

**Sunday, August 30, 2020 – Moving Forward III/Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
“Movement”**

Matthew 28: 16-20; 1 Peter 2: 4-10; Psalm 62: 5-8

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Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Today is the third in a three-week series on *why* we are moving forward in freedom – not so much the specifics but the theological rationale, the underpinning of why we’re doing what we’re doing, before shifting the focus to the *what* and the *how* that we’re planning to move forward.

Two weeks ago we saw God’s long game, His plan for the salvation of the world, from Adam and Eve to Abraham to Isaiah and the days of the prophets down to Jesus and then how Jesus has been using our congregation in His plan for the past 63 years – that is to say the ministry carried out here is an extension, part of a long chain of God’s plan of salvation unfolding through the generations. Last Sunday Pastor Brad led us into the foundation that we’re built upon – the truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God – and that everything we do – worship, Bible studies, small groups, fellowship, children’s and youth ministry and other ministries of the congregation – is fixed on Christ and what He’s doing. That’s what Forward in Freedom is all about – the focus is none other than the good gifts God has already given us through our Lord Jesus and how He puts us in a place to use His gifts. In this way, God’s people have been fed and nourished through the Word and Sacrament and will, by His grace, continue to be.

Which brings us to Jesus and His disciples, after the resurrection in these last verses of the Gospel of Matthew. Again, the focus is all upon Jesus. The only words are those of Jesus. Notice the scene – Jesus is risen from the dead. He has clearly proven his claims of divinity to be true, His victory over death is true... and yet, the disciples’ own thoughts and feelings are in the way. We’re told the disciples are hesitant. They’re doubting. Do they really worship Jesus? Is He really all that He says He is?

Can we trust His promises? What does His resurrection have to do with me, personally, to us, collectively, in every time and circumstance in our lives?

Hesitancy and doubting of God's Word is an age old hang up for Christians who have been set free. Notice what I said – hesitancy and doubting are a hang up for CHRISTIANS.

I'm grateful to our teachers for picking such an appropriate theme verse for our new school year, the Psalm 62 reading that you heard awhile ago, because it picks up on what God's Word says to our fear and our doubts. We are "Saved. Not shaken." Even when we *feel* shaken, even when we are *hesitant*, even when we *doubt*, God's Good Word is still good news for us. God is our refuge, our source of hope and our salvation, even when hesitancy and doubts nip at our heels.

Notice what Jesus does with the shaken, hesitant, doubting disciples. He doesn't roll his eyes or let out an audible sigh. He doesn't shake his head in dismay or second-guess whether he picked the right disciples for the new orders going forward. Instead, knowing that the disciples are hesitant, doubting and shaken Jesus speaks hope into them. Jesus acts as a refuge for them before He commissions them. Jesus provides clarity for what moving forward looks like for His disciples and His church – go! Make disciples! Baptize them! Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And we do so as a royal priesthood – adopted by baptism into the family of our Heavenly King, God our Father! We're priests, with access, priests, who can pray, priests, always close to God – for surely Jesus is with us always!

Each congregation, individual, and each generation will have a new and different lay of the land before them in which to be faithful to this Great Commission – staring into a new unknown, nagged from time to time with doubt or hesitation but always reoriented around this one central truth – that Word out of Jesus' mouth for us, as we, His priesthood of believers, this temple of living stones are sent by God to make disciples, baptize and teach.

This is a congregation that has had a lot of focus and success over the years in being faithful to this sending by ministering to children and their families. In 1960, just three years after the church was

planted we were averaging 83 people a Sunday in worship – with a Sunday School attendance of 180! By the mid-1960s the Sunday School had grown to 350 children a week when 100 people were coming to church! Can you imagine? Just think of those kids, their families and the impact for the Gospel ministry on our then small town. Our forebearers, starting from scratch, found a need that very much fit their culture and their era to sow the Good News of Jesus Christ in the neighborhood around them.

A generation later, with changing community needs we started a school, with children again a front line not only for ministering to those who already knew Jesus but for reaching entire families and our larger community. A quarter century on I look around our community and I see families who are here because their child or grandchild started attending our school. I see people who came to know Jesus and were baptized because of the ministry carried out through our school. I see many of our leaders, part of this body with us together because God has done this good work. Those folks, and all those who meet Jesus through their witness, are a testament to God’s help and encouragement in what surely brought about hesitancy and doubt. You know, people were asking questions then, too. “Do we really have what it takes to start a school? Can we really pick up stakes and move across town, taking this great risk?” But the kingdom mandate called for it – the sending words of Jesus – “Go!”

Is a school the only way to reach out to our community? By no means, in fact it’s not our only way, either – but it is one that we decided long ago to focus upon as a congregation, and it is a major ministry arm of this congregation to our community. Today, the question before us is this: Do we want to continue down that road, letting a Christian preschool and dayschool keep being a primary means by which we go about being faithful to that call that Jesus gives to go, make disciples, baptize and teach? If so, what resources are needed to facilitate that ministry being carried out well?

A similar challenge is before us today – the truth of God’s Word is the same yesterday, today and forever but the application of how we share that timeless Word changes, even when the ministry priorities stay similar. Even if we decide to keep supporting the same ministry area that we’ve done for

decades, the needs and expectations of our families in our day and age are different. The features that families seek to meet the needs of children today involve a larger space for learning centers in the classrooms, a new, dedicated space for a Media Center and for a Science Lab, reinvestment and upgrades into the facility – not simply so that we can have the shiniest or newest or the most with which to compete on the level of impressing parents who come to do tours... no, there's far more than that as to why our school ministry exists. It exists because decades ago we decided the opportunity to touch the lives of families in our community was a faithful and worthy way to be about the calling Jesus puts on His Church. We step forward, into both opportunity and risk, to vigorously attend to the physical spaces that facilitate this ministry. Simply put, this reinvestment in the changing needs of school families is a key piece to how we move Forward in Freedom! It's part of how we go, it supports disciple making, it creates possibilities for more baptisms and teaching. In other words, it all goes back to Jesus. It's His mission, His ministry, His sending power for us to Go! Make Disciples! Baptize! Teach!

And we don't go it alone! Surely, Jesus is with us always. Jesus is with us when we feel strong, confident and trusting but He is also with us in our hesitation, in our doubts. He is with us as we go forward, to the very end of the age. Teaching His Word, baptism, these disciple-making things of God power the movement forward and the ever-present activity of Jesus is with us as we go. In Jesus' name, Amen.