

Well, this Sunday has come way too quickly. Either way, here we are. This will probably be my last Sunday in this pulpit. Of course, if there is one thing that I have learned on my journey is never say never, and never second guess God. But the odds are that will be the case.

You know, as I was considering this last message that I was going to give here at Redeemer, the words that kept coming to my mind and heart were, “Well done!” And then I would think for a moment and I would push them away. I mean, although that is what I hope will be God’s words for me when it comes my time to leave this earth, this morning they sound sort of self-serving or self-aggrandizing, like I was trying to do some kind of a victory lap. The message should be about God and following His lead. It should be about listening and being faithful. It should be about discipleship and mission for the future. It should be all of that with a reference or two thrown in about Jesus being the way and the Great Commission being the charge.

But I couldn’t shake it. That message kept surfacing and lingering in my mind. “Well done.” And then it became clear. That is the message for this morning. I think that is what God wants us to hear this morning. So, I invite you listen and hear God’s message... for you. Well done! Well done, good and faithful servants!

We have been on mission together for almost six years and Christ has been alive and well in this place. We have been through many ups and a few downs. We have endured a fire in the sanctuary and a couple of break-ins. We had to replace our roof and the HVAC system. We retired an old crippled organ and, through an almost two-year process, we have a new one with great sound and expanded capabilities. And God says, “Well done, good and faithful servants.”

Together we created an ecumenical association called ARCUM and through that seven churches from five denominations have worshipped together, jointly processed on Palm Sunday through our community each year, and served those in need together in our little part of Greenville. Through ARCUM came the inspiration, which Our Lady of the Rosary acted upon, to create a resource center called Mother Theresa House for those in need. As envisioned, it is a place that helps with food, housing, and basic medical needs, either directly or by getting them connected to other agencies that can stand with them in their time of need. And we launched the pumpkin patch on our front lawn, selling pumpkins and handing out free books to the children that came. Through that annual event we have increased our outreach to places like Samaritan House, Pleasant Valley Connection, and Mother Theresa House in support of their ministries. Well done, good and faithful servants.

Through Rebuild Upstate, members of our EYC, along with others from Redeemer, have repaired homes and built handicap ramps, and through Summer of Service, which we launch last year, we have brought an increasing awareness of the plight of the homeless, the struggle of single mothers battling drug abuse, and the challenge of those without enough food. We have planted gardens of pinwheels, we have walked for cancer research, and we have enabled one of our own to bring aid in a faraway place to people displaced by war in the Ukraine, while at the same time sending food and aid out our own front door on a daily basis. Well, done Redeemer!

We have expanded and deepened our communication through a new website, an ongoing weekly e-blast, and better use of social media. We have an energetic and effective pastoral care team, a new and engaged outreach committee, and have built a team of paid staff that is not only great at their particular ministries, but have committed to support each other in those ministries into the future. And all of this has been made possible by your faithfulness and willingness to provide the resources necessary to fund Gods mission here. And God's message this morning is, "Well done!"

But in the midst of all this, there are some other words that ring true. They come from the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus is getting ready to return to his Father, a journey that we commemorate on this Ascension Day, and he says to all his followers, "Go therefore 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 observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

That Great Commission that Jesus gave us is filled with great and powerful words. It is about making disciples for the world. It is about teaching all people. Teaching them through our witness, and through our words, and through our lives and example. It sets standards, Godly standards that he commanded them to follow for their own sake and happiness, standards that he taught them, and teaches us, so that others could find the same happiness. It encourages us to baptize others into God's church and mission, sealing them in the name of the triune God.

But there is another word, a small word, a word that kicks off Christ's commission to us all. It is a word that can be exciting, filled with purpose, and promise, and mission. And, at the same time, it is a word that can be intimidating, a word that can bring fear and an uncomfortable hesitancy of an unknown future. But, whether it is exciting and full of potential or challenging and laced with a feeling of loss, it is often a necessary word for faithful people on God's mission.

The word that begins each journey to share God's love with others is "Go." It is a word at the heart of God's plan for each of us and for all of us, whether is it to a Mexican orphanage, or war-torn Ukraine, or hurricane battered Haiti, or out our front doors to division rattled US ...or even to Montana. It involves all of us because for every person who takes on the challenge of going, there are many others who do the hard work of sending. And I think especially in this, God's message for the Church of the Redeemer is, "Well done, good and faithful servants."

When Jane and I climb into our car on Wednesday and start to make our way to the Cathedral in Montana, Redeemer goes with us. Our time here has been life giving and invaluable to God's broader mission, just as it should be. All the accomplishments that we together brought forth here will impact life at St. Peter's there. All the challenges that we successfully navigated here will provide future pathways for the particular challenges that might arise there. God has interwoven his church by interweaving his people to bring his message of love and salvation to all people in all places. That is how it works. Going and sending...sending and going...preparing and equipping for the sake of the mission that we are called to and have accepted through our baptism.

So, my message this morning is thank you. Thank you for receiving Jane and me so wonderfully into your journey. Thank you for allowing us to share our journeys with you. Thank you for giving us a glimpse of a very special place which we will now take with us, as we share our ongoing journey with our brothers and sisters in Christ at St. Peter's.

This Sunday has come way too soon, but I am excited to discover what God will do with our time together. I am excited at what God is planning for Redeemer's ongoing journey, and I am excited to see how God will use our time together in order to bring yet to be discovered blessings to the wonderful people in Montana.

So, let us go forth rejoicing! Let us go forth rejoicing because we are part of the most important mission ever launched in all of human history. Let us go forth rejoicing because God has given us the privilege of being his hands and feet in this world. Let us go forth rejoicing because just around the next corner God has blessings ready that we have not yet even imagined. Let us go forth rejoicing in the name of the Risen Christ! Alleluia!

Amen!