

SERMON: "LOOKING BACK, AROUND AND AHEAD"
TEXT: OLD TESTAMENT PSALM 8
NEW TESTAMENT MATTHEW 28:16-20

May 31, 2026 ~ Last Sunday at CHCPC

Dr. Dave Kivett

INTRODUCTION

The lectionary really helped this preacher, did me a favor.

I was wondering and worrying about what I'd say on my last Sunday in this pulpit

There is so much I want to say – primarily "Thank you" and "Thank God."

But I need to do more than reflect, more than sob my way through a sermon

I'm called to preach a sermon, to reflect on God's word

This passage just happens to work out rather nicely for what I feel called to say
as I reflect on our ministry together and on this day we welcome the confirmation class.

They learned a good bit, put that learning to work ... and will continue to do so

This Great Commission, Jesus' last words to his disciples fits both journeys well
as we all - confirmand, congregation and preacher look back, around and ahead.

Lots of sermons in this passage. I want to focus on two things worth preaching

One about teaching. And another about Jesus being on the loose.

The commission, Jesus giving his disciples their / our marching orders comes
in a sandwich of promises. I'll read the whole thing. The parts belong together
like the bread and the PB and J or the ham and cheese in the middle.

**And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth
has been given to me. 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 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.
And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."**

Let me start with the middle, the commission itself. The imperatives here are

Go, make disciples, baptize and teach. They are all part of the same thing

They go together, each reinforcing the other. It's really about making disciples

And to do that Jesus' followers need to go and to baptize and to teach

In my almost a dozen years with you, I've leaned heavily into the 'go'

I've challenged your personal geography and challenged you to go new places
especially those right around here, meet new people, make new friends

try new things, take some risks, learn from your missteps and mistakes

You have responded well to that challenge. I thank you!

LEARNING OUR LESSONS

The baptize part? Haven't really done too much with that
I've used lots of water, learned that most children are not Trinitarian
They're okay with the first two scoops of water ... but the third
The Holy Spirit, that third scoop usually brings on the crying

I'd like to spend a little time with the teach imperative on my last Sunday with you
First things first ... we would be well served, the world would be well served,
if we were intentional about finishing that sentence ... **and teaching them
to obey everything that I have commanded you.**

That leads to a focus on the things Jesus was (and is) focused on
What did he command? To love God with all we are and to love neighbor
What did he talk about the most? His message was "repent, the kingdom
of God is at hand" followed by "Follow me." Would you agree that these
reflect the core of Jesus' teaching? Anything else as central as these?

So about teaching, teaching what Jesus commands
I remember moving her over a decade ago, I was excited about moving to a state
recognized for its educational system – a top 10 kind of state. That has changed
And not for the good. Iowa now ranks lower, middle of the pack.

That is not a reflection on our students ... or our teachers
It is more about decisions made to fund or not fund schools, about banning books,
about legislators, not educators, changing curriculums. This includes an effort
which is national in its scope, to clean up our history lessons – downplay
the conflicts, the oppression, the wrongs done by those in power.

That effort wants us to focus more on the highlights and hero stories instead
Nothing wrong with highlights or heroes, but if that is all we are teaching ...
If we are intentionally avoiding the difficult stories, the ugly stories (which is
what we are now doing), we miss critical, important opportunities to learn.

Please think about your own experience. Any of us right all the time?
Any of us living the hero's life day after day, year after year
Or looking back might it be that we have learned more, grown more
through the difficult, even ugly, times ... learned by trial and error?
Grown through what my parents called 'character building' times?

So here's one more ask from the parting pastor ... keep learning by trial and error.
Be willing to make mistakes and learn from them. Be willing to forgive yourself
(you have been forgiven). Forgive others (they too have been forgiven).

AN ASSURANCE OR TWO

Jesus most repeated message was “repent, the kingdom of God is at hand.”

To repent is to change directions. Walking humbly with God is more than familiar paths, it's changing course when the Holy Spirit gives us an opportunity to learn a lesson, to learn from our missteps ... including when we sit silently by while our history is whitewashed

You are the Place for Everyone you seek to be because you are humble, because you're life-long learners who learn from your mistakes I love your humility ... and how you have kept me humble. Thank you!

Now thinking about good-byes and how to end them ...

You don't end with an ask. You end with an assurance.

That is how Jesus says good-bye and how I'd like to say good-bye

The moving trucks come tomorrow. We close on our house here Tuesday and on our house in Salisbury Wednesday. I start my work as the Interim Pastor at the Community Presbyterian Church in Pinehurst on June 15

So then let me say a proper good bye. First by saying a heartfelt thank you I am so thankful to have walked the journey with you ... so thankful

And to say what most needs to be said above all else ... what Jesus said

Please notice how the great commission begins and ends.

Remember what I said about a sandwich earlier? The commission of Go, make disciples, baptize and teach what Jesus commands is sandwiched by not one but two words of assurance

Assurance - **And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Commission - Go therefore ... And one more assurance ... And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”**

Jesus does not leave us with a to do list on its own. He begins with a 'you can do this'

Why? Because all authority in heaven and on earth has been given him

We are not sent out on our own, left to our own devices.

We are sent in his name, under his authority. The first assurance

And the second is even better ... a proper good-bye

Jesus says. **“And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”**

Jesus does not leave us on our own. Figure it out yourself.

He doesn't just leave us with instructions. He does that ...

'to teach as he has commanded'. But he does even more.

He is with us always, to the end of the age!

SUMMARY

I started thinking about retirement some time ago.

Decided I wanted pictures of every church I have had the privilege to serve.

In my travels back South I've stopped to visit and take pictures in Athens

Atlanta, Reidsville, North Carolina and Chattanooga, Tennessee

Still need pictures from the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia

Two pictures of each church – one from the pews, one from the pulpit

We're going to do the same today here (with Randy's help)

One from the center aisle, one from the chancel area during the benediction

The difference with these pictures will be that the others were taken in empty sanctuaries. These two pictures will include you, y'all. I want you in the picture. In a way, you will always be with me ... and I with you.

But more than that, the assurance that is most re-assuring

is that Jesus is with you (I've seen that truth in so many different ways)

and that Jesus is with me. Always has been with you and with me,

and with us together these last almost dozen years

and with us as we part ways and I return to my Southern roots

Jesus is with us ... wherever and whenever and however. Always!

Good thing he's 'on the loose!'