

Matthew 28:16-20 *Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

10,000 times. That's approximately how many attempts Thomas Edison made to create the lightbulb. What keeps a person going when what they are doing doesn't work that many times? How many of us would have stopped after 10 or 50 or 100? But 10,000 times? Yet Edison would so famously say, "I haven't failed. I have only found 10,000 ways that don't work." James Dyson developed 5,127 prototypes for his vacuum going deeply in debt in the process over a period of 14 years until he finally developed the one that would work. What keeps a person going when it seems that the efforts are wasted and fruitless? Mission. These men were on a mission. They had a goal that drove them and a mentality that they weren't going to stop until they achieved it. Edison had the mission to develop a light that would allow people to see at night. Dyson had the mission to develop a better vacuum that would help people keep their homes clean. They were both men who were driven by their mission.

We are driven by a mission also. Our mission is to save the world. It sounds a little dramatic when I say it like this. It seems a bit overwhelming when you say it like this. But our goal is that lofty! We are here to save the world. God has blessed his Church with the privilege of partnering with him in this mission to make disciples of all nations. In his infinite wisdom and grace, he has chosen to accomplish his work of rescuing the lost through the work that we as his people have the privilege of carrying out. This is what makes the church different from other non-profits and charitable organizations and separates us from other civic organizations. This is what makes our school different from many other schools public and private who have similar goals. Our mission. Our Mission is who we are and what we do. Our mission dictates why we exist and what we are to spend our time, money and energy pursuing. So we have the wonderful privilege today as we bring our school year to a close, honor our graduates, and say farewell to our principal and his family to be reminded what we are all about, why we exist and what we are striving to pursue. Today we not only celebrate the mission God himself has given to us but we see and celebrate the fruits of that mission. Today God reiterates our mission as he says—***Go and Save the World.***

Put yourselves in the disciples shoes for a moment. I think we can understand the doubts some of them had even as they worshipped Jesus as their risen Lord. These weren't doubts as to whether he was alive or not. They had seen him alive on a couple of different occasions. These were doubts about an uncertain future. They didn't have any history to know what was going on. They had no direction as to what was happening. They had to wonder: What's going on? What does he expect of us? What will the future hold?

The Lord of the Church, the one who had been given all power and authority as the victorious Messiah and Savior had a plan. ¹⁹*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*" The God who had lived for them, died for them and risen for them had now called them as his ministers to serve all nations. They were to go and share with the world the message of Christ crucified and through this lead people to embrace the truth of Jesus as their Savior. Their work would be to point people to the forgiveness and salvation which Jesus alone brings. That truth would transform the lives of those who heard it. It would give them a new eternal destination. It would change the way they lived their lives. This message needed to get out. There were people who needed to know of the salvation Jesus brought. These disciples were to scatter to the ends of the earth on this mission to make disciples of everyone they met.

Though overwhelming, they would not be helpless in this task. They had the power and authority of God behind them as they carried out their work. The one who has complete authority over all the angels and archangels and saints in glory, over all principalities and powers and dominions and thrones here on earth; the one whose authority extends over all the things on this earth—all living things, all forces of nature, all human governments, all rulers of humankind, over all the armies and navies and nuclear powers of the world; the one whose rule extends over hell itself was sending the disciples out in his name to carry out his work. These were the credentials they carried with them. They could carry out their work confident that they were backed by the power and authority of none less than God himself. They no longer needed to doubt or be concerned about an uncertain future. They would go in the name of Jesus to carry out his work of saving the world and he would be with them.

This commission was not just for the disciples who gathered before Jesus that day. This call to go and make disciples of all nations were the marching orders Jesus gave to his church of all time. This call is for you and me. Our call to faith was not only an invitation to believe in Jesus our Savior. It was that. But it was also more than that. This call was also an invitation to be part of the great mission which God gave to his church. We were given a mission when we were called to faith. We were given the task to go out and save the world! In every age, God's people are to be going, going, going—active in carrying the banner of the gospel to those who so desperately need to hear it. God sends us to people who are dead spiritually and perishing eternally in their sin. God sends us to people in desperate need of help. God sends us to people who don't even know that they need help until we point out their precarious situation separated from God because of their sin. God sends us with the only message that will rescue people from hell and keep them safe eternally. If Edison was driven to provide light for people and Dyson was driven to help people clean their homes, how much more driven are we going to be when we recognize the importance of our mission as God's people. We're not talking about helping them see at night or clean the house, we're talking about helping them to live eternally. It's not too dramatic to say: God is sending us on a mission to save the world.

Obviously, we can't save the world by ourselves. So this mission starts at home. Mom and Dad, you are carrying out the Great Commission of Jesus just by being here today and bringing your children to God's house. You are discipling them. You are not only teaching them about Jesus, but you are showing them how faith in Jesus impacts the way that we live our lives. You are discipling them by showing them the importance of being in God's house and worshipping our Savior. You are discipling them when you give of your time and talents to serve others with God's Word. You are discipling them when you pray with them at night. You are discipling them when you bring them to our Lutheran Elementary School or our Sunday School or Vacation Bible School. Our mission as God's people is to save the world and that starts at home with our children. I have one mission as a dad—that is to do everything within my power to help my children be followers of Jesus, finish their lives in faith and live with him eternally. Saving the world starts with saving our children. This is God's mission.

But this is only the beginning of God's mission. We can't save the world alone and this is why we gather into congregations. We exist as a church and school to make disciples of all nations. Whether it is our Lutheran Elementary School, our Sunday School, our Vacation Bible School, our Catechism class, our Teen Bible Study or Adult Bible Study, whether it is worship on Sunday or our evangelism/outreach calling, our focus is on the same thing: to save the world. We have some great purposes for our school. We don't want to graduate students who just meet the minimum standards for being able to move on to the next level of education. We want our graduates to excel as they move on to the next level. We want to give them an education which will be the foundation their next level of education can build on which will help them to succeed in life. We strive for excellence in the education we provide for our students. But this is only a secondary goal for us. Our primary focus is to teach students the Word of God to give the Holy Spirit the opportunity to work in their hearts to become disciples of Jesus—those who not only know him as Savior, but trust in him as Savior and who follow him in their hearts and actions for all of their lives. Our ultimate goal for each of our students is not just to be successful in their occupations and lives but to finish their lives in faith and live with Jesus forever in heaven. We have the same goal for these students that I do for my children—that every one of them know Jesus and follow him in their lives and live with him eternally. This is our mission.

Our school is just one avenue which we use to carry out this mission. We use our Vacation Bible School and Sunday School toward the same goal. We use our Teen Bible Class and Adult Bible Class for the same mission. We have the freedom to decide together how we can best accomplish this mission in our ministry area. No matter what it is that we do as the people of God, we want it working toward this mission of making disciples for Jesus. It's good to ask ourselves—if our mission is to save the world and if we are to do that by baptizing and teaching, is this how we are spending our time, money and energy? I met recently with a congregation who is considering selling their building and property to start a new mission. The point was made in our meeting that they are spending all of their time and energy to take care of their building grounds and have nothing left to share Jesus with others. They actually suggested that selling the building would mean they would have more energy and time and money to share Jesus with more people. That's being mission minded. That's recognizing what it means to be driven by our mission. That's being focused on going out to save the world.

I don't know too many of God's people who disagree with the mission he has given to us. Yet it necessary to ask the question, how many are actually doing it? It's easy to be filled with doubts as those disciples of Jesus were. We believe in him and trust in him, yet we all to quickly start to doubt God's power to protect us as we go about His work. We doubt Jesus' power to go with us and the Holy Spirit's promise to work through us. Those doubts lead us to sit back and let someone else carry this out on our behalf. Like Judas, when we hear Jesus instruct us to go and make disciples, we respond with, "Surely you don't mean me, Lord?" "I'm not Seminary trained. I don't have kids. That costs too much money. I'd have to give more of my time and money to support it. I'm too busy." And so forth. Shame on us for all too often spending our time and energy trying to find ways to get out of God's work rather than just doing the work.

How thankful that someone in our lives heeded God's call to go and make disciples and shared with us the message of God's grace and forgiveness. It was for these sins that Jesus died. It was for these sins that Jesus suffered hell. It was for these sins which Jesus so willingly sacrificed himself for us. We thank the Lord that he sent someone into our lives who answered his call and brought this saving message to us. Now he call us to do the same for others. Now he calls us to go and save the world!

Just because you don't have children in our school or Sunday School or VBS or have children or grandchildren involved at all—you are still part of this mission. God has still commissioned you to give of your time, your talents, your money, your energy to support and carry out this mission. As we gather in a church to do more together than we could all by ourselves, we join together in a synod for the same reason. You may not be able to every city in America or to foreign lands to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus, but you send out people in your name through our ministerial education schools to do this on your behalf. This week our seminary sent new pastors to Knoxville, TN and San Carlos, AZ and Kenai, AK to carry out this mission for you. Two weeks ago our teaching college sent men and women out to do the same. The same Lord of the church is taking our current principal to Pooler, GA to carry out this mission and has provided a new principal for us to continue this work here. This is our mission—your individual mission and our collective mission—to go and make disciples of all nations.

Today we have the joy of seeing some of the fruit of this labor. We see young men and ladies finishing one level of education and moving on to the next. This is only the beginning. This is only a part of our mission. God wants his church to be a missionary kingdom until he takes us from this earth or comes back as he promised. We may not be able to get to the world ourselves, but we can do all that we can in our small part of the world to carry out this work in the mission outpost God has established here at Northdale Lutheran. May God bless our graduates as they move on to the next stage of their education preparing to carry out this mission wherever God may lead them. May God bless Mark and Jessie Thiesfeldt as they take their family to Pooler, GA to carry on this mission with the people of that community. May God bless all of us as we leave God's house focused on this mission. Go now and save the world. Amen.