

What am I supposed to do? Housing prices are still crashing? Unemployment still above 9%? Gasoline prices are hovering in the \$4.00 area. Are we headed toward round two of the economic downturn? Some people these days are buying canned goods and storing them in their basements. Or they are buying special seed to be able to plant in their gardens, should food prices skyrocket in the days ahead. Some people are stockpiling ammunition and weapons to protect themselves should violence ensue if our government defaults and loses control in its responsibility to protect its own citizens. Some people are buying gold and silver to have as a hard currency should the U.S. dollar become worthless. There are even some hedge fund managers today, who are actually buying cheap land in Africa, so that they will be able to farm the land, and sell the crops to make money, when food prices skyrocket. Now don't get me wrong. It is a good thing to prepare for the future. But so often what people should really be doing, just isn't happening. This morning, Jesus tells you what your role is in the world, why you are here, and how you can respond not only to terrorism and recession, but to every problem in this world. You can sum up what Jesus tells you to do in 4 words. "Go and Make Disciples!"

And as we study the Scriptures this morning, we find out that Jesus wants us to do more than simply pat people on the back and say, "Everything will be OK." He wants us to do more than just hug people when they're down. Jesus wants us to reach out with a specific purpose.

Jesus spoke these words at the very end of his ministry, after he had died and had risen from the dead. Right before he ascended into heaven, he met with the eleven disciples in Galilee. When they saw him, they worshiped him. But some doubted, we are told. Then Jesus told them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." All authority - in our world, there has never been anyone with that much authority. Even the top man in our country, the president, is limited in his authority. There are checks and balances - laws, congress, other countries, other leaders. And besides that, no saint or angel in heaven is under any earthly authority. Even the President's authority is limited.

But look at the authority of Jesus Christ. He doesn't need to get the thumbs up from congress or the voters, because his vote is the only one that counts. He doesn't need to consult the experts, because he is the top expert on everything. Every saint and angel in heaven listens to him. All authority in heaven and on earth is his. And so this morning, we go to the top authority, Jesus Christ, and we ask him, "What do you want us to do? There is terrorism in the world. There are economic problems. Since 9/11, Islam has become the fastest growing religion in the United States (strange but true). Even though our country claims to be spiritual, it's drifting farther and farther away from God. We go to the top authority in heaven and earth - Jesus Christ - and we ask him, what do you want us to do?"

He tells us. Be proactive. Go. Go with the distinct purpose of making disciples of everyone you come into contact with, all nations.

Why does this have to be done? I mean, most people in our world believe in God. True, but most people don't understand how to truly access God, so God is your friend. There is confusion in our world about how to access God, how to be acceptable to God. Some people make pilgrimages to places or buildings considered sacred, traveling miles on foot with nothing more than the clothes on their back. Others look for the right chicken to sacrifice, or even the right kind of weed to smoke. Some have even offered human sacrifices like the Aztecs who slaughtered up to 20,000 people a year! By nature we know that we owe God something if we want access to him. But here's the thing, we don't have what it takes to gain access to God. God doesn't want us to walk miles to some lonely monastery. Nor does he want us to sacrifice chickens or humans. What he wants from us, what he demands of us is perfection. He wants

people who always put the needs and wants of others first. He wants seasoned-citizens, for example, who use their wisdom and experience to encourage, not criticize. He wants husbands who cheerfully wash dishes, mow the lawn, and change diapers. He wants wives who are always happy to pick up the kids, and who aren't bitter that the monthly grocery bill doesn't allow for luxuries like spa treatments. He wants young people to serve their boss, customers, and Mom and Dad as if serving Jesus himself – always with a smile and looking to do more than just the bare minimum. Have you fallen short in any of these areas? If so, your access to God has been cut off. It's not just that God ought now to ignore you, like an ATM machine ignoring your request for cash because there is none in your account. God ought to come after you, like a prosecuting attorney who is seeking the death penalty in our case.

But God will not come after you. Why not? Listen to what Paul writes in Romans 5: verse 6 “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly...⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!” God will not come after us because he went after his own Son for our sins. At the cross, God the Father poured out his wrath for the world's sin on Jesus the way you and I might take out our frustrations on a punching bag after a tough day. Would you ever consider doing such a thing as God did? Would you give up your son, would you turn him away from your house so that the drunk driver who killed your daughter can live in his room and eat his food? Not in a million years! And yet this was the length that God went to so that our sins would be forgiven and that we would have full access to him! Why did God do it? He did it because he felt like it. That's grace. Only by grace do we have access to the Triune God, and only through faith in Jesus, not faith in anything we have done, will we enjoy the blessings of this grace.

You and I are surrounded by people who claim to be spiritual and pray once in awhile when they're in trouble. And yet, they really don't know what Jesus Christ has done for them. They are concerned about terrorism, concerned about the economy. They have health problems, family problems, work problems, money problems. Their schedules are too full. They say that they believe in God, but they have no idea what the Bible says about God, and they're too busy to find out. You live with them, you work with them, you eat dinner with them, you watch sports with them. Jesus tells you this morning that he doesn't want you to wait for them to come to church, because they probably won't. Instead, he wants you to go to them, and make them into disciples.

How do I make disciples of the people around me? The answer is, by using the proper tools. Jesus tells us what tools to use when he says, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Do you see the tools that Jesus tells us to use? One tool is Baptism..

Many people think that baptism is a nice church ritual. God blesses the baby. We all feel good. Maybe a picture after the service. A nice church ritual, because it's good to be religious once in awhile – that's what people think.

According to the Bible, baptism is so much more. Baptism changes a person from a clueless, lost, unbeliever, into a disciple of Jesus Christ who will someday go to heaven. God works behind the scenes in baptism, and changes the soul. Every time someone is baptized, the Holy Spirit is working, changing the soul, making disciples.

Baptism is a tool Jesus tells us to use as we reach out and make disciples. And along with that tool comes the spoken Word of God – teaching everything Jesus has commanded. Jesus

doesn't need people with game show host personalities. He doesn't need you to become a Bible professor who runs around spouting off his knowledge. He's looking for simple people to take the good news message of what Jesus has done and share it with others.

Why do we fall flat on our faces when it comes to this sort of thing? As individuals, and as a Church, we haven't always done so well when it comes to reaching out with the Gospel. Why? One reason is that we are confused about who is and who isn't going to heaven. Since 9/11, the main teaching that has been sweeping through our country is that it doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you are peaceful. Whether you are Christian or Muslim or Buddhist or Mormon or nothing – you just worship yourself – as long as you don't blow up any buildings, your religion is good. However, just because you are nice and peaceful is no guarantee for heaven.

Confusion keeps us from reaching out. And along with that confusion comes the second thing that paralyzes us - fear. We are afraid. "I'm afraid that if I witness to that unbeliever in my life, he might not like me. "I'm too afraid to risk my friendship, my relationship with that unbeliever. I'm afraid I'll say the wrong thing. I'm afraid of rejection. I'm afraid people won't like me. I'm afraid, so I won't reach out. I'll just hope that person goes to heaven when he dies – after all, he is a good person, so I'll just keep my fingers crossed."

Our confusion, our fear - these are things that keep us from doing what Jesus wants us to do. These excuses are sins. Jesus really ought to punish us for our sins, our attempts to weasel out of our responsibilities as Christians. Jesus ought to punish us, but he doesn't, does he. Instead, Jesus looks into our hearts, he sees how weak we are, and he gives us exactly what we need. He gives us a promise. Look at the promise Jesus gives us this morning: "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Jesus is with you always. He forgives you for all of your past failures. He has died for your sins on the cross. He has prepared a place in heaven for you. He has risen from the dead, and now, even though you can't see him, he is always with you, forgiving you, strengthening you, giving you the confidence you need to make disciples of all nations. Think of it this way – you are never alone when you're reaching out. You are never alone.

When you have the chance to witness to a friend or a loved one, and you're worried that you might be risking your relationship with that person by sharing the Gospel, Jesus says, don't worry, I am with you. When that neighbor across the fence says, "It doesn't matter what you believe – we all go to heaven someday anyway" – when your neighbor says that, and then you have a chance to witness and say, "No, I believe something different. I believe that there are all kinds of ways that people try to get to heaven, but only one way works. And that one way is depending on Christ instead of myself." When you have a chance to say that, but you are afraid and wonder, "Maybe I should just keep my mouth shut" – Speak up, Jesus says. I am with you. I will help you. I will give you strength. Go and make that person a disciple. Share your faith,

That is our number one purpose as a church here at Trinity. That is your number one purpose as a member. How good it is, that we have a Savior who promises to be with us, to forgive us when we fail, to strengthen us and to bless us, as we do his work. All kinds of exciting things can happen to a group of people who reach out with the Gospel. Let us be that group of people, fulfilling Christ's mission. Amen.