

- There is an old Cambodian proverb: If you want to travel fast, travel alone. If you want to travel far, travel with others.

- Jesus proclaimed the Beatitudes we hear in our Gospel in his first great sermon, preached on the shore of the sea of Galilee.
 - Throughout his life, from his birth in the stable in Bethlehem until his death on the cross and his resurrection, Jesus embodied the Beatitudes. All the promises of God's Kingdom were fulfilled in him.
 - In these Beatitudes, Jesus shows us the way to life, the way that He Himself has taken. Jesus **IS** the Way, and offers this Way as the path to true happiness.

- And in offering us the Beatitudes, Jesus asks us to follow Him, to travel with him along the path of love, the path that alone leads to eternal life.
 - It is not an easy journey. We face so many challenges in life: illness, distress, the struggle for justice, persecutions, the difficulty of daily conversion, the effort to remain faithful to our call to holiness, and many others.
 - But if we open the door to Jesus, even just a little, if we allow Him to be part of our lives, if we share our joys and sorrows with Him, then we will experience the peace and joy that only God, who is infinite love, can give.
 - The Beatitudes of Jesus are counter-cultural, even revolutionary. They present a way of life and a model of happiness radically different than what is communicated by the media, the world's prevailing wisdom that glorifies affluence, success at any cost, the arrogance of power and self-affirmation at the expense of others.

- In our Gospel, Jesus challenges us in the Beatitudes to reject the world's so-called wisdom and to take seriously **His** approach to life, challenging (but not forcing us) us to decide which path is right for us, which leads to true joy, asking us to share in and to choose His blessings.
- If we are able to say “yes” to Jesus, our lives will be both meaningful and fruitful, “blessed” as Jesus called those who seek to live the Beatitudes

- What does it mean to be “blessed”?
 - To be blessed means to be happy, truly happy.
 - In an age when we are constantly being enticed by vain and empty illusions of happiness, we risk settling for less and “thinking small” about happiness and the meaning of life.
 - The call of Christ is to think big, to open our hearts!
 - Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati a 20th century young man and activist beatified by Pope Saint John Paul II who called him the “Man of the Eight Beatitudes” said it this way “To live without faith...this is not living. It is scraping by. We should never just scrape by, but really live.”
 - Deep down, in our hearts where God resides, we possess an unquenchable thirst for happiness allowing us to expose and reject these “low cost” offers and approaches which try to tempting us like the ever present sales on Black Friday.
 - God's presence, God's love, in our hearts should burn within our hearts and help us to choose the way of Jesus Christ. It is not easy, but the way of Christ is worth the effort.

- *Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”*
 - These are the very last words of Jesus before He ascends into heaven, His marching orders if you will.
 - These words are also the most basic call each and every disciple receives, and from no less than Christ Himself.
- We're in a time of transition:
 - We see it in our world with war and violence taking new forms in terrorism and human destruction.
 - We see it in our country: a bruising election, new leadership and a new direction for our country, the ongoing problems we face in racism, poverty, issues of life and death and human dignity, of immigration.
 - We see the transition in our Church as Pope Francis challenges us to go beyond our comfort zone and reach out to those on the periphery.
 - We see the transition in our Archdiocese as Archbishop Lori responds both to the call of Pope Francis and ever present challenges by calling us to reflect on how we work together.
 - And we have seen that transition right here in our own community, faced with financial and pastoral challenges along with limited resources (including a VERY limited pastor). We are learning how to respond with new ways of thinking and acting, learning anew to reach out especially to those who are alienated from Christ or His Church.
 - And with transition, comes change, and with change comes uneasiness, anxiety, even stress.

- So, what do we do? We're going back to the basics which, for discipleship, come in the Great Commission: *Go make disciples...* As a community, we're going to take the next four weeks and unpack what a "disciple" is, what it means to "Go," and what it means to "make disciples."
 - We'll unpack who God is and how God uses us, where the community fits and what we can hope for, even and especially in transition.
 - These basics will help us understand who we are, where we're going and how to listen to God to figure it all out.
- When we understand better God's call, even with the anxiety and stress, we can also recognize the opportunity we get in going back to basics, listening anew to God.
 - Jesus invites us to "cast out to the deep!" in our love, hope, and union with Him; Jesus beckons us to joy and hope and the service of others, to a faith that is alive and active in service
 - "You're far greater than you think you are," He encourages us. "You're capable of greatness as disciples and as a community. You've been made for a destiny beyond your imagining."
 - Even the transition is a reminder that it's really astonishingly good news: God so loved the world that He sent His only Son; the Son so loved the world that He established the Church to continue His saving mission.
 - That's where you and I join the adventure in fidelity and hope: we have the sacred responsibility to journey forward and to proclaim the Good News we have come to know.
 - "Oh, no! Lord, not us! Haven't you heard? Haven't you noticed! We're tired and struggling just to keep up. Our faith is sagging and we're just keeping our heads above water.

- And that's precisely why Jesus reminded his earliest disciples and us again today, I am with you ALWAYS, even transition, even when you're struggling, even the end of the age.
- So, we seek in these basics to renew our profound hope in God's care for us, His call, His loving providence, our conviction that, without Him nothing is **possible**, that, with Him, nothing is **impossible**, that He never calls us to a task without providing us the grace to accomplish it.
- Many of you laugh when I drag out what some think of as a tag line for me: God loves us and loves us and loves us and NEVER stops loving us. Well, it's true and I stand behind it, in fact, I've staked my life on it. But I haven't been as good about what that means.
 - Sure it means that we operate from strength, that we believe we are good, created in God's image and likeness, that our sins are forgiven. But I may not have stressed the flip side enough.
 - God does not demand anything from us in return for all that He gives us. But like any parent, God loves when we come back, not merely to say "thanks" but to love Him in return.
- You see, God demands nothing, but appreciates everything. Like any lover, **GOD WANTS OUR HEART**. He want us to know of His love so we can return it and experience the delight He takes in us and then to share all of that with ourselves and others. Love is the most basic of these "basics".
- Back to the Old Cambodian Proverb: So, we may not travel fast because we do not travel alone. But with God and one another, we can't go wrong and we will go far, even to eternal life.
- Now, let's go, make disciples.