

“The left-over mission” Matthew 28:19

“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.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

As you may know this is this tradition, where during the Lent different congregations, we could say, cooperate in a way, and pastors rotate within the zone, taking services at different congregations. Yes, we do that...

When in our zone pastors had to pick their topics for these Lent devotions, I said that I am happy to pick whatever topic will be left over. And the “left-over” topic was... mission. Mission of all things. Isn't that quite symbolic?

Or perhaps we should say, symptomatic? Church's mission as a left-over. Isn't that to a great extent true about our church, about the LCA as well? Surely, we talk a lot about it. It is one of those sacred buzzwords.

If we say something needs to be done for the sake of mission, that is like pulling out the trump card, that beats everything else. Doctrine, practice, common sense. Often, we misunderstand what the mission is. Too often I have witnessed other good things, like caring for our neighbours, for the poor, for justice, called a mission.

What picture do you have in mind when you hear the word mission?

We may have different strange ideas. Perhaps, we imagine knocking at our neighbours' doors, feeling awkward and not knowing what to say and what to expect. Perhaps, we imagine our non-Christian friends or relatives getting cross with us as we keep disrupting their peace by bringing up the name of Jesus.

Maybe we picture giving some dollars to missionaries who travel to other countries and feeling satisfied with ourselves – yes, we supported the mission, job well done, that's enough mission for me.

I don't know what you picture in your mind when you hear this word “mission”, therefore, today I want to share some bits and pieces of how the Bible shapes our understanding of what this mission is about.

First question – whose mission are we talking about? What do I mean? Is it ours... or is it God's mission? Of course, we need to be clear, it is God's mission. The Triune God is God on mission. But then, what is this mission, how could we describe it?

We could say that it is about seeking after the lost, rescuing them from under the power of Satan, and bringing them into the divine fellowship with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and will all God's chosen people.

Now, when did God begin His mission? Yes, in the very beginning. In that garden. When our first parents had been deceived and had lost their trust in the true God, when sin and death had come in the world, and humanity had been enslaved under the dark powers we couldn't overcome on our own.

Do you remember who came looking for Adam? "Adam, where are you?" Who was it? Since ancient times the Church has believed that it was the second person of the Trinity, the eternal Son, who was on mission to find us, to rescue us and to bring us back where we truly belong. See how this changes how we see this event.

Just a moment ago, Adam and Eve had done something, that will mean that the Son of God will need to be rejected, suffer and die in the most painful death imaginable. And knowing all of this, He comes to Adam and Eve and gives them the first Gospel promise; He promises that He Himself will mend what they had broken, even as it will cost Him His own life. This incredible promise kept faith for God's people for millennia and millennia through the OT age as they were waiting for that day.

Then, in the fullness of time the Son of God did come to fulfill His promise. How did that happen? Remember, Genesis 3, the promise was that the offspring of woman – not of man and woman – but someone born of woman will destroy the power of the ancient enemy and lift the curse of death.

What follows is of special interest for us. How was Jesus conceived? By the power of the Holy Spirit. "Born of the virgin Mary". Who descended upon Jesus when He was baptised? The Holy Spirit.

Who led Jesus to be tempted in the wilderness? The Holy Spirit. In whose power did Jesus perform all His miracles? In the power of the Holy Spirit. How was Jesus raised from the dead? In the power of the Holy Spirit. What does this mean for us?

Now, when Jesus had accomplished the main part of His mission, when He had destroyed the power of the sin and death and devil on the cross, and when He ascended back to His Father, remember, who did He leave to continue His mission?

We could say, His disciples. We could say the Church. Or we could say – the body of Christ. The body of Christ. And who did Jesus promise to send to His disciples? "And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." (Luke 24:49)

Yes, He sent us the Holy Spirit. Can you see what wonderful picture emerges?! The body of Christ, that is – all of us, we are commissioned to continue God's mission of seeking the lost, rescuing them from under the power of darkness and bringing them back into God's family.

And we are given the same Spirit in whose power Jesus accomplished His mission. We have the same mission and we have the same Spirit. But there is more. How are people rescued from under the power of Satan, or how is the true faith created?

Remember, faith comes from... yes, from hearing the Good News about what Jesus has done for us. There is something amazing, something almost unbelievable happening as we partake in Christ's mission.

When any of God's people speak the Good News, when we tell others about the Triune God, His love, His commitment, His grace, our message, our words are accompanied by no one else, but by... yes! by the Holy Spirit. As Paul wrote in his letter to Thessalonians: "Our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit."

Or as he wrote in his letter to Galatians: "Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?" See, when we speak God's message, when you speak God's message, that is not just a sound of your words that your listeners hear, the Holy Spirit is at work with them.

Calling them by the Gospel, enlightening them, creating in them new hearts and true faith. This is what happens when God's people, when you speak the message about Jesus. Isn't this amazing?! Just think about this – we have this privilege to speak the words of eternal life, and as we speak, we literally offer and give eternal life to those who are willing to listen. Just think about it!

You, by speaking God's message, can give to someone the gift of eternal life. This is how we partake in God's mission. This is how He employs us in His mission. We all as God's chosen people, we are the body of Christ, and the Spirit of God dwells in you and powers your message.

Isn't this incredible?! The Triune God has chosen to involve us in His work of new creation. Us, as we are, imperfect and unworthy, little and rebellious creatures. It is speaking through us that the Triune God overcomes the power of darkness and gathers His family. Speaking through us...

This is a Biblical picture of what the mission is about. We certainly are not qualified to participate in such a magnificent venture. For just imagine how high are the stakes in this mission? We certainly don't deserve such honour and trust. And we can't even appreciate the grandeur of this mission. That's all true.

Besides, so often this mission is like a "left-over" among all our other activities. We often fear it, we try to dodge it, we are not comfortable to participate in it. In such a situation the comforting news is that – you don't have to do it. You don't have to participate in this grand rescue mission that builds God's Kingdom.

No one has to do it. The Father's favour to you, His fervent love, your salvation, your promised place in New Heavens and Earth, remember! they don't depend on how much you have done, or how many times you have proclaimed the Gospel, or even on how many you have brought into God's family.

Your eternal fate is secure because of what Jesus Christ did for you. He has secured a place for you; more, He has gone to prepare that place for you. Now, He is waiting for you. You just need to cling to His promises, treasure them and rejoice in them.

But, if God's mission is a bit of "left-over" for us, it is us who are missing out on something very special. We are missing out on one of the greatest joys that we may have as Christians. When we are on mission together with our God.

Together with our God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit!

When we pray for those, we care for and who we want to see among God's people. When we curiously study Scripture and ask for the Spirit's guidance, to give us wisdom, to teach us what to say, how to deliver the life-giving message.

When we engage with fellow brothers and sisters, sharing our experience, our God-given insights, pooling together our God given wisdom. And when we have the opportunity to deliver the message of eternal life to those we love, and... God willing, to witness a miracle, when we see that someone, who was an enemy of God, receives a new heart and becomes a child of God, our brother or sister.

God's mission. Christ's mission. It is this joy that our Triune God wants to share with us. This is what He invites us to experience. This is what this mission is about.

I can only pray that the Holy Spirit would help us to appreciate this wonderful gift of God, and if it pleases our good Lord, may He kindle in us the passion for His mission and use each one of us as He finds it fitting.

Grant us this joy, O Lord, grant it to us abundantly!

Amen.