*SLEEP LOOSE*

Matthew 28:16-20

Trinity Sunday

June 7, 2020

Curbside check-in has changed everything. I mean, in terms of leave-taking, good-byes, final closures and well-wishes at partings. Now there is rarely time to get the traveler and his or her luggage out of the car before other vehicles are honking at you for blocking traffic. You can’t craft a meaningful, heartfelt farewell while trying to get a garment bag out of your trunk, handing tickets to a skycap, and worrying about that next car in line pinning you to the bumper. Our “good-byes” have become something we simply shout out from across the driver’s side of the car, over the din of traffic and the smell of exhaust.

What a pity. Because good-byes are messages that can stay with us. Leaving family or friends is a poignant, sometimes painful moment in our lives. We tend consciously to remember all the details of our final minutes together. As children, we all experienced a very important “good-bye” every day of our lives – when we were tucked into bed and left alone in the dark. Our parents called it “good night.” But this end-of-the-day ritual is really a good-bye, a farewell to the day we shared together.

What is the last thing you say-- or said -- to your kids before you turned out the light and shut the door? Susan Goodwin Stiles, of Foley, MN, has two little girls – ages 6 and 4. As she tucks her daughters into bed each night, Susan recites a special mantra to them: “Remember, you are special to God. Remember how much we love you. Sleep loose.”

Hello! “Sleep loose”? Shouldn’t that be “sleep tight”? As in, tucked-in, cozied, embraced, and protected? The Stiles recite their strange-sounding directive to their girls for a very important reason. They want their children to relax and let go into the love of God that surrounds each of them. They want their children to sleep loose in the security of that divine love.

Too many adults, and the dirty little secret is it’s children, too—too many folks are sleeping “tight” instead—as in, tensed and ready to bolt and run at the slightest appearance of danger, the smallest indication of risk. It’s hard to get a good night’s rest when all of our muscles are taut. This “sleeping tight” (and it’s all too common) is an uncomfortable, unhappy way to go through life. But for those who know they are “special,” that they are “loved,” each bedtime brings the comfort and security of “sleeping loose.”

Jesus’ final words to His disciples this week demonstrate how a well-crafted “good-bye” can be meaningful and moving. For the disciples, the future for Christians was unclear. If they weren’t then, they would soon face persecution, the possibility of arrest, and for many, execution. And maybe they had indications of that future already.

Farewell, of course, also means “may you have a good journey,” – and the journey Jesus envisions is the one that travels through this life towards that ultimate destination with God. Jesus’ good-bye to the disciples, then, is like His spiritual “triptik” for their own journey though life as Christ-ones.

*ALL* authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. So move out and disciple *ALL* nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit (*ALL* of God), teaching them to keep absolutely *ALL* that I commanded you. And look! I myself am right there with you *ALL* the days, even unto the consummation of history.

It is the breathtaking scope of the “alls” that has given the deserved name “great” to this commission. Adolf Harnack, a theologian of some renown at the turn of the previous century, in a famous remark honored this Gospel climax: “One cannot say anything greater or more in forty words.”

Verse 18 says, “And Jesus stepped forward and spoke to them, saying, “All authority in heaven and on earth . . . . .” “Stepped forward.” A great manifestation of Jesus comes forward and picks up these literally flattened disciples. Jesus stepping forward toward the disciples has something compelling in it. There is no prefatory “fear not,” no touching, not even a greeting; rather, as with a king addressing his servants, all attention is drawn to his commanding *words.*

“All authority.” This is the first of the “alls” of the Great Commission. *Authority* is Matthew’s favorite noun for describing Jesus, and it almost has the weight of our English word “deity.” Authority. It means executive power. And when Jesus now claims ALL executive power, not only in heaven but on earth, he means that he is the Chief Executive Officer of the universe, in complete control of the world. “He’s got the whole world in his hands.” He is the “King of kings, and Lord of lords, and he shall reign forever and ever.” “And the government shall be upon *his* shoulders” (Is. 9:6).

All spiritual, metaphysical, philosophical, and religious power “*in heaven,*” but also all social, physical, political, and economic power “*on earth*” are in *His* hands. He is in charge around here. So what you and I experience and are consumed by, torn-up with, takes a massive step back here. “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ.” What the peoples of the world thought they had before – “power” – is now taken from them and given to another, and given to Him exclusively. The much-mocked man of this Gospel, “Come on down from the cross and we’ll believe in you!”, the man looked for a few hours ago in a grave, now claims universal rule over heaven and earth. The King of the Jews has become the King of the World, yes?

“*In heaven*” means that the impossible possibility of salvation, requiring the obedience of faith, can be supplied from above by one who has authority *there*, and who gives power of access *here.* “In heaven” also means that you and I need fear no other heavenly or spiritual powers. He has everything in hand up there.

“*On earth.”* The powers that seem to be powers on earth are no longer so imposing; they have been outbid. Under this announcement of the CEO of earth, Christians must fear no human powers at all; we are in league with the King: as in, this Jesus Christ, “the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth” as it says in the very first chapter of the Revelation. There is nothing which has power that was not granted by Him.

“All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” “*Has been given to me*.” In the Greek sentence this phrase is up front for shock value like this: “*Given to* ***me*** is all authority.” That first person pronoun (I, me, mine . . . given to ME) is the key to the Great Commission. It is not a generally divine figure or an angel of the Lord who here claims God’s gift of universal lordship; it is a first-century Jew by the name of Jesus. . . . whom we knew. And can trust.

And even that’s not all. Isaiah’s Lord says that the Lord God will not give his glory to another (Is. 42:8 says, “I am the Lord, that is my name; my glory I give to no other.” The only tolerable meaning of this claim in Matthew, then, must be that Jesus is no one less than Lord God Himself. Otherwise, Jesus has badly attacked Isaiah, and the *Shema* “Hear O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is *One* and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Dt. 6:4). He’d be undercutting this, and Isaiah, and the First Commandment itself, which says, “I am the Lord your God, and you shall have no other gods before me” (Ex. 20:2, 3). If Jesus has been given universal authority and yet is not God, where does that leave God? This verse, better than most others, shows why the church HAD to come to its Trinitarian convictions if she were not to presume on the First Article of Faith: the sole Godness of God. And notice that Jesus has been *GIVEN* this authority, which credits God the Father with an even more overarching sovereignty.

OK. Here’s what it all means: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” is Jesus’ final claim in the Gospel, and it forces disciples to make final decisions about Him, in the midst of honest doubts. (Some doubted, remember? Verse 17. That may be our condition, too, from time to time.) The final decision of believers through the centuries has been to worship Jesus as the eternal Son of God the Father, and by the power of the Holy Spirit. In short, the church’s final decision has been the worship of God who appears in three persons, the blessed Trinity.

“And lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.” My favorite commentator of Matthew, Frederick Dale Bruner, whose son I had in youth group when I served an internship in Spokane WA, Frederick Dale Bruner translates that as “And look! I myself am right there with you, *all* the days.” The final “look!” is not one more command, but directs the disciples to one final, definitive assurance. And this is, indeed, more assurance than promise, ‘cause it doesn’t just promise something *ahead*—the verb isn’t a future “I *will be* with you”; the verb is *present* tense and assures the disciples of an *already present* fact; “I myself *am right there* with you” ‘You don’t even have to think about it. I’m there.’

And, finally, we need to say something about the “with you.” God’s promise to be with the commissioned individual is by far the commonest expression of reassurance I the Hebrew Bible.

So Jesus’ divine “with you” means not only protection and defense, though it *is* also that, but it especially means “I will enable your Great Commission doing.” It’s a ‘withness’ that gives you and me Jesus—Jesus-courage to move out, Jesus-wisdom in discipling, Jesus-effectiveness in encouraging baptism, and a Jesus-creativity in teaching. In short, Jesus’ “with you” means Christ will absolutely enable you and me *fruitfulness* in our being Christ’s people in this time.

So. Don’t worry. Sleep loose. Amen.