18th Sunday after Trinity
SERMON ON EVANGELISM - A GREAT CHURCH
West Henrietta - 1961

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IN NOMINE JESU

St. Matthew 28: 18-20 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

A church which lives and works under the compulsion of the Gospel of Jesus Christ cannot escape another compulsion - the desire to be a great church. I assume that everyone of you here would like to see our congregation in West Henrietta grow into a great church. I take for granted that a church which believes that Christ died and rose again according to the Scriptures will be committed to t pursuit of excellence. It will not be content to make its peace with mediocrity. It will be a restless church — restless with its status quo!
It will want to be a great church. What, then, will make our church great? Its pastor? The Church Council? The Ladies' Aid? The Walther League? Let us ask our Lord Jesus Christ to tell us just what it takes to build a great church. He would remind us that the charter or blueprint for building a great church can be found i our text: And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto Me heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in th Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you alway, even unt the end of the world. Amen.

In the first place, then, a great church bows humbly and obediently befor a great claim. And it should! Listen! All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. No words could more absolutely express unconditional, unlimited authorit and sovereignty. All power, every kind of force, whether it be physical or political, or any other kind, is only a power derived from Jesus Christ. Every kind of dominion is in His hands. His power is at work in every sphere: in heaven and in earth. Governments - all governments, whether they be hostile or friendly to the church - are ordained by Him. The earth, the stars, the moon, all planets, the dea and the living, the rich and the poor, the industrialist or the laboring man, men, women, children, pastors, teachers, laity; all are subject to Him. At His name every knee will bow.

All power is given unto Me, He said. When? St. Paul answers: He was declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead. St. Peter agrees: God raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory. The writer to the Hebrews tells us: We see Jesus crowned with glory and honor for the suffering of death. And St. John praises Him by calling Jesus the Faithful Witness, and the First-born from the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth. The hands tha were pierced with nails to redeem us from our sins now wield the scepter of the universe. And the brow that was crowned with thorns because of our iniquities is now encircled with the crown of universal kingship.

Christ has the right to tell His church what to believe, what to do, and what to teach. And it is the mark of a great church that it bows before His great claim and calls Him Lord of lords and King of kings. It is not surprising, then, that the first brief creed of the early church was the simple declaration Jesus Christ is Lord. This is the first claim of the church's Lord, and this is the fir and basic confession of allegiance of the church to Jesus Christ. He is our Lord. When He speaks, He speaks with authority. He is Commander in Chief, and when He gives orders to His Church Militant, she does not argue with His Word. And when th church speaks and teaches in His name, she is not content to listen only to the dim echo of her own weak voice, but insists instead that she must speak with the strong voice of the almighty God. A great church is great and strong only as it speaks with the great and strong voice of Him who said, All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.

Every kind of word He speaks is of greatest value. We are not merely to bow before Him when He says: Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest, but also when He says, Take heed and beware. There are those - there always have been and there always will be those - who will not listen intently and attentively for the voice of Him who is the Truth and who speaks the truth. There are those who have no more questions because they have all the answer They are so proud of having the truth that in their pride they have already lost it They have no need for searching the Scriptures, for Daily Bible Study and family

devotions, or for worship. They apply human solutions to all their spiritual problems and they do not listen eagerly to the divine voice of the King of kings. Th are those, on the other hand, who have only questions and no answers. They hold strange and complicated views about the Scriptures, and one hears only the enticin whisper, Yea, hath God said? They are strong in negatives and weak in positives, and rarely does one catch the thunder of the strong voice of certainty which proclaims, Yea, God hath said! They are skillful in raising doubts, clever in unsett ling men's faith, but powerless to anchor it for them in the clear and certain wor of Scripture.

A great church listens humbly and obediently to the voice of a great Lor It believes that the revealed Word of God is altogether human and altogether divin even as the incarnate Word of God, Jesus Christ, is altogether human and altogethe divine. But it confesses that, even as both natures in Christ are inseparably joi ed in His one Person, even so both natures of the Scriptures are inseparably joine in and by Him who said: If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. A great church do not rationalize with Christ and His claims. It bows before Him and them. It believes that the God, who is merciful, can also be scientific, and that He who work miracles of faith can also work miracles in nature.

A great church responds in faith to a great commission. Jesus said: All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nati baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. It is as though He said, Because I have all power, you are charged with the duty of winning the world for your King. The Christ who rules over all things expects us to proclaim His universal kingdom. He craves no empty rule, no mere elevation over men. His rule is imcomplete without the surrender of men as His subjects. He wants authorit over the heart and life of every man, and He wants to exercise this authority. And as long as there is one person in the world who says, I will not have this Man rule over me, Christ is not satisfied, and neither can His church, and neither can we.

A conquering Lord commands us to engage in a worldwide conquest - to disciple the nations. And He supplies the means to bring this about! He brings men into fellowship with the Holy Trinity by supplying us with Word and Sacrament achieve this miracle. By His Spirit He seeks to bring the wayward children of men into the arms of the Father who created them, who supplies their every need, who governs them, and who loves them! By His Gospel He strives to change stubborn unbelievers into willing believers, who trust in Him as the Son of God and their Savior. And to do all this He uses us! The treasure of the Gospel is committed to earthen vessels - you and me - that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us. But He does more. He uses us to teach them to observe all things whatsoever He has commanded us. He wants His disciples to be trained not only in creed but also in their conduct. His truth is not merely to be believed; it is to be done. His Gospel is to be applied to every area of thought and life and learning. So far as He is concerned, creeds without actions are empty, and conduct without creeds is unworthy.

The people of a church will always be the best evidence of its greatness. Will they have a passion for the souls of men, as did their Lord? Will they go out to the unchurched as one beggar telling another beggar where to find food? Will they be determined to feed the lambs and the sheep of Christ - teaching them in the best possible way, using the best possible facilities, - only because Christ asks them to love Him and to love them? Will they engage valiantly in the battle for men's minds and teach ~~God's people~~ them to cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ? Go, says He, Go and make disciples of all nations!

A great church is great, finally, because it relies on a great promise: Lo I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world! In only two short weeks you will be calling on many people in our community to tell them about your Savior. Many Christian people will be working 'with you'; they will pray for you. But what immeasurably greater assurance comes from Christ's promise I am with you. This is a certain promise. He has established it by His resurrection from the dead. His

I am with you alway is His way of saying that He has a living heart to love you, a living eye to see your needs , and a living almighty hand to help you. This is an all-embracing promise. He is with you alway - along every step of the way. Th is a limitless promise - even unto the end of the world. There is a touch of heav in these words. By it He lifts your eyes to the end of time and tells you to keep your eyes on heaven as you serve with faithfulness on earth. A great church has a great awareness of Christ's presence.

There is only one word left in our text, and that is Amen. Our Lord cla that all power is given unto Him in heaven and in earth, and this big word says th this is so. Our Lord has given His church a great commission, and the Amen says that this is so. He gives you a great promise of His unfailing presence, and this word says that this is so. Now, all that is left for you to do is to believe it and to act upon it, and God will prove it so to you.

Amen.