

The Reverend Jon Hauerwas – November 8, 2020 – Fulfilling God’s Plan
Ephesians 2:4-10 and Matthew 28:16-20

Some moments are steeped in such significance that they become ingrained in our collective consciousness. We remember with joy the formal declarations marking the end of lengthy wars, and the pride that fills our being when witnessing a moonwalk. Yet, together, we have also mourned the assassinations of presidents and cultural icons, and have shared in the deep sadness following the terrorist attacks of September the 11th.

And now, in the year 2020, we have faced a series of challenges that have forever altered our understanding of the world in which we live. Raging wildfires on the west coast have destroyed property and livelihoods, while filling the air with noxious fumes. A record number of named storms have churned in the waters of the Atlantic Ocean, making landfall in neighboring nations and taking aim at our fellow citizens in the Gulf.

Here in Summit County, we are now in the throes of a global pandemic, as our nation struggles to contain a virus which shows no signs of retreating, and no interest in the preservation of human life. Yes. If we were searching for relief, it would not come easily. For 2020 is also a presidential election year in which the rhetoric has been bitter, and divisive, and relentless. Taking each of these moments

together, we recognize that the events of this year have fueled our anxiety, and called us to question where we go from here.

In the church, the present circumstances have propelled us to consider the cost of doing business as usual, and have pressed us to pursue our discipleship in ways that we simply had not imagined by retaining our connections amid social distancing and by leaning into new technologies which serve our purposes as the people of God.

In our second lesson this morning, the resurrected Jesus appears to the eleven remaining apostles, and he provides them with some very specific instructions. They are to “go” and to “make disciples of all nations.” He says this as a reminder that our faith is not an exclusive club, limited by the constructs of ethnicity or nationality. No. Ours is a global movement in which we no longer must travel in order to engage with our brothers and sisters in faith.

Rather, in this new reality, and by utilizing the gift of technology, we can gather anytime and anywhere in the confidence that, wherever we are, God is there with us until the end of the age. That is Jesus’ promise in this passage, bringing full circle the significance of his name, foreshadowed in Advent, as we hail the arrival of Emmanuel, translated “God is with us.”

At this moment, and with God near, we are challenged to reconsider what it means to be the church when it is no longer safe for us to gather in a shared space. And it is in times such as these, when everything appears to be in upheaval, that we can adopt new models that will serve the kingdom of God amid a rapidly changing context.

The Holy Spirit reminds us that our faith is not static. In fact, sometimes we are called upon to let go of something that we hold dear in order for something even more wonderful to emerge. To pause long enough to consider what new things are emerging in our lives. To ask how our discipleship is being tested and challenged even now. For this is the first step in a lifelong journey of discernment.

When I first entered ordained ministry, I never imagined that I would one day be leading worship from my home with no congregation in sight, administering the Sacrament of Holy Communion at a table at which my children create art, speaking into a camera that would allow this moment to be shared by others. But, my entire journey has been filled with surprises from joyful celebrations to crushing disappointments.

And yet, in the midst of it all, I recognize that God is present. In the ordinary elements of bread and juice. In the ordinary water that fills the font of baptism. And in the extraordinary grace that God makes possible for all who long to be made whole. Indeed, we are fulfilling God's purposes even now. All thanks be to God both now and forever. Amen.