The Church and Its Mission

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[0:00] If you would take out your Bible and open to Matthew 28, page 835, that would be great. This is a very, very, very familiar passage to many, and we're really going to be focusing just on the words of Jesus in the last three verses of this passage.

While you turn to it, we do have unstable pews, and we could have a lot of fun with that, really. Some of the pews have been flipping, and I thought it might have been the preaching, but it's not. However, if I see any of you going to sleep, I'm going to nominate you next week to sit in one of the unstable pews. Truth be told, they're not going to be unstable for too much longer, which is what we hope for each one of you spiritually.

Well, now we come to this very familiar text, and you may know, or you may not know, that there's a buzzword doing the Christian rounds, has been for about a decade. It's the phrase, missional church.

It's the go-to topic for seminars and conferences and books. The missional church, Google it, 4.6 million hits. I don't know if that proves anything, but I thought I'd do it and find out.

[1:13] It comes from the fact that in the last 100 years, the global church has emerged in the South very strong, and in the West, as we've moved post-Christendom, churches feel, we feel a little like marginal outsiders.

And the sense is that adding evangelistic programs to our church or having the occasional guest activity just doesn't cut it anymore. And there's a shift in understanding where missional is not one of the things we do as a church.

We don't do Sunday school in small groups and outreach. Mission is not one of our activities that we engage in. Mission comes from the very nature of God himself.

And this is what missional means. That God sent his son, Jesus Christ, into the world for us, and that the son sent the spirit to the church, and now he sends the church to continue his purposes, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to be a missional church.

And I'm very conscious as we are coming to the end of this series on the church, that unless we look at this issue, everything else we've said and thought will be deformed in some way.

[2:25] I mean, we can talk about our fellowship and the body of Christ, and we can talk about our being, you know, a gathering and a congregation and the flock and the house of God. But this is the purpose of the risen Christ for us to do.

And if this is the purpose of the risen Christ, the question I hope you've got going over in your minds as you listen today is how do we do this together? How do we translate it into action here amongst ourselves, in St. John's, in our lives, in our families, now, this year, and next year?

And, of course, you know, every one of the Gospels finishes with the resurrection of Jesus. And one of the strange things you might know is that the focus in the resurrection is not really on the evidences.

There's plenty of evidence there. But the focus is on the application, the meaning, and the significance of the resurrection. When I was a young preacher, I used to preach Easter Day on these texts and, you know, say there's life after death.

And that's true. But that's nowhere close to the point of what these texts are about. Each Gospel and the New Testament teaches us that the point of the resurrection is that something has happened to Jesus that changes everything and what that means for the church now.

[3:46] In fact, if you go through the New Testament and look at all the references to what Jesus does during those 40 days between the resurrection and his ascension into heaven, he's always teaching about what it means for the church.

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And he uses every occasion to transfer his mission, to invite the church into his mission so that we will continue until he returns.
And these last three verses are called the Great Commission. David rightly reminded us the context is the stunning, amazing, wild fact that Jesus has risen from the dead.
And the first 10 verses tell us how the two Marys go to the tomb and there are guards at the tomb with a big rock that they've put over the tomb. And there's this massive earthquake and the ground shakes and the angel takes the stone and tosses it away like a donut and sits on it.
Something I'd love to preach on, just that sitting on the stone. And we're told in those verses that he is, verse 3, he's like lightning. You ever looked at lightning?
[4:54] He's like lightning, clothes are white. And the guards, verse 4, become like dead men. Very clever. And they hear the angel say to the women, do not be afraid. I know you seek Jesus who was crucified.

He is not here. Underline for he has risen. Come and look. Go tell his disciples that he has twice risen from the dead. He's going before you to Galilee.
There you will see him. And they race off and Jesus meets them in verse 9 and he says, hello, and they worship. And the mention of Galilee takes us down now to verse 16 because Galilee is the boonies in Israel.
It's like the real... I'm not going to make any comparisons with any place in BC but it really is the edge of civilization. That's where Jesus came from and that's where he began his ministry.
And this is where he begins this new phase of his ministry risen from the dead. One more thing before we get into it and that is almost every word that Jesus speaks in verse 18, 19 and 20 at the end of the gospel cuts completely against the grain of our individualistic, consumerist, secularist culture.
[6:15] And I just... You want to feel this because we get so used to reading Jesus' words that the shock of this sometimes doesn't register. He doesn't make suggestions. He makes commands.

Worse, he makes... He commands us to disciple other people as though we have a right to impose our views on others. Worse than that, he commands us to do this indiscriminately to all nations as though he is quite happy for us to proselytize people from other religions and get them to convert which just seems in our culture unethical, immoral and like we're not all equal.
Worse than that, he begins by assuming that he has the right to do this by claiming all authority in heaven and earth has been given to him. It is a horror, don't you think?
For our tolerant, open, relativist culture. And this is one of the most shocking things about Jesus and if you're not yet a Christian it's very good to hear this that Jesus takes to himself the right to tell us what our lives are about, why we're here, what we ought to be doing here, how to run our life, what to do with our time and our families and our retirement and our money and all sorts of things.
And the reason I say this is because everything that Jesus says about the mission of the church here in these verses is based on that one big claim in verse 18 all authority has been given to me.
[7:50] If you can take that out the whole deck of cards falls down you see. I'll come back to this in a few minutes. Everything depends on who Jesus is. So I want to look at three things.

First, what is it he wants us to do and secondly, why does he want us to do it and thirdly, how does he want us to do it or how can we possibly do it? Firstly then, what is the actual commission?
What is it? This is very important. Brahman and I watch a television show called Top Gear. It's a hoot. It's a British show with a couple of guys who get given millions and millions of pounds.
I don't know where they get the money from each year to destroy cars and they do it very creatively.
And we were watching a show once where they were driving through, I think it was Bolivia. They were driving from one side to the other and they got lost and instead of going to Chile they ended up in Peru and they were arrested and it was all very funny.
And it's funny watching it on television but it's not so funny when you watch it in a church setting.
And Jesus, there are three simple commands that Jesus makes for us and one of them is much more important.
[9:00] The force in the Greek is on the first one and it's simply this. Go therefore, Jesus says, verse, so if you look down there at verse 19, go therefore and make disciples of all nations.

He's just said all authority in heaven and earth have been given to me and you might expect him to say what he's going to do with it. He doesn't. He says, this is what you are going to do. And he says, go make disciples because we're very comfortable being comfortable and we're shy and

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self-conscious and apologetic.
But we have to get this clear. He says, go make disciples. He says, don't, he doesn't say, go get converts. He doesn't say, go take a loud hailer and preach on the corner.
He doesn't say, go get decisions for Jesus. He doesn't say, go make Anglicans, thankfully. He doesn't say, go bring people to church, all of which are probably good.
He says, make disciples. Not admirers, not acquaintances, but disciples. And disciple combines two things, you know.
[10:10] Disciple is someone who is personally attached to a teacher. Someone who has absolute allegiance to that person will follow them. And the second part is that the disciple becomes a learner, a lifelong learner and listens and learns from the person who they are a disciple of.

That's what you are if you're a Christian. Every Christian is a disciple. Your highest allegiance is to Jesus Christ and you wear learner plates. And you know what? You never take them off.
Where's David Ellis who read the Bible for us? Where are you, sir? Do you take the learner plates off? David? David? You're in one of those unstable pews.
I can see. Do you ever take the learner plates off as a disciple? Absolutely not. And I don't think there's anyone here who is wiser or older.
So here is the clear command. Don't just be a disciple. Very important. But to make disciples. disciples. Because disciples are not born that way.
[11:23] They don't happen by osmosis. It doesn't just... Discipleship's not an airborne virus that you just catch like the measles. This is the mission of the church.

This is our mission, brothers and sisters, to make disciples of all nations. And it's not for those of us who are extroverted just. And I know there's a great fascination on this right now.
You can be an extroverted, an introvert, or an omnivirt. It's irrelevant. You might be shy. It doesn't matter. This is not for the paid professionals. This is a command for every Christian. And I say that because in verse 16 and 17 there's a larger group there than the 11.
The 11 are there and they're called disciples. So they're in capacity as disciples, not apostles. And being part of a disciple, verse 20, is teaching other disciples to observe all that he has commanded. And this is one of the things that he has commanded. So this is our mission as a church at its most simple. It's to make disciples of others. I want to say this, please get me clear and I'll say it slowly and carefully.
[12:29] Our prime task is not to reform society. Of course, we need to be engaged with that. To make change where we possibly can.

But that is not the supreme task. Our supreme task is not to heal the sick. Of course, that's part of the great commandment to love one another and some of us have gifts in that area.
Our task is not to redeem creation, something that's become very trendy. Of course, we are to care and steward creation as God gives it to us, including the natural resources.
Our mission is not even to plant churches. All those things are things that disciples ought to be doing, but the commission from the risen Jesus is to make disciples.
And it's completely comprehensive. Being a disciple is for every Christian, every member of St. John's. It doesn't matter what your age, your background. We're all learners. It's for all of life until we die.
[13:34] It means following and teaching all of Jesus' commands and it's to all nations, all people. So, just think through the different arenas of your life.

We need to think about the different involvements that we have in terms of being disciples and making disciples of others. If you're a parent, do you think about your children, how you will make disciples of your children?
If you're married, do you pray for and do what you can and act with your partner in such a way that will help them to be a disciple in your leisure activity, in your work.
And I know at work you can't say much. It's very tricky there. But in your work and leisure and your home and being away, it involves, I think, at least praying for people and speaking when we have the opportunity.
It's not easy and if you're anything like me, you will feel this is the last thing you're capable of doing. And it's very interesting to me, you know, in chapter 28, there are actually two reactions to the resurrection, not one.

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[14:45] There's the wild joy of the women and the disciples but there's also in verses 11 to 14 a negative, very negative reaction where the chief priests bribed the soldiers to lie about what they saw.

It's a sort of anti-Great Commission. And I don't have time to do this but I'd love to play with this. This is a wonderful section.
The soldiers were there, it says. They were there at the earthquake. They saw the angel come down. They saw him throw the stone away. They heard what he said to the women. And I just imagine the soldiers going back to their captain of the guard and saying, look, you're not going to believe what happened.
and the captain of the guard saying, tell me the story again and going over and over it. But instead what happens, they go to the chief priests and the chief priests pay them a considerable amount of money, it says, to spread this stupid lie and the lie is it was night, it was dark, we were asleep and the disciples came and stole the body away.
Do you see the suicide in the lie? If you're asleep and it's dark, how did you know it was the disciples? However, if you're paying people to lie, that's not such a big issue.
[16:03] I think the pressure for us today is much more subtle than that. Do we not feel that morals and beliefs are a purely personal matter? Do you feel like in conversations when it comes close to Jesus, there's this pain line?

People are quite happy to talk about God and spirituality. When we talk about the facts about Jesus or what Jesus means to us, there's a pain line and you must respect my privacy because privacy is the highest good and in the end we become silent as well.
Jesus' commission is very clear since he has all authority in heaven and earth, we are to make disciples of all nations. That's the first command and I've spent the most on it and there are two other smaller commands which show how that work and the second is in verse 19, baptize them into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.
It's a wonderful thing that here in the Great Commission Jesus wants the church to play a key role because the first thing that happens when we become a disciple is we acknowledge Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, he's Lord and I haven't treated him like this and as soon as I turn to him Jesus turns and brings us into the church and that's what baptism is for.
When I give my allegiance to Jesus Christ I enter into him and into his body through baptism which is a wonderful sign of being washed and having a new life that we're not meant to be disciples and walk apart from a local fellowship and we're not baptized into Anglicanism or Presbyterianism or Pentecostalism we're baptized into one name the name of God name singular Father, Son and Holy Spirit the Christian name for God.
[17:50] Right here in the Great Commission it's corporate we don't just do discipleship on our own go make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and thirdly teach people to observe all that I have commanded you.

Between the resurrection and the coming of Jesus the teaching function of the church and our teaching of one another is crucial but here's the thing it's not education for education's sake it's not information so much as it is transformation he says teaching them to observe to obey to do all that I have commanded you and as I was preparing this week I just swung over the first 11 chapters of Matthew's gospel and I pulled out a couple of Jesus commands these are commands that we're meant to teach each other to obey listen to these repent for the kingdom of God is at hand rejoice and be glad when you're persecuted that's a command let your light so shine before others they may see your good works give glory to your father who is in heaven here's another command love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you pray to your father who is in secret do not lay up treasure for yourself on earth but lay up treasure for yourself in heaven do not be anxious about your life what you shall eat or what you shall drink nor about your body what you shall put on seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness it's wonderful isn't it
I mean just these commands of Jesus and these are not all of them I'm just picking and choosing ask and it will be given to you seek and you will find knock and it will be open to you are you in that position wanting to know where to go ask seek knock pray earnestly that the lord of the harvest will send out labourers into his harvest here's a stern here's a stern command do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell or at the other extreme take my yoke upon you and learn from me says Jesus for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls they're beautiful and what Jesus is saying is between his

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rising from the dead and his coming again in glory to judge the living and the dead his teaching will never be irrelevant never outmoded never superseded never untrue and we must we must pass it on to each other and continue to teach one another to observe these things as well as to the next generation so there it is there is the great commission that's it those three things and I've spent the majority of time on the what and I want to ask more quickly why and then how do we do it so if you're still with us why why does Jesus give this commission because if you're anything like me speaking like this

I think makes us feel acutely aware of our own weakness and Jesus is even more aware of our weakness and the wonderful thing about this passage just these little words of Jesus as they have a shape to them because the commission comes between two things sandwiched between two things Jesus says about himself the first one is all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me and the second is I'm with you always why should we obey this great commission it's because of this first statement that there's been a change in the order of reality all authority on heaven and earth has been given to me has been given something has happened that changes everything from now on now of course Jesus had authority in his earthly ministry didn't he he had authority to forgive sins he had authority to heal and to preach but his authority was limited he had a self-imposed limitation on his authority he only did what he saw the father doing he only did the will of God and he faced physical challenges just like you and I do and temptation just as you and I do and in the end he was executed as the son of God in weakness but the son of God has changed all that risen from the dead

God has raised him to the highest place seated him in his right hand and now God is placing all Jesus enemies under his feet that means Jesus is now Lord of all there is a change that's happened and that means every knee every knee every knee will bow in heaven and on earth to Jesus Christ Buddha will bow the knee willingly or not Muhammad will bow the knee Confucius Zoroaster Gandhi will all bow the knee and that's simply because the resurrection of Jesus is a total and eternal triumph you couldn't have a more total triumph I mean there is no power greater that we know of is there than the power of death those who this world thinks are super super powerful they think they command the power of death but they're not they're only servants of death but Jesus died and he defeated death and there he stands before them the man who was crucified a few days before in his resurrection power his triumph is total and because it's death whom he has triumphed over his triumph is eternal lasts forever that's why he says he has all authority not just power but authority the right to decide the freedom has been given to him by God

[23:59] God has given to the Son all authority you see these words I know they're familiar but all authority it's unrestricted it's unqualified it's unconditional it extends from the smallest subatomic particle to the outer reaches of space it draws under its canopy every man woman child and all spiritual beings in the universe from the woman who's eking out an existence on the edge of the desert in Namibia to the woman who's charge of a high tech company to the young boy in Syria to the old man who is living on life support in a wealthy retirement home Jesus has all authority authority that's not going to diminish over time it's not going to weaken in the different circumstances of our lives and brothers and sisters that doesn't matter that means it doesn't matter who you are or what your circumstances are Jesus Christ is your Lord he has authority over you

I don't know if things are well with you or you've just received you know a shattering diagnosis or your family has it doesn't matter it does but it doesn't matter in this sense that Jesus is still Lord Jesus could not assert with more clarity his absolute flawless consummate sovereignty dominion and rule over all things all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me this came through our door yesterday it's a little pamphlet asks the question can the dead really live again on the back it's from JW.org which is Jehovah's Witness organization and in the side what the resurrection means for you it means comfort when loved ones die freedom from a morbid fear of death a real hope of being reunited with your dead loved ones and we'd want to say to that mmm yeah that's really self-focused that's never the focus of the New Testament resurrection the focus of the resurrection is that Jesus Christ is Lord of all that all authority in heaven and earth has been given to him that the authority that used to be limited is now no longer limited that he is no longer just the man of sorrows acquainted with grief he's no longer just the man who is smitten stricken by God for us he is the one through whom all authority is now mediated and it's a turning point for the world and that is why he commissions us so important to see the connection between these two things if we take away this authority of Jesus we might as well just keep doing what we're doing but the

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commission depends on his authority so that's the what of the commission the why of the commission and the third question
I want to ask is how or where really where do we get the power to do this because I want to say at one level it's completely completely impossible for us to do it we can't make disciples of other people and the temptation if you're anything like me is to feel my discipleship is not up to scratch I need to perform better before I'll try doing this all of which is completely beside the point and it's beside the point because of the last phrase in verse 20 behold Jesus says look says Jesus I am with you always to the end of the age so exalted by God the Father to the right hand Jesus is no longer confined by the limitations of his earthly existence you see his presence and his power now extends all the way through heaven and right throughout the earth and right throughout time that's the change of the resurrection until he comes to judge the living and the dead his local presence which was in Palestine
Israel now becomes his universal presence with this breathtaking promise not I will be with you but I am with you present tense all of every day until I come again which is so encouraging because we cannot be effective in serving Jesus we could never make disciples let alone be disciples apart from his presence and his power with us in us and through us that's why we pray for each other we can't give repentance and faith to each other we cannot make disciples on our own and I think and this is a whole other sermon that if Jesus promises to be with us in the context of this great commission it means that it's as we seek to make disciples we experience both his presence and his power it's not that I wait to experience his presence and his power and then I go and do it it's as I do it that he gives his presence and his power to us so there it is that's what it is to be a missional church and I wonder if Christ is pleased with our progress here because everything else we do as a church is compromised unless we're making disciples are we making disciples and I think it's a great relief that Jesus doesn't call us to massive introspection or to feel certain things or to be successful at certain things he calls us to do something make disciples baptize and teach and that takes precedence for us as individuals and for us as a church together so let's kneel and pray as we speak to him

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