

Trinity-A May 18, 2008  
Galilee Church, Virginia Beach, VA  
A sermon by the Rev. Dr. James B. Magness

Genesis 1.1 – 2.4a  
Psalm 8  
2 Corinthians 13.11-13  
Matthew 28.16-20

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...."

Five days from today one of America's heroes will be back! No, none of the political candidates are coming to town. No, to my knowledge we won't be seeing any of the American Idol stars. No, the Washington Redskins won't be paying another call on Virginia Beach. In five short days Indiana Jones will whip-crack back onto the silver screen and into our imaginations with Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull. This will be Harrison Ford's fourth time to be on the screen as Indiana Jones. It's been nineteen years since the first movie of the series appeared.

In every single one of these movies the erudite academic archeologist Indiana Jones has been in search of objects of curiosity that can bestow power up on the one who is in possession of the object. In the new movie Indiana reportedly is in search of the crystal skulls that bestow such great power upon the owner.<sup>1</sup>

The quest of Indiana Jones and his adversaries is certainly nothing new. Ever since our ancestors appeared upon the face of this earth we've been engaged in the quest for power.

People have always wanted power over nature. How do we protect ourselves from natural disasters and storms? Obviously, as evidenced by recent cyclones and earthquakes, the quest for such a power continues on even to this day.

People have also yearned for power to influence their fellow man. Whether the object of control is a popular or local election, or the authority to name a park after a beloved member of the community member, we've sought after power. In a host of religious groups phenomenal power struggles have arisen over the right and ability to control the destiny of a congregation. Most of you could tell stories about religious power struggles.

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<sup>1</sup> Natalie Finn, *Hunt for the Crystal Skull Begins Early*, May 12, 2008:  
[http://www.eonline.com/uberblog/b136424\\_hunt\\_crystal\\_skull\\_begins\\_early.html](http://www.eonline.com/uberblog/b136424_hunt_crystal_skull_begins_early.html)

For the followers of Jesus Christ, there is a response to all of these quests. The Christ-followers have been given great power and authority. They've been given a power and authority that can and will never be bestowed by the likes of a crystal skull or an election. In the church of Jesus Christ we have had power and authority bestowed upon us to go into the entire world to make disciples of our Lord Christ.

In the epistle lesson from the Apostle Paul's second letter to the Christ-followers at Corinth, Paul is in the process of writing a conclusion to his final letter to them. Though Paul's closing in this letter contains some of the most touching sentiment you will ever read in the bible, in the background Paul understands that the Corinthian people have been in a monumental struggle with one another to determine who will win the contest for power. Earlier in this same chapter Paul wrote:

Examine yourselves, to see whether you are holding to your faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you fail to meet the test!<sup>2</sup>

Do you dislike being subjected to tests as much as I do? Whether it is a driver's test or a school exam, I have never been very fond of tests.

Perhaps you are one of those who do well on tests and like to take them. ON the other hand, I know some people – of more than reasonable intelligence – who absolutely freeze every time they have to take a test.

In the scripture I just read the Apostle Paul is talking about another type of test. This test is to determine whether or not the disciples have the right faith. For Paul faith and believing has two parts: right believing and right acting or doing. When you read what Paul says in his letter to the young church at the city of Corinth, you see that not everyone is passing the test. But this failing didn't start with the people of the early church to which Paul wrote in his letters. It began with Jesus' disciples.

Have you noticed how some phrases just roll off your tongue so easily that you don't have to think about it? When I say the "seven seas" or the "four winds" those phrases just flow from my mouth with hardly a second thought about what I am saying. When I say "twelve disciples" those words come every bit as easily. However, in our Gospel lesson today there are eleven disciples and not twelve. The pattern is broken. The loss of the one disciple reminds us of Judas' failure. Judas turned on Jesus and failed the test of faith. Judas truly failed Jesus and the disciples.

Judas' behavior bears out the fact that Christ's disciples were far from perfect men. Faithfulness to Christ was no easier in those days than today. Jesus was dealing with real people who really failed. All had not passed the test.

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<sup>2</sup> Second Corinthians 13.5, *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*

We've come through several decades during which there have been very public failures by people of faith in leadership positions in the church. In the 70s and 80s it was the television evangelists who failed – often in a very public way. More often than not their failures had to do with either sex, or money, or both. I have often reflected upon their failures have been very aware that when one of them failed, somehow it all reflected poorly upon all of us – upon all Christians. At such times I find that we have the tendency to be extremely critical of these mortals and their failures.

Since then we have had to deal with the abuse scandal that has been a blight upon the Roman Catholic Church. That too has had its own temptations. There have been times when I have wanted to say that just because I wear a white clerical collar, I'm not one of them. Once again it would have been easy to be very critical of those leaders and their failures.

Yet in truth I know that I have my own long list of failures. The difference is that mine have not been so public. I suppose we could take the attitude that we need not be so hard on folks. People will be people. Perhaps we should lower the bar of expectations. Well, what do you think – should we?

Perhaps we should expect less of people. At least we'll decrease our disappointment.

Can you see Jesus doing that – lowering the bar and saying something like, "You disciples have your share of doubt. After all, these days there are only eleven of you. From now on I won't expect you to keep all of the commandments – six or seven out of ten will do, and don't even be concerned about the new ones!"

HARDLY! His Burden Might Be Light – but it has never ceased to exist.

When I honestly look at and think on the real and unfiltered or unsanitized situation of the disciples I realize something about their challenge of faith. The disciples' challenge is the realistic background against which Jesus speaks to them.

And just when their minds wander over toward their problems –their dwindling numbers and increasing spiritual doubt – Jesus hits them with a broadside of responsibility. Jesus astounds them by telling them to make disciples of all nations.

But how will they ever fulfill this great responsibility? Where and how will they get the ability to do this?

The authority and power will come from God. Jesus gives them his promise and in so doing, the rag-tag disciples who have nothing now become the first vestiges of the church that has everything!

The same Lord who created their world also sends the disciples forth and out. The creator-Lord has become the redeemer-Lord; redeeming the creation that had become

disobedient. The world will be redeemed through baptism in the name of the Trinitarian God: Father/Son/Holy Spirit.

In order to do all of this the redeemer-Lord has given the disciples three things – three gifts:

First, Jesus assured them of his power. This is a share of the same power that had conquered death. From that point on they were all servants of a Master whose power and authority upon earth was beyond question.

Next Jesus gave them a commission. Jesus sent them to go out and make disciples of the entire world. The disciples were sent to those who have failed as well as to those whose faith is weaker than their doubt. The commission is to bring all people to Him.

Lastly, Jesus promised the disciples a presence. Eleven humble Galileans were being sent forth with the task of bringing the entire world to Jesus. Though they must have experienced the heaviness of the commission as they heard Jesus describe and lay out this monumental task, Jesus knew their needs even better than the disciples knew themselves. No sooner was the command given than was the promise made. Jesus eternally will be present with his disciples, then and now, to give empowerment, enablement and to comfort them.

That was then and today is now. We have the same commission today that the disciples had two thousand years ago. We struggle with many of the same issues the disciples struggled with in their day such as our loss of numbers and people for whom doubt is stronger than faith.

As you look at this congregation, why are eleven here when once there were twelve?

What does it mean to be sent forth today co-missioned in Jesus' power with the promise of His presence?

I think, truly think, that the Apostle Paul had this in mind when he wrote to his beloved friends in Corinth. Listen once more to his words to them:

Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.<sup>3</sup>

AMEN.

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<sup>3</sup> Second Corinthians 13.11-13, Ibid.