

I AM WHO I WILL BE
A Sermon for Sardis Baptist Church
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Trinity Sunday
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Matthew 28:16-20

Today's passage is often referred to as the Great Commission. Jesus gathers the disciples on a mountain in the Galilee, and he leaves them with final instructions. This morning we'll explore Christ's commission, but before we do, I think it's important to consider a few other commissioning stories.

Even before Jesus, God's had a way of calling folks.

In Exodus, Moses notices a burning bush with an interesting trait: the flame never consumes it. Upon further investigation, Moses realizes this bush is the Angel of the LORD. Before long, a conversation ensues, and Moses soon learns that he will be chosen to help steward a people to freedom.

But Moses is hesitant. "I'm no leader. And I have a stammer. And besides, I've got no experience in transportation logistics."

God responds: "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."

"I'm gonna need a name," Moses says.

God says to Moses: "I AM WHO I WILL BE."

God says further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also says to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you':

*This is my name forever
and this is my title for all generations."
(Exodus 3:12-15)*

God instructed Moses. And God loved Moses. And God was with Moses. And Moses led God's people.

When Moses departed this earth, it was Joshua's turn to be God's chosen leader. We're never told so, but one has to imagine that Joshua, like any normal person, would be anxious.

God said to Joshua: "I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

(Joshua 1:9)

God instructed Joshua. And God loved Joshua. And God was with Joshua. And Joshua led God's people.

Throughout the generations, people of faith have sought God's instruction and God's presence. And in the pages of Proverbs they have met Sophia, Lady Wisdom.

And does not she call, and does not understanding raise her voice? On the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand; beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals...

(Proverbs 8:1-3)

And she cries out noble things. And before she takes her leave she reminds us:

"And now, my children, listen to me: happy are those who keep my ways. Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it. Happy is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors. For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord."

(Proverbs 8:32-35)

Sophia has instructed the Saints. And Sophia has loved the Saints. And Sophia has been with the Saints. And the Saints have led God's people.

Do you notice a pattern? Do you see where I am going?

God has been revealed in countless ways to countless people. But no matter the place, no matter the time, no matter the person, when God is revealed, God offers instruction, and God offers love, and God offers an everlasting presence.

All four Gospels reveal that in Jesus we meet the divine in human form – John's prologue (**John 1:1-14**) says it best I think: "God has come and dwelled among us."

And his ministry complete, Matthew's Gospel tells us that Jesus offers a final commissioning to the anxious, nervous, even doubting disciples:

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, 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)

Over the years, the traditional takeaway from this passage has been evangelism. Jesus said make disciples or students of people near and far – So grab a bike, grab a car, grab a train, grab a plane, grab a unicycle, grab a pogo stick or roller skates or a Big Wheel, grab anything that will scatter you around the globe. And when you get there, tell them the Good News. It's urgent. It's the last thing Jesus said in this realm.

And I think that's fine. Whether we're Billy Graham, or Joel Osteen, or perhaps even the other end of the spectrum – those Protestants who prefer a more discrete form of witness – on some level, I think we do have an obligation to tell those we encounter about the effects of the presence of God in our lives. After all, if we believe God shapes us, and molds us, and empowers us, and steers us, and is invested in who we are; if we believe God is vital to our lives, it's reasonable that we express that importance in some way. We expect no less in other relationships whether family or work or neighborhood or nation. I would, however, note that every person is entitled to express such importance in their own unique way, be it extravagant, subtle, or any place in between. Remember, Jesus valued BOTH the humility of the Centurion AND the boldness of the anointing woman. So yes, today's commissioning does have a strain of evangelism or outreach.

But I have to be honest. That second sentence is not what grabs my attention. It's the sentences that bookend it.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Translation: Jesus is of God, and all that is of God, is accessible to Jesus. And Jesus gives us the power, the strength, the credibility, the confidence to be God's chosen. Maybe we'll stammer like Moses; maybe we'll be required to fill gigantic shoes like Joshua; maybe we'll wonder if we can ever attain the wisdom of Sophia; maybe we'll stumble and trip over God's truth like the disciples. It doesn't matter. In this one sentence, Jesus says, "Don't worry! You can do this. I believe in you. I'm making it so."

And then that second sentence: *"And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

Translation: "Don't worry. I'm right here. I'm not going anywhere. I am present in your life. Now. And Always."

I guess what I am saying is that I don't necessarily think Jesus' last words were about what we are supposed to do, or how we are going to do it, or when and if he's coming back.

Yes, we have been given instruction. But more importantly, we've been given affirmation and assurance. God has empowered and blessed us. And whatever the task, whatever the time, whatever the result, God's still gonna be there.

Today is also Trinity Sunday. And we do our best to explain this miraculous God of ours – God is a Father or Parent, and at the same time a Son or the Christ, and further still God is Spirit – creating, redeeming, sustaining. And I won't argue the point – God is all of those things and more.

But on this Trinity Sunday, I'm gonna stick with another name: I AM WHO I WILL BE.

Because whether it's the Father who shepherded Moses and Joshua, or the Spirit who gave us her wisdom, or the Christ who makes God accessible; whether God is one or three or thirty or three hundred or three thousand; God is gonna be who God will be. And that my friends is the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and even Sardis.

And that God's gonna instruct you. And love you. And be with you.

But here's the thing. I think that instruction or that calling or that commissioning will sound a little different for everyone, and it will be fulfilled a little differently for everyone. After all, each of us have unique and distinct and wonderful gifts to share and express.

So on this Great Commission Sunday, I hear the voice of a God who empowers and loves us and remains with us, whatever our commission may be, and however our commission might manifest itself.

And on this Trinity Sunday, I hear the voice of a God whose name has resounded for generations: "I'm gonna be who I'm gonna be."

A multi-faceted God.

For a multi-faceted People.

Expressed in a multitude of Commissions.

Now that's a Trinity I can get behind. And that's a Commission that's pretty Great.

Thanks be to the God who will always be.

Amen.