

There have been many persons given exciting commissions in their lifetimes. There was Michelangelo's charge to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican in Rome, Sir Christopher Wren's commission to build St. Paul's Cathedral in London, Marco Polo's challenge to open up new trade routes, Florence Nightingale's campaign to establish the first Nursing School in London and Jorn Utzon's commission to build the Sydney Opera House.

However, in my life and yours, there is an even greater commission than those. It is found here in St Mark where Jesus Christ turns to his disciples and sends them out to proclaim the Good News.

What happened? What happened between that depressing visit to Nazareth that we heard about last week and this first successful mission? Something sure majorly changed. Did the disciples suddenly lose their fears and self-consciousness? Did they get massive doses of vitamin B-12 or an injection of steroids?

No, of course not. What probably happened was something like this. Jesus called together this group who had been his friends from the start and he said to them, "I need you. The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few. I cannot do it by myself. It is time for you to get started." So they went out and they healed people and cast out demons. They surprised everyone, perhaps most of all themselves. What was for sure was that this commission had great height, width depth and length.

Let us consider the height of this commission of Jesus. In Matthew's Gospel Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples." All authority. That doesn't leave much out, does it? "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." That is, Jesus. It's all centred in one person - Jesus Christ.

What does this authority say? He says, "Go and make disciples." He says it to a group of fisherman, merchants, and government officials. You see, this commission is so vast it'll take more than a bunch of individuals to get it done. It'll take a worldwide body of encouraging, working, loving, committed, cooperative people to accomplish this task. Never forget, Christ's commission was given to a group, not an individual. It was given to the Church!

When Jesus set about his ministry of teaching and healing there were those who asked, "By what authority do you do this? Is it your own ego or Satan or some man who compels you to do these things?" And Jesus consistently pointed to God as the basis of his authority. It is the same today - somebody's going to want to know why? "Go," Jesus said. And his marching orders still stand. "Go! Make Disciples!

That was something of the height of our commission. Now this: something of the width of our commission. The New Testament describes the proportions as including "all nations." Funny how we like to narrow our ministry to Anglicans or the middle class or the educated or the youth or the elderly. Jonah had to get all of this straight in his own commission. God said to him, "Go to Nineveh!" But Jonah hated Gentiles. He only wanted a ministry to his own Hebrew people. It took a storm, a whale, a hot sun, and God's rebuke to straighten him out. St Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:16, "From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view..." Instead, everyone we see is a potential brother or sister in Jesus.

Moving on, let's consider not only the height and width of our Christ commission, but also its depth. For us, people-made-new, begins with hearing of God's holiness and people's sin and our most certain judgment. It continues with the Good News of God's love and provision in Christ and a clear

call to repentance, faith, the fullness of the Holy Spirit, and obedience. Such is the depth of our commission.

A final dimension of our challenge! It's length. It took Michelangelo over ten years to paint the Sistine Chapel. So it's fair to ask how long it'll take us to fulfil the commission Jesus has given us. "What'll it take, Lord? Five minutes? A year? Two years? Five? Ten?" And Christ says, "Go ... to all nations ... teach all I have commanded you ... to the close of the age." In other words, each of our commissions lasts until the job gets done, until life is over, "until the close of the age."

I can't imagine a footie player coming off the field in the third quarter, walking up to his coach, and saying, "Coach, I've been thinking. I've played enough. Let some other guys finish the contest. I'm going over there for a pie and beer and relax with my girlfriend." It'd never happen! Yet it does happen in the church. "For thirty years I've laboured for you, Jesus. Sunday school, group prayer, morning teas, worship, small groups. I've done it all. And things have changed and I don't like it so now I'm going to wander off somewhere else or buy me a sailboat and head for the beach every weekend I can. Let somebody else do your work for a while." And Jesus says, "Until the close of the age." You see, the Christian life is not a 100-yard dash. It's a lifelong committed marathon.

So, here we sit - fishermen, farmers, government officials, leading men and women, professionals, business people the old and the young. Today, as of old, It's easy to put this commission of Christ's disciples aside for something else, isn't it? To be distracted or annoyed about the trappings of life and/or Church. But for all of us it's time to get going! To do what Christ has called us to do. Every Sunday, in fact- we are reminded of our commission. In the very meanings of the Eucharist there is a sense to "Go Out" don't keep it to yourself. Can we hear those words coming from Jesus: "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord"?

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