



Roanoke, Virginia

June 4, 2023

## ***“Unqualified Teaching”***

*Matthew 28:16-20*

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*16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 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, 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’*

There have been many moments since Camden was born when Valerie and I look at each other with a look, that is followed with one of us saying something to the effect of, “Who put us in charge?” Like seriously, we leave the hospital with a new human being that is solely our responsibility. We are responsible for keeping him fed and clean, and then teaching this little human how to eat, walk, talk, and eventually live as an autonomous and contributing human being. Who put us in charge!

We read some books. We followed Instagram accounts on parenting. We talked with family and friends who recently became parents.

But nothing prepares you for that moment when there is a diaper explosion, when your baby cries and cries and you don’t know why.



Nothing can prepare you for the exhaustion of midnight feedings, and 2 AM feedings, and then 4 AM feedings, then spits up every drop of the 1.5 oz that you patiently worked to maneuver into his belly for the past 40 minutes.

Nothing can prepare you for the moment when they begin to scoot out of their baby rocker and you find him hanging off the side, ready to land on the not-so-soft hardwood floors of your living room.

Nothing prepares you for the constant supervision that is needed when they start to put everything in their mouth (And I mean everything!), wondering what snack he just ate that made his mouth turn purple and then you see an open box of sidewalk chalk in the corner of the room.

### **Who put us in charge!**

There will always be moments throughout life when we are put in charge, moments when we are given the opportunity, no matter how big or small, to teach and lead—even when we feel unprepared and unqualified.

In what is known as the Great Commission, Jesus puts the disciples in charge, and gives them one final set of instructions: Go. Make. Baptize. Teach.

Earlier in his ministry, Jesus sent out the 12 and gave them the authority to cast out demons and unclean spirits, heal the sick, and proclaim the good news that the kingdom of heaven has come near. Jesus had been doing this alongside the disciples, or I should say, the disciples had been doing this alongside Jesus. But Jesus was the only teacher. Teaching was a distinguishing mark of his ministry.

Jesus was the teacher; the disciples were not.

Now, with this final commissioning, the disciples are now put in charge of teaching. The disciples, really *all* his followers, are now called to continue Jesus' ministry of teaching. They are to do what Jesus had been doing and now with more far-reaching affect—sending them out to *all nations*.

Looking into this passage, Terri Ott imagines the disciples in this moment looking at each other, much like Valerie and I looked at each, and saying, “Who me?” because, as she says, “to accept the role of teacher assumes we have some sort of expertise, some wisdom to share. But no one feels like an expert in the Christian faith (or at least they shouldn't).”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Terri McDowell Ott, “Looking Into the Lectionary: Trinity Sunday – June 4, 2023: Year A, Matthew 28:16-20,” published in *The Presbyterian Outlook* May 22, 2023; Updated May 24, 2023. <https://pres-outlook.org/2023/05/trinity-sunday-june-4-2023/>



Ott then points to Mark Devries and Trey Wince, who co-wrote about preparing young adults for leadership in the church in an Outlook article titled “Can I Have the Keys?”<sup>2</sup> Their article helps articulate the reluctance to give young people, the next generation, real responsibility, and opportunities to learn by trying, and sometimes failing, in the church, a place that is dedicated to fostering their potential.

Devries and Wince speak to the point that investing in the leadership of the next generation and passing on leadership to the next generation before they are actually ready is biblical. Moses, Gideon, Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, even Amos and Jonah all were called and commissioned to a task they were not yet ready for, a big task they felt they were unqualified for. And then in the gospels, the disciples were called and commissioned to big tasks, expected to preach and cast out demons. They didn’t even go to seminary!

Devries and Wince go on to say, “the disciples preached that ‘all should repent,’ an echo of Jesus’ first sermon. Now ‘repent,’ of course, literally means ‘to change the mind.’ Is anyone in a better position to invite change than the young who just don’t know any better?”

When I was the Assistant Camp Director for YMCA Camp Cherokee, I would have this elevator speech on why camping is important. It went like this: kids no longer are afforded many opportunities to try new things, experience something different, and given permission to fail. Residential summer camp provides such opportunities and experiences, to try new things and sometimes fail, all the while having the support and guidance and love of someone that is not their parent or schoolteacher. Wouldn’t you want your child to develop the courage and resilience (and even the vulnerability) to step into uncomfortable but safe situations knowing that they have the support of a young role model? If so, then camp just might be the place for them.

As the Assistant Camp Director, I was in charge of all summer programming and in charge of training our summer staff. It was expected that by the time summer camp began, our staff would be able to do 3 things: keep our campers safe, give them fun and memorable moments, and teach them life lessons. That is a big task for high schoolers. But I loved Staff Trainings because in that moment I lived into the calling to teach.

But to be honest, this was not the case as the summer went along. As the weeks came and went, I became too focused on getting tasks done, on doing it the right way (which most of the time was my way) and doing it fast. It takes time to teach people to do something, to demonstrate

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Devries and Trey Wince, “A generational approach to ministry innovation: ‘Can I have the keys?’” published in *The Presbyterian Outlook* on May 16, 2023. <https://pres-outlook.org/2023/05/a-generational-approach-to-ministry-innovation-can-i-have-the-keys/>



how to do it, and to coach through situations, no matter how simple or complex. So, throughout the summer, I just handled things myself, most of the time frustrated that no one knew how to do it or that it even needed to be done.

This is the same in our churches. It may be our own hesitancy to teach that has hindered the next generation of leaders from gaining experience and being given opportunities to lead. Perhaps because it takes time. But maybe it is because taking the role of teacher is a humbling and vulnerable position. It exposes what we don't know, the questions we can't answer, the skills we don't yet have. But discipleship is rarely a call to stay in our comfort zone.

If you ask teachers, especially teachers in the church, what is one thing they enjoy about teaching, you will most likely get this answer: I love to teach because of how much I learn along the way.

Much like the disciples and the early church, as we teach, we gain a better understanding of what we believe, we become more comfortable in sharing our beliefs, and through practice we develop the ability to ask different and deeper questions, to look beyond the surface for meaning and connection.

### **And teaching goes beyond the classroom.**

Jesus charged his disciples—from the first church to today—to Go. Make. Baptize. Teach. Go, leave your comfort zone; Make, that is to be relationship with others; Baptize, call others into the family of God; and Teach, humble yourselves in the way of Christ and relinquish control, so that others may come to better understand the good news of the gospel!

We are all unqualified. But in Jesus' call and commission to the church, there is also a promise. And the promise is that we are not alone, the Holy Trio of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, goes with us.

It is a promise that the God of Creation, the Maker of heaven and earth, the part of God who is larger and more powerful than all things and beyond all logic and reason is with you.

### **It is a promise...**

that the God of Redemption, the part of God who is known in human form, who let go of control and took on our frailty to feel as we feel, who entered into our human condition of pain and suffering to set us free from such pain and suffering, the God who is Immanuel (God with us) is always with you.

### **It is a promise...**

that the God of Sustaining Power, the part of God who swirled over the waters at creation and is still swirling within us, among us, and around us today, the part of God who is transformation, lighting hearts on fire just as it did at Pentecost is with you.



### **It is a promise...**

Jesus says, "I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Friends, I stand here today, wondering, Who am I that the Triune God would call me? Just like the disciples, I worship, but sometimes doubt creeps in. And I have learned that that's ok. Because I am reminded from our passage that the disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. You see, with only a word from the women who went to the tomb, the disciples went to the place. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were the first to share the gospel, Christ is Risen. And with those 3 little but powerful words, the disciples went. They believed enough to go to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. They showed up, not knowing exactly what was going on or what to expect. And there they encountered Jesus; there they encountered the Risen Lord.

Beloved, Christ is risen! So, go to the place Jesus is calling you! Wherever that place may be. And there you may too encounter Jesus, the Risen Lord.

Step into the challenge of the call, to the nerve-wracking nature of something new, knowing that it is ok to fail. Because the Triune God, the God who is Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, the God is who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is with you, supporting you and guiding you along way.

May it be so. Amen.

