

Farewell sermon by Pastor John Warmuth - May 28, 2017

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

Dear friends in Christ,

Good-byes are never easy. Yet it is something we must say many times in our lives. Our best friend in grade school moved away. We said good bye. We graduated from high school and went separate ways from several close friends. We said good bye. We may move a number of times in our lifetime. We changed jobs. Finally, there is the ultimate farewell when a loved one dies. Good bye.

Over the course of his ministry, a pastor may serve a number of congregations. For me it has been in three settings. The first was a dual parish in Nebraska- St. Paul's Lutheran Church in North Platte and Trinity Lutheran Church in McCook. They were 70 miles apart. The next was in Jefferson, Wisconsin- St. John's Lutheran Church, a large congregation with a Lutheran elementary school. And finally, here in rural Clark County, WI at Immanuel, Globe and St. John's, Christie.

As a pastor you often get deeply involved in members lives. You share their joys like the births, baptisms and confirmations of their children. You share in the joy of their weddings and anniversaries. You teach them God's Word in instruction classes, Bible Classes, and Vacation Bible School. You get to celebrate special days with them like Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, Reformation, church anniversaries and the like. You also share their sorrows such as hospital visits, lingering illnesses, counseling problems, and the death of loved ones. After all these contacts, there are strong emotions when a pastor leaves.

That's what I am experiencing right now. Although I hope that someday I will see you again, I know that for some I will never see you again on earth. That's hard after working together, worshipping together, and serving together for over 8 ½ years in the Lord's kingdom.

The good news is that by faith in Jesus Christ we look forward to a joyful reunion in heaven. Our Savior has made that possible through his death and resurrection. As Christians we have the joy of knowing that we never say good-bye. Rather, we can say, "I'll see you in heaven."

We may never be with each other again on earth, but we will always be together with Jesus, no matter where we are. That is his promise to us in Matthew 28:20. "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Let's focus on these words together this morning as we consider who said them, to whom he said them and when he said them.

I

There are so many things to marvel at about our Savior Jesus who spoke these words. Many of them are directly related to the fact that he is 100% God and 100% man in one person. Thus what is true of and can be said about God is also true and can be said of Jesus as a man. His divinity and humanity were and are united in such a way that the characteristics of his divinity were and are shared with his humanity.

For instance, God is omnipresent- present everywhere. The psalmist says, "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle

on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast” (Psalm 139:7-10).

God is present everywhere. And since God is present everywhere that means that Jesus, even as a man, is present everywhere, because in him God and man are united in one person. Of which other human being can that be said? We can't even imagine a human being who is present everywhere without imagining something ridiculous like a person being stretched out like a parachute so that he covers the entire earth. But that's not what Jesus is like. He is flesh of our flesh, made like his brothers in every way, and yet he is present everywhere, something which none of us can do or be.

This present-everywhere God/Man is the one who redeemed us or paid the ransom price to set us free from the eternal condemnation we fully deserve for our sin. He gave his innocent body into suffering and death by letting himself become sin for us. He shed his holy, precious blood, the blood of a human being but also the very blood of God to cleanse us from guilt and shame. Jesus is the one who then broke the chains of death by rising from the dead, thus making eternal life in the coming world possible for all of us. Through faith in him we will have that eternal life.

II

It is this Jesus who spoke the words, “And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” It is also important that we understand to whom he spoke these words. We call them his disciples. They were people like you and me.

They were people who had disappointed him by getting scared on the stormy sea even though he was in the boat with them, people who let him down by arguing with each other about who was the greatest, who had promised never to disown him and then had fled from him in his moment of greatest need and denied that they even knew him, who found it so hard to simply believe the Scriptures which testify about him.

Jesus was not speaking only to them, though. After all, he says he will be with them to the very end of the age, and the disciples he spoke to that day were not around that long; they have long since died.

So know this- he speaks these words also to us today, even though we too have let him down time and again by arguing with each other, by exalting ourselves in comparison with others, by returning to the same pet sins. He speaks these words to us even though we do not always value his Word and the fellowship of believers as we ought to, and have often forgot with our thoughts, words, and actions, whether in public or in private, that Jesus the God-man was right there with us.

Yes, Jesus spoke these words to sinners then and he speaks them to sinners now. But he speaks them to sinners who nevertheless believe, even if somewhat weakly at times, that he saved them from those sins and will grant them eternal life in the perfect world to come.

He speaks these words to each of us individually and collectively, that is, to the whole group of you gathered here this morning as members of Immanuel, Globe and St. John's, Christie. He wants you to know that even though the human shepherd you have had these past 8 plus years is leaving you, he is not leaving you. While I thought of you as my flock, you are really his flock. He will still be in charge watching over and caring for you as he had every moment of the past 8

plus years. He already knows who he will bring here as your next pastor and when he will bring him here. Yes, Jesus is with you.

III

So, what is he doing here with you? Let's take a look at when Jesus originally spoke these words. It was near the end of the forty day period after his resurrection from the dead. It was maybe a couple of days before he ascended to heaven, or maybe moments before it. He had given his disciples some simple, explicit instructions. He told them, "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 that I have commanded you."

Those words of Jesus are significant for us today as we say goodbye to the pastor/flock relationship of the last 8 plus years. We worked together with our Lord Jesus to do what he told us to do. While you and I will no longer be together here doing those things, Jesus will still be with you helping you to get those things done here.

After all, each of these congregations is not so much YOURS as they are HIS. You make up HIS Church. You make disciples of HIM, you do not make members of YOUR Church. You proclaim HIS Word, not what a great bunch of people you are in your individual congregations.

I want you to know that as I leave your midst, I do so with a lot of joy and satisfaction in my heart. That's because Jesus was with us all that time, leading and directing us through his Word, as he granted us wisdom from the Holy Spirit. I leave in the confidence of his promise to you: He will always be with you, to the very end of the age, because you are his Church. Amen.