

Sermon for Sunday, March 3, 1974 by Andrew A. Jumper, D. D., Pastor
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"WILL SOMEBODY PLEASE SING SOPRANO?"

St. Matthew 28:16-20

Text: "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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." St. Matthew 28:19, 20

In music the melody line is the soprano. Of course, it is more fun to sing parts, but if nobody is singing the tune, it simply doesn't sound right. Now, it is true that the various parts give support and harmonic richness to the soprano. But if nobody is singing soprano, the parts by themselves don't make musical sense. So, whenever people get together to sing, somebody needs to sing soprano.

Life is much like music. The various parts can add depth and harmonic value to life. But life, too, needs a melody line. This is something we are learning at our house these days. In the home someone usually carries the soprano line and more often than not, it is the mother. The children may carry certain tunes and the father makes his particular contribution. But the steadying theme that holds it all together is the mother--she carries the soprano line. She creates the melody to which all of the family is attuned. And when the melody line is dropped, something goes out of that family that is very difficult to replace. Someone has to pick up the melody and create the tune that pulls them all together as a family.

Or look at the church today. I don't know very many people who are happy about their denomination and many church people are not at all happy about their particular local church. There is a reason for this. Too many today are singing parts. Take, for example, what has happened in recent years in the area of social action. Many of our church leaders are emphasizing that area of the church's life. Now, surely most of us would agree that the church has responsibility in certain areas of her life. But that is only one of the parts. It is not even the melody line. On the other hand, certain of our fellow churchmen are emphasizing the spirituality of the church today. That, too, is a valid part of the song of the church. But, again, it is only a part. It is the melody line. Now, it is about that melody line that I want to speak this morning.

In our scripture this morning Jesus is pictured with his disciples for the last time. I cannot impress upon you enough the significance of this moment. Everything that has happened is brought into focus here. This is the crucial moment. The first word of Jesus at this critical moment is the command to "go". "Go therefore and make disciples..." No one ought to have any question about the primary task of the church of the Christian. The melody line, the soprano, of the mission of the church is to lead people to discipleship in Jesus.

Surely most of us are aware of the desperate needs of the world today. Perhaps as never before people today are seeking spiritual realities. One cannot account for the rise in interest in the occult, in satanism, in astrology except for the fact that people are becoming aware of deep spiritual needs within themselves and they are reaching out to fill the vacuum in their lives. And what our world today desperately needs is to hear the melody line of the Gospel--it needs to hear the good news of what God has done for them--it needs to hear the word of love and

forgiveness that God has spoken in Jesus--it needs for somebody to sing soprano.

See how it works. Look at the world in which we live and the desperate needs of people. People who are broken, alienated and separated from God. It is something like this. Suppose you are in your automobile and you are going through a school zone, speed limit--15 miles per hour. But you are not observing that. You are not even observing the 55 mile limit. In stead with your foot to the floor on the accelerator, you are speeding through the school zone at 100 miles an hour. Children fill the cross walk. You, unable to stop, slam into them and then three little children, broken and bleeding, lie dead on the pavement. You have broken the laws of society and as such you are subject to arrest and you are cast into prison. To this point life spiritually is much the same. God has placed us in a universe that is structured by moral laws and moral principles. He has surrounded us with the laws that he lays upon us. You and I find that as we have experienced life we are in violation of the laws of God.

There in prison you await your trial. The day comes when you stand before the judge. He reads the record. "How do you plead?" Back comes the answer. "Guilty." The judge passes sentence. Could the judge ignore what you had done? Could he say to you, "I know you really didn't mean to do it. I know you will probably never do it again. We will forget it this time. We will ignore the fact that you violated the law and don't do it again." Will he do that? No, why not? Because the laws of society make society possible. Suppose we all decide we will not obey the laws, the judge will not punish us, so traffic becomes impossible. Nobody observes the stop signs, the red lights or the divider marks or anything else and so when each drives as he will, traffic becomes impossible.

The judge cannot overlook the violation of the law. To do so would make life impossible. Here again the same is true in the spiritual dimensions. God has laid down the moral rules for his universe. If we violate those laws, God cannot simply overlook them and ignore them for it makes the spiritual dimensions of life as unimportant. These are the laws that hold our universe together. So the judge passes sentence.

You are sentenced to die and at last the day comes. They lead you forth from your cell and you are placed in the electric chair, your arms are strapped down, your legs are fastened to the chair and the electrode is placed on your head. The executioner steps forward and he grasps the switch and the moment has come now. He starts to pull it down but a hand comes and stops him. A voice says, "wait". You look and it is the judges son. He comes and unbuckles your arms and unstraps your legs and removes the electrodes. He says, "My Father has sent me. He was your judge and as such it was necessary for him to pronounce sentence upon you but he has sent me, his own son, to take your place--to die in your stead if you will let me." Now that is exactly what God in Christ has done for us. Because you and I are guilty of violating the spiritual laws of the universe, we are weighed in the balance and found wanting. We are rightly judged guilty and upon us has been pronounced the sentence--death. But there comes to us the son of the eternal judge. There upon Calvary's cross, he takes our place and he dies our death. He says to us, "if you will accept it, my death is for you."

The first word of Jesus is the word "go". Go and share with people what Jesus has done for them--how much God has loved them. The second word of Jesus is

the word "show". That is, "teach them all I have commanded you. Show them, tell them, what kind of a life I want you to live. If you accept my death, now I want you to live for me, to be obedient to all my commands." D. T. Niles, that product of our missionary enterprise in India, that great Indian Christian tells a story of two brothers who were orphaned by a plague. The older brother felt a deep responsibility for his younger brother but he was inexperienced. He was not knowledgeable and as a consequence he could not raise the younger brother as he should. The younger boy began to get into different kinds of trouble and no matter how much his brother pled he could not help him. One day as the older boy sat in their little two room cottage, he heard the police whistle blowing, the sound of running steps and suddenly there burst into the room his brother, his coat splattered with blood, a look of terror on his face, and still clasped uncounsciously in his hand the bloody knife. Obviously what had happened was he started to rob someone who had resisted and in fear he had plunged the knife into the man. But the police had come upon the scene and now he was fleeing for his life. His brother took him into the back room, took off the blood stained clothing and put it on himself and took the knife in his hand. When the police burst into the door, they saw him standing there and they took him prisoner and cast him in jail. At last he was pronounced guilty and sentenced to die and the day came for the execution. The younger brother pled, "Please let me tell them I am the guilty one. I am the one who committed this crime. I should die not you." "No," said his older brother, "I die your death for you. You live my life for me." "Go tell them, I have died their death for them. Teach them all things that they may live my life for me."

The third word that comes to us is the word "lo." "Lo, I am with you always." Even though you have accepted Jesus as your saviour and even though he tells you to live his life for him, you know you cannot. You have already tried. You have tried to be obedient. You have tried to be loving and kind. You have tried to be all the things that Jesus wants you to be and you know that you have failed as I have failed.

A lot of us are trying to live the Christian life in our own power and in our own strength but Jesus gives us the third theme, the "lo" of the Gospel. "Lo, I am with you always" and Jesus then offers to us a power beyond ourselves. He offers us the power of his Holy Spirit to live within us, to infill us and to equip us with power from him to help us live his life. That is what Jesus has for us. You know, that is what the world needs to know. It needs to know that it has been forgiven and it needs to know it has power available to live for Jesus Christ because he has promised, "Lo, I am with you."

For you and for me we need the presence of Jesus to help us live our lives for Him and there is a world out there to which Jesus sends us. "Go," he says, "tell them that Jesus died for them. Show them how life should be lived as they live their lives for me. And lo, I am with you always. I give you the promise that I will never leave you." That is what we need. That is what the world needs--somebody to please sing soprano.