

## ALWAYS

Mathew 28:16 -20

Isaiah 43:2 -3a

May 8, 2016

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What if they hadn't gone? What if they didn't respond favorably to the invitation to come and see? What if they refused to listen to that person in their life who cared deeply for them and wanted something better for them? Where would they be today?

I could be talking about the disciples. I'm not actually. I'm talking about the young people from our church who led last Sunday's worship services. They were great. If you missed it, that's your loss.

Three members of our youth, Allison Wiker, Jonathan Clive and Wendy Weaver shared the Sunday morning message: Allison at 9:00 AM, Jonathan at 10:00 AM and Wendy at 11:15. They shared stories about their participation in youth, their growth and faith development; their struggles and how their faith and the support of their friends, leaders, and parents helped them get to where they are right now.

Many others shared in the service as well. We heard from others through the "My Story". We also heard personal testimonies from several individuals who shared how meaningful our youth ministry is to them. Some spoke of the persistence of their friends who asked them to come again and again. They came. They experienced. Today they are involved, active, and in a much better place.

Last Sunday was a good day for our church. The leaders of our Youth Ministry felt good about their efforts. The parents of these youth felt good that they had encouraged or supported their child's willingness to get involved. The rest of us regular church members and attendees felt good that we give and pray and that our giving and prayers support such an effective tool.

But what if they hadn't gone? What if each one of the young people in our services last week did not respond affirmatively to the invitation to come to youth? Each one had to say "Yes, I'll go". When they were asked, encouraged or begged to attend. You know that not everyone says yes right? What of the ones who have resisted the invitation to this point? Where are they? What are they missing? The

ones who are here would say and have said “My life is better because I’m a part of our youth group”.

If they hadn’t gone to youth, if they didn’t say yes to the invitation, they would be missing what they have now. And what if they hadn’t been asked?

Why am I telling you this? Because two weeks ago we discussed the Great Commission, Jesus first words of instruction to his disciples after his death and resurrection. Jesus, speaking with divine authority said,

Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age. Matt. 28:19

If you were here two weeks ago, you might remember that we began looking at this passage of scripture by considering the very first word, “GO”. We mentioned how tempting it must have been for the disciples, once Jesus returned, to want to go back to the way things were. To sit around and reflect on the past and be satisfied with that. When Jesus said “Go” it was his way of saying to his disciples “you can’t stay here”. “You can’t stay where you are”.

Jesus says the same thing to us. “GO”. You can’t stay where you are if you are going to experience everything I have in store for you. You can’t stay here if you are going to become the person I created you to be, the person I hope you will become. You can’t stay here if you are going to experience a better life.

When the individuals spoke last Sunday (and there were 15 – 20) some spoke of that invitation. When someone said “you should come!” and someone else said “you should go!” they went. And their lives are better because they did.

So to review, Jesus says, “GO” take the initiative to listen, to follow and perhaps lead. Make disciples – invite other people to believe, to practice as you practice, to come to settings where their faith may grow and develop. Ask, what if I ask them, what if they come, what if I don’t ask them.

We mentioned two weeks ago that baptism is the public affirmation and declaration that you wish to follow Jesus – if you are an adult – and that you promise to raise your children in the church, in an environment where your children can be taught and nurtured in the faith by other believers until they reach

that moment in their own lives where they can publically accept faith in Christ for themselves.

Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you – We grow in our faith by studying the life of Jesus and by following his example. We learn to love God, love our neighbor, forgive those who sin against us, turn the other cheek, and to pray for our enemies. The more Christ- like we become, and the more we encourage others to be like Jesus, the closer we get to becoming what God hopes for us; the more we are transformed and the more we can transform the world around us.

Two weeks ago I suggested a brilliant idea that someone create a personal GPS, a Jesus-in-my-pocket kind of device that would help us make right decisions and enable us to avoid wrong ones.

I suggested that it could be that we already have such a Jesus-in-your pocket device in our lives. It's called the Holy Spirit. Jesus informed us that after he left he would send another to be a counselor, a guide, to us.

- And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth. John 14:16-17
- But the counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. John 14:26
- When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, he will testify about me. John 15:26

Next Sunday is Pentecost. Pentecost is the day we recognize as the time when the Holy Spirit appeared and descended upon the disciples.

Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where the disciples were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit...  
Acts 2:2-4a

Pastor Dennis will be preaching next Sunday so I don't want to steal his thunder. I do want to encourage you to come and hear his message about this incredible gift from God which is, yet another gift of God. Don't miss next Sunday.

At the end of the Great Commission, after Jesus tells us to go, make, baptize, and teach to obey, Jesus ends with these words,

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

Jesus says he is with us always, forever. This is one of my favorite passages of scripture and it is one of my favorite concepts for us to understand and embrace.

I love this word, always. Jesus is with us always. God was with his chosen people always. The Holy Spirit will be with us always. There is some presence, some form of God/Son/Holy Spirit with us always.

Stop for a moment and think about the word always. Think about what it means to you. It's a good word, although sometimes it can be used in a negative context as in "you are always late for dinner". "You always leave your clothes lying around your bedroom".

Always means on every occasion; at every time. Jesus is with us on every occasion, at every time. Don't you just love that?

You've just given birth to your first child. No one could totally prepare you for what it was like. It was hard and it was awesome and Jesus was there.

You are suddenly faced with an unexpected situation. Your job is changing or its ending. You received an unexpected bill from the Internal Revenue Service. Someone you love is sick. You have surgery. Jesus is there.

Someone very close to you has died. Whether it was expected or a total surprise, there's no way to fully prepare for the news once it comes. Jesus is by your side, always.

Always means ceaselessly, continuously, forever. All along the way. Always means more than in that one instance. It means over the long haul.

Some say giving birth is the easy part. They must be men. But being a Mom and a Dad gets harder. They have this new son or daughter all the time, morning, noon, and night and sometimes the baby is most awake at night. Babies sometimes don't sleep. Babies sometimes act sick. Jesus is by your side always, over the long haul, even when your spouse goes back to bed.

Sometimes a person close to you, perhaps that person closest to you becomes ill and the illness does not pass quickly. They are sicker, longer. You knew deep down in your heart that this was a possibility when you agreed to “for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish. But you always hoped, even prayed it would never happen. But it has. And you are there, loving, caring; never giving up. And Jesus is with you ceaselessly, continuously, even when, especially when it gets the hardest.

Last Sunday I listened to three outstanding messages from our youth. Do yourself a favor. Watch all 3 on line or come to our outdoor service when they share their message again.

At 10:00 AM Jonathan Clive shared his faith journey. He gave credit to our youth program. He also gave credit to his mother. Jonathan’s story was so moving that you might have missed his mention of her. She is the one who suggested he come to youth group. She is the one who watched out for him and cared for him as he attempted to find his way. She is the one who never gave up on him, hoped and prayed for him, continuously rooted for him. Jonathan’s Mom was always there for him and I’ll bet if you ask her, she will tell you that Jesus has always been by her side.

Jesus says to us; surely I am with you always, to the end of time. Jesus is there on every occasion, at every time, ceaselessly, continuously, forever, all along the way, in good times and bad, whether we know it or not. Thanks be to God.

But now this is what the Lord says:

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned, the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, Your Savior.

Is: 43:2-3a