

Date: May 31, 2026 (Trinity Sunday / Pentecost 1)

1. Texts: Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Ps. 8; 2 Corinthians 13:11-13; Matthew 28:16-20.
2. Subject: discipleship.
3. Topic: obedience in discipleship.
4. Aim: test the limits.
5. Proposition: "Ultimately, we have to choose to obey God."

## THE CHOICE TO OBEY GOD

It's easy to miss, because of the monumental statement that follows. But the beginning of the short passage from Matthew is astounding: "When [the apostles] saw [Jesus], they worshipped him; *but some doubted.*" Listen to that: "...but some doubted." This is some *of the apostles* doubted. We don't know who the doubters were, but there were some apostles who doubted that Jesus was the resurrected Christ. Or they doubted that this person was even Jesus. Or they doubted that he had actually died. Whatever the root of the doubt was, some apostles doubted.

In response to this, Jesus pulled out his trump card—the authority granted to him by God: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Jesus was about to give them their marching orders and so he claimed the earthly authority to command them.

Now, before we move on to the Great Commission, we really should think out loud about the issue of obedience.

You see, obedience is not something that the superior power can truly enforce. Obedience is something that the inferior power must choose. I am reminded of an old "Dennis the Menace" cartoon. Dennis is sitting in the time-out chair in a corner. He turns his head to the side and says, "I may be sitting down on the outside, but on the inside, I'm standing up." Dennis complied with his mother's command to go, sit in the corner, but he was not being obedient on the inside.

In today's case, Jesus is claiming authority, but it will be the choice to obey by the apostles that will make the difference. Authority is only meaningful in the light of someone's obedience. And that is a choice each disciple has to make.

Jesus' claim to authority leads to his command:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.<sup>1</sup>

Because Jesus has been given authority by God, the apostles are to leave the security of the upper room and Jerusalem. They are to go out into the world and make disciples everywhere. They are to educate and baptize. In essence, the apostles are to create the Christian Church.

It turns out that the apostles demonstrated their obedience to this command. We don't know which of them doubted because they chose obedience to the command. Christ's resurrection proved his authority. The apostles accepted that authority. They founded the Church.

But their obedience had a consequence which they likely didn't understand at the time. Their obedience to the command of Christ also proved that obedience to Christ's commands belongs to the nature and identity of the Church. This is important.

Jesus' resurrection proves that he is the Christ. Because he is the Christ, he has God-given authority over the Church. Because he has authority, he can command the disciples. Because the apostles accepted that authority, they chose obedience to Christ's commands. Their obedience shapes the identity and nature of the Church which they founded.

So now, we have to figure out what Christ is commanding us to do. We can only manage this in broad terms, but that will be enough to guide our individual commitment to obedience.

I'd like to start with the Great Commission that we read today, but there is a command that is prior to it and actually of greater importance. This command informs the practice of the Great Commission.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 28:19-20.

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."<sup>2</sup>

Jesus worded this commandment in a slightly different way in Matthew's Gospel.

'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'<sup>3</sup> Matthew 22:37-39

Self-sacrificing love for the disciples and for others is just as much a part of the identity of the Christian Church as evangelism is. The command of Christ compels us to love in word and deed. Our love is to be made tangible, visible and experiential in the lives of the people with whom we come into contact.

Then, there is the Great Commission we read today:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.<sup>4</sup>

The Christian Church is an evangelizing Church. As a Church, a diocese, a parish and as disciples, we have to figure out how to make disciples. Choosing obedience is essential to Christian identity. We have to figure out how we will be obedient to this command to evangelize, especially in light of the command to love.

Lastly, let's hear an indirect command, but a command nonetheless.

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your

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<sup>2</sup> John 13:34-35.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 22:37-39.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 28:19-20.

slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”<sup>5</sup>

A life of service arising out of sacrificial love is as essential to the identity and nature of the Church as are the other commands.

The most universal commands of Jesus are clear:

- ✓ to love one another in the same way that Jesus has loved us; that is, to love God with all that we are so that we might love others;
- ✓ to make disciples wherever we are;
- ✓ to serve others as a demonstration of divine love.

We could easily find others, but these are enough to encourage our quest for obedience.

The first step will be to commit ourselves to obedience. Remember, Jesus commands, but we must choose obedience.

Secondly, we recognize Jesus’ commands. For our practice today, just the ones we have already highlighted.

Lastly, we look for opportunities through which we can practice obedience. We look for situations where love, evangelism and service may be practiced and developed.

Once our obedience has grown into a habit, we can then expand our attention to include other commands.

This cascading torrent of faith consequences arose out of the doubt of some unnamed apostles. That’s actually quite astounding and exciting. Our doubts and questions can lead to a transformed life. All we really need to do is recognize the God-given authority of Jesus. All anyone really needs is to choose obedience to the Saviour.

AMEN.

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 20:25-28,