

JJ¹

In the business world, mottos or slogans often summarize a company's mission statement, their goal. Advanced Auto Parts—*We're ready in advance*. Basically, if they're not ready to help you with your automotive repair needs, they've failed. Microsoft's mission statement says—*At Microsoft, we work to help people and businesses throughout the world realize their full potential*. Many of you see this mission statement being fulfilled on a daily basis at work and at home. But then there are some mission statements that seem to shoot a bit high. Take for instance part of the Levi Strauss mission statement which says, *We will clothe the world*. Maybe, just maybe, their aim is a bit ambitious.

But what about the mission of the Church? I'm not necessarily talking about St. John's mission statement—*Come, Grow, Live and Share Christ!* The Church's mission is summarized with the words before us today, which are often described as *The Great Commission*.

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and gather disciples from all nations by baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the

Son and of the Holy Spirit, and by teaching them to keep all the instructions I have given you. And surely I am with you always until the end of the age."

Have you ever thought Jesus was shooting a little too high? Have you ever thought Jesus' aim was a little too ambitious—not realistic? Keep those questions in mind.

The description, *The Great Commission*, isn't something found in the Bible. It was a phrase coined by Christians long ago which accurately describes the end of Matthew's Gospel. Now it may seem strange to hear this, but if we focus too narrowly on the greatness of this mission, we might begin to think it's an impossible mission to carry out. And that would also happen if we *lose sight of the fact that behind this commission is an even greater "co-mission," the combined, cooperative, and perfectly coordinated mission of the three persons of our triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.*² *The Church's mission is rooted in ... and flows from God's mission. The Church's mission finds its source and power in God's mission. The key to the Church's mission...is to understand...that the first and greatest missionary is God!*

¹ JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

² Many thoughts of this sermon, and the general flow are taken from *Concordia Pulpit Resources*, Vol. 24, Part 3, Series A (Holy Trinity, by Rev. Joel Lehenbauer). With the exception of the italicized mission statements, any italicized portions are direct quotes from Lehenbauer's notes and sermon.

God's mission begins in the heart of God the Father. Consider Paul's words to Pastor Timothy: "God our Savior...wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4 NIV84). Our triune God has been mission minded from eternity. Our first lesson today recounts God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit creating the world. The very next chapter, Genesis 3, records the worst event in human history—The Fall into sin. But remember our triune God is a mission-minded, Savior God! Before one word of sorrow or repentance over sin, God gives the first promise of the Savior! But God as missionary started long before Adam and Eve ever sinned. In Ephesians chapter 1, Paul tells us that God's missionary plan began "before the creation of the world!" (Eph. 1:3-14 NIV84).

Over and over again, the Bible pictures God the Father as a seeking God and as a sending God. The Father seeks his lost sheep, a lost coin, a lost son (Ezekiel 34; Luke 15). Because God our Father longs to seek and to save what was lost, he sent his servants, the prophets, in the Old Testament. And each one of them pointed ahead to the Father's Son who would save the world. Luther's hymn, *Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice*, beautifully portrays this "father's heart" of God.



But God beheld my wretched state
before the world's foundation,

And, mindful of his mercies great,
he planned my soul's salvation.

A Father's heart he turned to me,
sought my redemption fervently;

He gave his dearest treasure. (st. 4)

He spoke to his beloved Son: "Tis time
to have compassion.

Then go, bright Jewel of my crown,
and bring mankind salvation.

From sin and sorrow set
them free; Slay bitter
death for them that they
May live with you
forever." (st. 5)

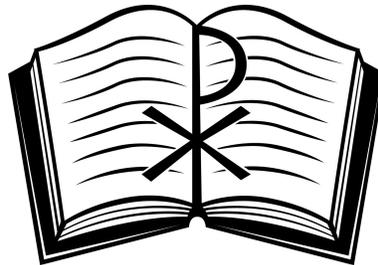
Considering Luther's hymn, we see that God's mission centers in God the Son, Jesus Christ. God the Father did not seek to carry out his mission to save the world by the sheer force and power of his will. Sometimes we wish he would do it this way. Sometimes we wonder why he

doesn't just make everyone a believer like when he said, "Let there be light!" and there was light. We can wonder "WHY?" all we want, but it won't do us any good. That's a question for heaven, and even then who knows if we'll be given the answer, or even be able to understand it should it be given! What God the Father has chosen, he has chosen. And he has chosen to save the world through his Son.

We see this truth as clear as day as we look throughout the Scriptures and see

that *from beginning to end*, the central character of the Bible is Jesus Christ. He is the One God the Father sends to make peace between himself, a holy God, and sinful mankind. Jesus, God the Son, is the One the Father sent to satisfy all the demands of his holy law. Jesus, God the Son, is the One the Father sent to suffer our hell and our death on the cross. Jesus, God the Son, is the One the Father sent to crush the serpent's head and open wide heaven's gates. God's mission to save the world always has and always will center on God the Son because: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12 NIV84).

To make this saving work ours, God's mission is carried out in people's hearts and lives individually by God the Holy Spirit. *Just as the Father sent his Son...so the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit as the third "missionary partner" in God's great plan of salvation.* It's important for us to understand that God the Holy Spirit didn't start carrying out this mission on Pentecost. Not only was he active in creating the world, he has been active in this mission from the beginning. He was the One who restored faith in Adam and Eve's hearts after hearing the Father's gospel promise about God the Son. He is the One who spoke through the prophets. He was the One who descended on Jesus, anointing him at his baptism. He is the



One who continues to carry out God's mission yet today.

Remember a few minutes ago when I asked you if you ever wondered if God's mission sometimes seems a little too ambitious? Jesus said, "gather disciples from all nations," and "teaching them to keep all the instructions I have given you." Even with all the technology we have at our disposal today, all nations seems like a really tall order. With all the different Christian denominations and with the growing cultural attitude that truth is relative, truth is what you make it to be, makes teaching everything God has taught us and holding on to all of it as truth seem like God is asking a little too much. This all may seem far more unrealistic than Levi's goal to clothe the world!

Friends, it is too ambitious if we want to treat God's Word as a buffet, picking and choosing which teachings to believe or which teachings are more important than others, and sweeping the others aside. It is too ambitious if we're not going to trust that God's promises are totally true and totally reliable. It is too ambitious if we plan to rely on our own strength and cleverness.

But friends, when we see and believe that God is *the first and greatest missionary*, then we can *properly understand the Church's role in God's mission and participate in that mission properly, joyfully and*

confidently. We share in God's mission according to the various callings in which he has placed us. Single person—spouse—parent—grandparent—godparent. Congregational leader—musician—Sunday School teacher. Employer—employee. And for each of these callings which God has given to you, he promises to equip you *with the appropriate and needed gifts* in order to carry out those callings. And not only to carry out those callings from a human/worldly perspective, but to also carry out those callings in light of God's mission—to gather disciples from all nations and to teach them all of God's Word.

God's mission is indeed an ambitious mission. There is no more ambitious mission and mission statement in all the world! The wonderful thing is, it isn't backed up by market analysts and a clever CEO. It's backed up by the One True Triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It's backed up by the only real truth in this world—the Word of God! It is the Word of God! So friends, don't trust in yourselves to carry out your role in this mission. Trust in God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Trust in his Word and simply be faithful in studying and sharing that Word. Friends, **GO WITH GOD'S MISSION.** Amen.

³ SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for "To God Alone Be The Glory". This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn't about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.

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