

Devotions for Jan 9 - 15, 2012

COMMISSION MONDAY, JANUARY 9 | MATTHEW 28:16-20

Last words are important, and that's especially true when it comes to Matthew's Gospel. The disciples have experienced the brutal death of their beloved friend and master, and with him goes their hopes and dreams. But seeing Jesus alive again probably stuns them even more than seeing him die. Jesus' death, while tragic, was explainable. How do you explain a dead man coming to life again? In 28:10, the resurrected Jesus instructs the disciples to meet him in Galilee. The place where Jesus' ministry began becomes the place where the disciples' ministry begins. Imagine the journey, the conversations and the questions along the way. Jesus has instructed the disciples to meet him on a mountain in Galilee. Mountains hold a prominent place in Matthew's Gospel: the temptation, the Sermon on the Mount, the Transfiguration. When the disciples saw Jesus, some worshipped him, and some doubted. Both responses seem appropriate! Notice that Jesus does not chide the doubters, but gives all disciples the same commission. Has Jesus has given you the same commission? Ask God to help you get over the fence and share God's love through genuine relationships.

AUTHORITY TUESDAY, JANUARY 10 | MATTHEW 28:16-20 AGAIN

Matthew 28:18-20 frames the ministry of Jesus' eleven remaining disciples. Jesus words contain four "alls," which capture the central message of Matthew's entire Gospel. All authority. God has now given the resurrected Jesus authority over all of creation, both heaven and earth. We, too, are given this authority. All nations. The disciples are to make disciples of all nations regardless of their race or nationality. There are no boundaries to this global mission. All that I have commanded. Notice that Jesus does not call the disciples to make believers. He calls them to make disciples, people who do not only believe, but follow and obey Jesus' teachings. I am with you always. The disciples are given a big commission. In a world without mass communication or mass transit this commission would have been overwhelming for eleven men. But Jesus reminds them that they will never be alone. Do you feel like you have this kind of authority? Ask God to help you get over the fence and share God's love through genuine relationships.

FOLLOWING JESUS WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11 | MATTHEW 19:16-22

Negative images of fulfilling the Great Commission are all around us: religious door-to-door callers, bullhorn guy and big tent revivals, to name just a few. But this is a process more often than an event. Lutheran evangelism has generally been understood as inviting people to church. While that's certainly not a bad thing to do, it's not what following Jesus is about. And this is not just a suggestion for some disciples. It is Jesus' clear command to all disciples. The rich man went away sad because he knew he couldn't fulfill the requirement that Jesus commanded. In your life, what has following Jesus required of you? Ask God to help you get over the fence and share God's love through genuine relationships.

WITNESS THURSDAY, JANUARY 12 | MATTHEW 16:124-28

Evangelism is a very misunderstood word. Some of us have operated with a framework that looks like this: The burden is on us. We have to close the sale. It's all about information and decision. The focus is on what happens after you die. It proposes a transaction: God will do something if we will do something. However, in Scripture we hear something very different about what it means to witness to our faith. Witnessing is built on a foundation of God's authority, not our abilities. Witnessing lays claim to peoples' lives, not just their minds. Witnessing focuses on life now and forever. Witnessing is a proclamation of what God has already done in Christ, a proclamation that creates faith, which sets people free for joyful obedience. Do you believe that God can make you a faithful witness? Ask God to help you get over the fence and share God's love through genuine relationships.

INCARNATION FRIDAY, JANUARY 13 | JOHN 3:16-20

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. God went on a rescue mission and entered into the mess of our lives. He didn't just risk his life, but gave his life to save us from our bondage to sin and death. He came among us as a baby, and lived and died on our behalf. How are you paying that forward? As disciples of Jesus Christ we are called, commissioned and empowered to give to others what was first given to us: the good news of God's love in Jesus Christ. Or, as Jesus put it, we are sent out to "go and make disciples." We're going to be equipped and challenged throughout this series to reach over the fence into our neighbor's life with the good news of God's love. Do you think that God can use you to do that? Ask God to help you get over the fence and share God's love through genuine relationships.

FRIENDSHIP SATURDAY, JANUARY 14 | JOHN 15:12-17

Over and over again we see this same pattern. Genuine friendship leads to conversation and a sense of community, which sometimes leads to faith. God does all the heavy lifting! We simply serve as the bridge across which God's love and God's grace flows into people's lives. We know this works because we've seen God use this process in people's lives. We know this works because it's how we probably became a person of faith. There are people all around us who need what we've been given. Can you identify one person who could become a new and genuine friend? Ask God to help you get over the fence and share God's love through genuine relationships.

MOTIVATION SUNDAY, JANUARY 15 | 2 PETER 1:16-21

Why would we do this? Why would we engage in this process? Why share our faith? Why would we make disciples of all nations? We could say we'll do it because Jesus told us to, out of sheer obedience. But let's press for a deeper motivation. Martin Luther once said that Christianity is merely one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. It's paying forward what we've first received. So here's a question to wrestle with this week: What difference does faith make in your life? What does this Christianity business really matter to you? Reach deep inside yourself for the answer, because if you can't articulate why this faith really matters to you, then why would you bother sharing it with someone else? Ask God to help you get over the fence and share God's love through genuine relationships.