This is the purpose of faith in the book, *Energy in the Pew*. "Reviewing the gospels recently," he said, "I was astounded at the number of times Jesus sent his followers out to do something. The record is punctuated with these orders. Go preach. Go tell. Go work. Go into the highways. Go to the next town. Go into the country. Go to the other side. Go into the deep. Go into the streets. Go into the city. Go into the village. Go to the lost sheep. Go call your husband. Go make it right with your brother. Go and learn. Go quickly. Go in peace. Arise and go!" (6)

St. Paul set the standard for us over 1900 years ago when he wrote that our job "whether at home or absent, is to be pleasing to God." (II Corinthians 5:9). That is the test of service in our lives as believers in Him. Would it be pleasing to Christ?

We are united by what we believe. We are united by our love for one another and for the Christ we serve. **Finally we are united by our love for those whom we are trying to save--the world for which Christ died.** The church can never be satisfied with protecting its own existence. We serve one who poured out his life for the world. That is our calling as well--to pour out our life for the world. We have no other purpose as the church of Jesus Christ.

A young woman was joining a certain church. The pastor asked her, "What do you do for a living?"

And with a sly smile, she looked at him and said, "I am a practicing Catholic secretly disguised as a legal secretary."

"Isn't that wonderful?" As a soldier, sailor, Marine. As a Reservist, Active or Guard. Or even as a civilian. The attitude we bring can change almost any occupation into the call of God. For whatever our occupation, our one vocation is always to be a servant." (7)

Christ prayed that we would be united. United by what we believe. We believe in Jesus Christ. United by the one whom we serve. We seek to serve Christ in all we think, say and do. United by whom we are seeking to save--the world for which Christ died.

Our text for the Seventh Sunday of Easter which got canceled so we could celebrate the Ascension ends with these words: "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified." Jesus loved the church like a mother loves her child. Remember that this Mother's Day. And what is it that he most wants for us? To be united. We are sanctified by our faith, by our love for Christ and by our outreach to the world for whom Christ died.

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1. Author unknown. From the Internet.
 2. Michal Stawicki and Jeannie Ingraham, *99 Perseverance Success Stories: Encouragement for Success in Every Walk of Life* (Kindle Edition).
 3. Zondervan (June 1974).
 4. Via Ecunet, "Sermonshop Discussion," #1748, 2/7/97. Cited by Dr. David E. Leininger, <https://www.sermonwriter.com/sermons/mark-92-9-wow-leininger>.
 5. William H. Hinson (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), p. 44.
 6. From a sermon by Dr. Eugene Brice
 7. [Http://day1.org/552-take_this_job_and_love_it](http://day1.org/552-take_this_job_and_love_it).