

Sent WEEK THREE May 24, 2020 Ascension

My all time favorite Ascension story is one that I heard after I was ordained a priest.

The story takes place in heaven, right after Jesus arrives back in heaven. And the first person he met was the Angel Gabriel.

Gabriel sees the holes in Jesus's hands & feet from the crucifixion - the wound in his side - and asks him,

"Lord, do the people on earth know how much you love them?"

Jesus answers, *"Well Gabriel, not everybody....not yet.*

Right now, only Peter, James & John and the other disciples know.

But they will tell people who will tell others and eventually everyone on earth will know how much I love them."

Now, Gabriel was a little skeptical about this plan.

After all, he'd been watching Jesus's mission from heaven.

He witnessed Peter's denial.

He'd seen how confused James and John could get.

He watched Thomas doubt.

So he asked Jesus,

"Lord, what happens if Peter denies you again?

What happens if James gets confused or Thomas has more doubts?

What's your back-up plan, what's PLAN B?"

Jesus looked Gabriel in the eye and simply said:

"I have no other plan, I'm counting on them."

I love this story for so many reasons.

First, because I really get Gabriel's skepticism - I can relate.

Let's be honest, the Apostles did not have a great track record up to this point.

- Peter did deny Jesus three times.

- Thomas doubted.

- James and John struggled with some of Jesus's most basic teachings.

Just two Sundays ago we heard about when Jesus said to Philip:

"After I've been with you all this time and still you do not know me?"

SCREEN: they worshiped, but they doubted

This line from today's Gospel pretty much sums up the faith of the Apostles at this point:

they worshiped, but they doubted.

They worshiped, but they doubted.

So, it was pretty risky for Jesus to leave his mission in the hands of disciples who were doubtful, uncertain and unreliable.

What did it take for Jesus to do this?

The answer is, it took trust.

Think of it, at his Ascension, Jesus was saying,

"I've spent three years establishing my Kingdom.

I gave my life for this mission.

Now I'm handing it on to you and trusting that you will do a good job, and that it won't all fall apart."

Trust. But not just any kind of trust,

I'm talking deep, intense trust.

Maybe you can relate.

Let me ask,

parents, did you ever go away and leave your home in the hands of your teenager?

Or ever loan your car to a friend?

How about at work - did you ever hand off a pet project to a coworker?

In these situations, you think of everything that could go wrong, don't you?

Especially if the person you're trusting doesn't have

a proven track record for reliability or has let you down before.

This gives you some idea of the trust Jesus placed in his disciples.

Like I said, for some people, it's impossible. *But not for God.*

And what exactly was Jesus relying on them to do?

SCREEN: Go make disciples of all nations. -Matthew 28:19

This was their mission: *go make disciples.*

We refer to this as, 'The Great Commission'.

The great commission.

But what is a disciple?

It's a term I use in almost every homily.

But do you understand what the word means?

Well, a disciple is a student, a follower,

someone who studies under a teacher - learns from the master -

then passes on what they learned to others.

But for those who learned from Jesus,

discipleship goes much deeper - as deep as you can get.

Jesus's disciples gave their lives for him.

And the reason why they're so devoted to Jesus is because

they knew he loved them totally, unconditionally and eternally.

This is what every disciple is called to do.

The gift of Jesus's love is so powerful that disciples offer their lives to him in return -

they love *him* totally, unconditionally and eternally.

And the greatest way to demonstrate their love is by making more disciples

- by telling others about Jesus and leading them to his Kingdom.

That's Jesus's Plan A: they tell others who then tell others and eventually

everyone knows how much God loves them.

Go make disciples of all nations.

This one verse sums up why the Church exists.

And it's the commission you and I received on the day we were baptized.

But it wasn't magic, it wasn't automatic.

The invitation to be a disciple requires a personal response.

You have to choose to follow Christ.

You must proclaim,

"Because I know Jesus loves me, I'll dedicate my life to him.

I will be his disciple and I will go make disciples."

SCREEN: Discipleship is a relationship

So, what is discipleship?

It's a relationship - pure and simple - between you and Jesus.

But it must be the most important relationship in your life.

Anything less is not discipleship it's just a hobby, an interest, a sideline.

Discipleship is all or nothing.

Jesus wants this for everyone.

Not just for priests like me, or a chosen few, but for everyone.

That's everyone in our parish,

and all of you worshipping with us online,

and every single person we encounter throughout the week.

Getting back to the story I started with,

Jesus told Gabriel that he did not have a backup plan - no Plan B.

That was a big risk, but deep down, I think it was a carefully calculated one.

And that's because Jesus knew the potential of every single one of his Apostles.

He saw greatness in them that they didn't see or knew existed in themselves.

And that risky bet paid off.

So, how'd they do?

After receiving the Great Commission,

the Apostles went forth and preached everywhere...

everywhere!

And if before they were weak, they now found strength.

If before they were unreliable, now they were dedicated.

No more doubts, no more fear, no uncertainty.

They were confident, courageous and committed.

And the reason you and I are together now is because of

Jesus's trust in his disciples, and because his first disciples

were so passionate about their mission.

In a typical feel-good story, this would seem like the place to end -

to announce, "*they lived happily ever after.*"

But we know it was not the end, it was just the beginning.

And as we look around our world - especially now -

we know just how much work remains to be done.

So many people still need to hear the Good News or be reminded of it.

So many people need healing, need hope, and are hungry for answers.

And this is where you and I come in.

Like those first followers, you and I are sent.

Sent to bring God's message of hope and eternal life to those who need it.

And like the Apostles at the Ascension, we can feel doubtful and uncertain about what to do and even wonder if we are up to the task.

Like them, perhaps you worship, but you have some doubts.

I want you to know that you are more than up to your mission.

God sees potential and possibility in you that you don't even see in yourself.

He has given you his Holy Spirit to lead and guide you.

SCREEN: I am with you always! -Jesus

And the promise Jesus made to his followers at the Ascension is a promise he has made to you: I am with you *always*.

So have no fear, because Jesus is with you.

Have no doubt, because the Holy Spirit will lead and guide you.

Have the same trust in yourself that Jesus has in you.

In this pandemic, the opportunities for mission and service being given to the followers of Jesus are unlike any you and I have ever experienced.

People are hurting, some are feeling hopeless.

But so many are hungry for a message of hope and salvation.

And we have that message.

I think the scary part in being sent to tell others about Jesus is that we think we have to go out and find non-believers, or people who've stopped believing.

But I think the mission right now is to share a message of hope with those who are lukewarm about religion or are struggling with their faith.

Last week I talked about the circle of influence you and I have.

That includes our family and friends, our neighbors and co-workers, classmates and parishioners.

That's the best place to begin.

And here's how you can lead them to Jesus.

SCREEN: be joyful, be hopeful, be helpful

First, let them see your faith by being joyful, hopeful and helpful.

Avoid the opposite of those things:

don't be grumpy, discouraging or hurtful.

Hasn't God given us the most upbeat and life-changing message in the history of the world?

The Son of God conquered sin and death forever!

And all who believe in him will live with him eternally in heaven.

If that's not a message of hope, I don't know what is.

If that isn't something powerful, nothing is.

And you and I are sent to share this message.

What an honor and a privilege we've been given.

So, first is your attitude...radiate joy and hope to someone who is lukewarm or struggling.

Then second, point them in the right direction.

And one of the best ways you can do that right now is by issuing an invitation.

I know that some of you are worshipping with us today because someone told you about our online Mass.

Someone who loves and cares for you extended an invitation and you responded.

You can do the same thing for someone else.

If you are worshipping through our website you'll see the Invite link in the chat feature.

Why not invite someone right now - just click on the link.

Then after Mass or the next day, reach out and ask them what they thought.

SCREEN: spxbowie.org/invite

Our website has other ways you can invite someone.

We've discovered that sometimes, all it takes is an invitation.

With everything going on right now,

more people than ever are open and ready.

There are people God wants you to touch, that no one else can.

God has uniquely placed each of us to do his work.

Today, this Ascension, may each of us hear these words of Jesus:

I have no other plan. I am counting on you.

Amen. +