

ALWAYS---A GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING!

TEXT: MATTHEW 28: 16-20

Trinity Avenue Presbyterian Church, Durham, NC

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Rev. Kent Clise

PRAYER:

Loving and Triune God, we realize that a key element in knowing that your son is "always" there is found in our attitudes and in our hearts. As with a poignant struggle for friendship; we are missing your saving and loving presence. We know of your love, what we seek is to be in touch with your love. This we pray through Jesus Christ, our lord. Amen.

INTRODUCTION:

I.

Erma Bombeck used to describe guilt as 'the gift that keeps on giving'. Erma was especially fond of describing the guilt a mother can give to her children as a guilt which will stalk her children until the end of time. Today we learn Jesus will be with us always until the end of time - and this is a gift which keeps on giving.

Today, we are invited to accept this great promise from Jesus as a promise of a gift which keeps on giving. Jesus concludes his great commissioning by promising; "Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

What this promise means is

Jesus Christ is first a figure on a page -
Then a light against which life is silhouetted,
Then a face, a presence. Then, at last, a
Companion for the daily road. *Always*.

Always--a gift that keeps on giving.

II.

Jesus takes a little word and packs a great promise into it. Jesus says, "Lo, I am with you *always*." This promise is about how long and how completely we can count on Jesus to be with us. The promise *is not* for a *short* time, for *some* time or

even a *long* time--rather for *always*.

"Always" is a simple word. In our text it is an easy word to overlook. "Always" holds little mystery or challenge. Let the word do a free fall through your mind! It is a light and airy word in our text. For in Matthew's sequence of Jesus' Great Commission we have words like "authority", "baptize", and "commanded". Those are the heavy duty words possessing mystery and challenge. Linguistically, "always" almost seems vanilla.

III.

However, because Jesus uttered this word; it takes on significance. Jesus frequently took common things and common people and gave them great new meaning and power. Jesus took bread, water and fish, common items for food and made sacraments of these items. Repeatedly Jesus took people who lives had been discarded and gave them new life.

What makes this particular promise so compelling is that life changes. Many of us believe that the world has moved beyond the first century when Jesus first uttered this great promise. However, I will wager that while we may not be in bondage to first-century superstitions, we have managed to create an ample supply of our own. For instance, if we believe that we are in any way trapped, or that life is over at middle age or at any other age, or if we believe we have been dealt a bad hand, or that we cannot get out of the rut we are presently in, then we are in bondage to a superstition.

This great promise reveals that God is in charge of the world. Nothing else is in charge. So if we trust this great promise, and keep it, then we will never be trapped. Our health--emotional, spiritual and physical depends upon our ability to adapt to the reality of change. Thus "always" is a word that is unique when applied to our life.

IV.

"Always" has to do with Jesus Christ! Jesus is always in our life. Jesus is with us always. By being with us always Jesus brings God to us. Jesus makes it possible for my life to connect to God. Jesus makes it possible for my spirit to connect to God's Spirit. Jesus is savior--*always*.

BODY:

When Jesus uses the word "always" in this text it carries two meanings.

I. Always means all the time:

Jesus promises a Holy and Divine presence based upon the power of the one who is from and who is eternity. Jesus spans time. Jesus is in time and beyond time. Jesus is there in success and in failure. Jesus is there at birth and at death. Jesus is there during childhood, adulthood and retirement.

This promise covers the long span of variously tinted days. However many days our life will span, however different each day's complexion may be, days of summer, days of winter, days of sunshine and days of storm, days of buoyant youth and days of stagnant stereotyped mature years, days of apparent failure and days of apparent prosperity, Jesus is with us in them all.

The days may change, but, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever.

Note the unlimited extent of this great promise. 'Even unto the close of the age-the end of time. We are tempted to think that long ago the earth was fuller of God than it is today, and that way forward into the future it will again be fuller, but that this moment in which we live is comparatively empty. The heavens touch the earth on the horizon in front and behind, and they are remotest above us just where we stand. But no past day or future day has more of Jesus Christ in it than does this day. A primary condition of Jesus ascending into heaven to sit at the right of the Heavenly Father, is that he will surely come again. Jesus therefore, departs for a season that we might receive Him in due season forever.

II. Always means Jesus will not let us down:

This promise opens with an "*I am*". The tone is one of assertion and certitude! I recall a story from several years back of a family which struggled with an adopted son. After several serious miscues and errors in judgment the boy intentionally vandalized and damaged the family home. The father owned an A.C. Cobra Bristol, one of only twelve Bristol's in the United States. The Bristol was a British-made auto. The entire family was distraught over what to do. Unsure of what to do,

the father decided that his son needed to be reassured of his place. The father went to the boy. What the father did achieved spectacular results and marked the beginning of new life for this lad.

The father grabbed his son by the collar and put his nose on the boy's nose and said; "listen, I am your father because I want to be your father; we are family because we want to be family, and you are stuck with me forever. I am your father always. You will never be able to be rid of me. So why not shape up and make it easy on yourself."

Jesus Christ accepts us steadfastly. This phrase is the speech of one who stands above time and all of the succession of events which consume time.

Isaac Watts understood in his great hymn of the church:
 "A Thousand ages in thy sight are like an evening gone;
 Short as the watch that ends the night before the rising sun.

This "I am" covers all the varieties of *was, is, and is to be*.

Please mark down that this great promise comes after a command and is contingent, for all its blessedness and power upon our obedience to a prescribed duty. This duty is to make disciples of all nations, and the discharge of this duty is so closely connected with the realization of the promise that a person with a missionary-like zeal is the one who shall know of Christ's presence.

CONCLUSION:

Obedience to all the King's commands is required as we stand before Him, and expect to enjoy His smile.

In the immortal words of Robert E. Lee,

"Do your duty in all things. You cannot do more. You should never wish to do less."

As we seek to be near to Jesus Christ and to feel him with us, it is in the mind, in the thoughts, in the heart, and in the doing.

As a person loves the Lord, that person will keep every word which proceeds out of the mouth of God. Each will come to God and make his abode with God.