### “In the Names” Steve Finlan for The First Church, June 4, 2023

**2 Corinthians 13:11–13**

11Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. 12Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. 13 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

**Matthew 28:16–20**

16Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. 18And Jesus came and said to them, “All auth–ority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, bap–tizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Welcome to the First Church on this almost-summer day.

We have the endings of two of the most important books of the New Testament as our readings today. Is there a way we can put ourselves in the apostles’ shoes and imagine how we would receive the final message of the risen Jesus? I sometimes imagine myself among the crowd hearing Jesus’ words. This message is an ending of the appearances of Jesus to the apostles. It is also a beginning. Are the apostles ready to hear these final words from Jesus?

In his final message of comfort and teaching, Jesus tells them that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him, and he authorizes *them* to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. There is a focus on three things: the authority of Jesus, his authorization of the disciples, and baptizing “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (v. 19).

He comforts them by saying, “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (28:20). The disciples, and we, too, need that word of comfort. We know Jesus is with us as we set about baptizing, making disciples, and teaching them.

To this, we add the ending of 2nd Corinthians, which also has both command and comfort. In sending his best wishes, Paul stresses the love of God, linking it with the grace of Jesus and the communion of the Holy Spirit. Again, we have a Trinitarian statement. He wishes God’s love, Jesus’ grace, and the Spirit’s communion upon the congregation. We all need that love, grace, and communion, to live in a healthy way in the church.

Now, what does it mean to be a disciple? It means to follow Jesus as our leader and savior. It means that our values will be shaped by his teachings and example. We study the truth that Jesus taught and lived out. His teachings reveal the values.

What are these values? In Matthew 23, Jesus said that a true disciple pays attention to “the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith” (Matt 23:23). These are the basics of spiritual living. God’s goodness should be our principal focus. “Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness,” he says, and “do not worry about tomorrow” (6:33–34). He says our righteousness must be greater than the legalistic morality of the Pharisees (5:20), and that we must be reconciled to our brothers, attending to that before attending to worship (5:23). Goodness is an end in itself.

In the parable of the Talents, Jesus lets it be known that he expects spiritual *profit* from the talents that he has lent us (Matt 25:24–27). Every disciple has been given a certain allotment of “talents,” and is expected to get spiritual profit, that is, spiritual *growth*, from these talents. We must grow in love and forgiveness.

Discipleship also means that we proclaim in word and action, and thus, by example, these truths about God, Jesus, love, and righteousness, even if we are mainly sharing it with our friends, rather than shouting it from the rooftops. Still, it is important, as it says in Matthew 10, to “proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near’” (10:7). Today that kingdom is where we live, for Jesus is with us and within us as we live in God’s creation.

What are the ways in which the kingdom of heaven or the *way* of heaven has come near to your heart? Maybe it comes near you when you feel a certain communion with your Christian friends. Maybe it’s when you take to heart Jesus’ words on “justice and mercy and faith” or his promise “I am with you always.” Taking in Jesus’ words, incorporating them into your daily life, leads to joy, and your joy is a testimony in itself. This can happen in sudden and dramatic ways, or arrive more subtly, culminating in an Aha! moment. Jesus’ words have God-energy; they are filled with truth, love, and goodness.

If you are a disciple, it means you will recognize the authority of Jesus and be loyal to his truth and goodness. It means we are attentive to each other, to the demands of ethics and love. Through our interactions with each other, we develop our spiritual talents. And this discipleship means we will yearn to learn more about the good news. To *make* disciples means we will help anyone who has expressed a desire to follow Jesus. We should be “teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (28:20). So making disciples includes *teaching* them. We tell them the old, old story that we love to tell.

Notice that we baptize them in three names: the name of the Father, the name of the Son, and the name of the Holy Spirit. In the power of these three we baptize them and commit them to the divine care.

Of all the gospels, Matthew is probably the one that puts the most emphasis on teaching. The whole gospel is structured into large teaching sessions, and here at the very end, the last commandment is that disciples should teach Jesus’ commandments to *new* disciples. Matthew promotes the church as a community of teaching and practice. In a line that occurs only in Matthew, disciples are compared to scribes, when Jesus says “every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old” (Matt 13:52).

Treasure in this community is love and wisdom—including *written* and spoken wisdom, both new and old. It may be that new members were expected to learn the teachings of Jesus in classes taught by the new scribes, probably the pastors and deacons. In our church today, we carry on this teaching ministry through the sermons, Confirmation classes, membership classes, and Bible studies. It will always be important for believers to learn about Jesus, his deeds and his words. This will come easily, since our desire to be more God-like, to follow Jesus’ way, means we *want* to know more about the life Jesus lived among us. We *want* to know how he dealt with sorrow, how he handled challenges, how he created community with his disciples.

Let’s be like Matthew’s community in our approach to learning righteousness. Let us be like a good scribe or householder, bringing forth treasures new and old. A good householder offers hospitality to any visitor. We should be hospitable to new disciples. It will come naturally to us, when we seek to follow Jesus in his way.

We can practice brotherly affection and encouragement to both old and new disciples. We can be good *listeners*, and good comforters, too. We can affirm that the Son of God has promised “I am with you always.” *That* is why the kingdom of heaven is nearby, because the *king* is nearby. This is a fatherly and gracious king, really more like a thoughtful and kindly teacher than a king.

No matter what is going on in the environment, we can be secure, knowing we have the Son of God in our hearts. As Paul wrote, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you” (2 Cor 13:13). Pass it on. Let the circle be unbroken. Share God’s love with each other.