

Dominion **Matthew 28:16-20**

Introduction

(Show the video of rioting this week)

These were the images that occupied my television screen this week. These were the stories that filled my Facebook feed, the airwaves of the radio stations I listened to, my newspaper and every other news source that I use in the course of a day. These were also the images that were in my mind as I sat down to pray through the texts that we are using in our worship service today and to prepare this sermon.

Here are two verses that stood out to me as I read, verses you heard the lector read a few moments ago:

*And God saw all that he had made, and it was **very good**. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day. (Genesis 1:28)*

Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. (2 Corinthians 13:11)

Those verses and those images caused me to think of one additional passage of Scripture:

The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. So the Lord said, "I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created...for I regret that I have made them." (Genesis 6:5-7)

I have always thought those were some of the saddest words in the entire Bible. God "regretted" creating the human race. Can you imagine that? In a very short span of time, God went from viewing His creation as "very good" to "regretting" that He had created us.

The new factor in that span of time was, of course, the introduction of sin to the system. That is the reason the "very good" thing that God had created had degenerated into something "very bad."

So, in the days of Noah, God addressed this mess by sending a flood that covered the entire earth. Forty days of nonstop rain, and months of overwhelming water destroyed everything that lived, with the exception of eight people and hundreds of animals that had been gathered in an ark of safety.

Yet sin continued. The flood successfully washed away people and animals, trees and flowers, but it could not wash away sin. When Adam and Eve ate that apple, sin not only was something they DID. It infiltrated every fiber of who they WERE. So powerful and evil is sin that not even a world changing flood could eliminate it.

So, as you might expect, the lessons learned from that flood didn't last long. Things soon got very bad again. God wasn't surprised by that. Nothing surprises Him. But God needed to address the problem of sin and He needed to teach us humans that all of the normal solutions for fixing the sin problem don't work.

- Punishment doesn't work. God's people were held captive or harassed by Egyptians, Philistines, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians and Romans, and yet they continued to move farther and farther into their sinful ways.
- Legislation doesn't work. God gave His people the Ten Commandments and countless other restrictions aimed at showing them how to live a godly life. Read the book of Leviticus! Yet the sinfulness of people continued to grow worse (worse and worse).

So about 2,000 years ago, after proving over and over again that human efforts to fix the sinful ways of people will never work, God finally did the only thing that would work – a thing He knew was the only cure for the sin problem – a way He first mentioned back in the Garden of Eden. He sent Jesus.

The ministry of Jesus lasted about three years. He taught, performed miracles and modeled for us what a right relationship with our Heavenly Father looked like. Then He died. His death was cruel and ugly, one of the most gruesome executions in all of history. It was awful! But it worked. The blood Jesus shed had the power to change people's lives and to set them free from their sinful ways.

You see, things like punishment and legislation are forces that work from the outside in. They have some power, but they cannot penetrate the heart of a man or a woman. Their impact is limited.

But the blood of Jesus is different. It works from the inside out. It starts in the heart – not on the outside working in but on the inside working out. It changes the very nature of the people who receive it – so much so that it starts to show up in the way they live, the way they think, and the way they treat other people.

What punishment and legislation can never do, the blood of Jesus Christ does.

That is wonderful news! No longer is it a foregone conclusion that things must go from very good to very bad. Because of Jesus the flow is reversed. Things can now go from very bad to very good! We see that in the lives of people who get serious about their faith.

But it doesn't happen automatically. God never forces the blood of Jesus on anyone. Each person needs to respond in faith for themselves. When we do:

...the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin. (1 John 1:7)

People just have to know that. If they don't know, they can't respond in faith. That's the question that is perfectly framed in Romans 10:

And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? (Romans 10:14-15, NLT)

Which brings us to today's Gospel. You know it well, but listen it once more within the context of what I am sharing today:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

In response to the question from Romans (How will they believe unless someone is sent?) Jesus simply says "Go." He sends us.

And with this commission Jesus provides His power, His plan and His presence.

#1: HIS POWER

Verse 18:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. (Matthew 28:18)

When we stand up to speak, we stand up in the Name of Jesus. What we share is what Jesus says. The world is full of people with their own opinions, and no matter who they are their opinions can't bring lasting change to the hearts of people. Only Jesus can do that.

His Power means that when you and I speak His message, He backs it up. If you share your opinion, you are relying on your own power, but if you speak God's Word you have the full force of heaven behind you.

#2: HIS PLAN

His plan is equally as simple:

Go 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 I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19-20a)

Jesus doesn't call on His followers to enact more laws or executive stiffer penalties. In this passage, He is not even calling on them to do church-y sorts of things. He doesn't call for more Bible studies or prayer meetings. He tells us to go baptize and teach.

People's hearts are changed as we build relationships with them that incorporate them into the family of God. There is no other way.

#3: HIS PRESENCE

And finally His assures of His presence.

And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matthew 28:20b)

When the children of Israel started out through the wilderness, they refused to move unless God went with them. He assured them of His presence.

When the earliest disciples were called before the authorities and told to stop proclaiming the message of Jesus, God assured them of His presence.

And He assures us of His presence as well.

APPLICATION

The events of this past week ought to spur us to action. And for many it has.

- Politicians have been spurred toward photo ops and rhetoric about new pieces of legislation.
- Commentators have talked about everything from the breakdown of the family to the residues of racism throughout the legal system.

As Christians, though, we need to be spurred toward sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ. That is the only hope for our world. It is the only way that which is now very bad can move toward being very good once again.

(Prayer)

Amen.