



Matthew 28:16-20 NRSV

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Background

Last month, we spent time with the book of Acts. It was important as we moved towards the day of Pentecost to focus on the work of the spirit in our communities. As a reminder, if you are feeling like this season is strange, take comfort in knowing that you are not the first to endure the "strangeness" of being separated. Lean on the wisdom of our Biblical and Historical ancestors who found a way to make sense of the nonsense.

This month, we're going to spend time in the gospel of Matthew. Today's text is rich, but we'll just be studying a few verses. In your own devo-

tional period, read the entire 28th Chapter of Matthew. What do you notice about the characters named? Women? Chief priests? Soldiers? Disciples? What do you see these characters doing, or not doing? Who do you relate to the most?

Today's lesson will focus on the power of the good news spreading.

Read the scripture out loud together.

Discuss with someone in your home. What makes you want to share information with someone? What compels you to share a video, joke, story, article, news clip or book with someone else? What makes it "shareable?"

What's happening during this passage?

This passage takes place after the resurrection of Jesus. Upon seeing their resurrected savior, they began to worship and some even doubted him. Jesus comes to the disciples and gives them a very clear direction. Jesus stands on his authority and tells the disciples, "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." It's a clear commandment. Jesus basically tells the disciples, "pick it up, and keep it going."

What might the disciples be feeling?

Our text tells us that upon seeing him, some worshipped, but others doubted. Both of these responses were valid human responses, but this is not what Jesus calls us to. Jesus does not rest in being worshipped.

If you would put yourself in the disciples' shoes, perhaps you might feel concerned, scared, excited that Jesus has returned, nervous that he may leave you again. Jesus has just defeated death through God's power

and might. In doing so, has defied natural laws. The disciples may be understandably disoriented.

What is Jesus' commandment?

Jesus wants the disciples to keep sharing the good news. Intentionally, he tells the disciples to change their actions. Quite literally, Jesus gives the disciples new verbs to focus on. Don't just "see" me, or "worship" me, or "doubt me, he says. Jesus says, "go." Jesus says "**make disciples,**" "**baptize,**" "**teach,**" and "**remember.**" Jesus requires that the disciples spread the gospel.

Why does Jesus require these things of the disciples?

Go: Go! Jesus requires us to leave our comfort zones. Don't just focus on the people who already fall in line. How can we share the love of Christ with strangers? With people without homes? With vulnerable people? With neighbors? With people who grieve lost ones to COVID? This one is delicate. Jesus never says, "make everyone Christian." Jesus, throughout his ministry, worked with and cared for people outside his own tradition. Check out *Matthew 15* for his interaction with the Syro-phoenician woman. He first refused to help this woman because of her background, but when she challenged him, he granted her the desires of her heart and met her demands. He never changed her. Changing her ethnicity was not necessary. As we go, we must remember to respect and value the stories of people we meet.

Make Disciples: Get your people. A healthy movement requires humans. We cannot do the work of spreading the gospel without people. And throughout the ministry of Christ, he reminds us that we have to "get in groups." During the feeding of 5,000 plus people, Jesus instructed the disciples to put the people in groups so that the task of feeding them would be smoother. Jesus says "make disciples," not "copycats." We need people who can think on their own and can contribute their own unique gifts. Everyone has different spiritual and vocational gifts!

Baptize: The baptism is an intimate, sacred act. It is a public display of an inward change, as we learned in Sunday School as children. The beauty of baptism is that each time someone is baptized into the faith, onlookers are compelled to remember their own baptism.

Teach: As we are invited into the faith, we have to go deeper as we grow our roots. What are the scriptures that sustain us? What songs nourish us? What are our expectations of one another? How do we treat each other? The teachings aren't just about memorizing scripture. In Christ's tradition, teachings are about gaining understanding and applying the text to everyday life. When we see a scripture or hear a hymn, how does that apply to our real lives? How does it connect to what we see, hear, feel and know in our world?

Remember: After making disciples, baptizing, and teaching, one may understandably feel overwhelmed. This is a heavy and great work. So Jesus tells the people to remember that "I am with you always, to the end of the age." Always means just that-- always. Psalm 61:2 grants us security like this:

"When my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the Rock that is higher than I."

What questions do you still have of this scripture? How will you commit to journeying with this text this week?

Connection to Today's World

What does it mean to go viral? A small Minnesota Bail Fund learned first hand just what that means this week. In the last few days, the bail fund raised about \$20 million dollars in donations, all because social media helped bring awareness to their cause. Us-



ers on all platforms tagged people into the challenge, saying "match my

\$10!” Celebrities, politicians and activists all reposted the links, to the point that the bail fund had to say “Alright now, we have enough money, please share with someone else.” They had been gifted with an abundant blessing and couldn’t fathom keeping it all to themselves.

Why Bail funds? Bail funds help liberate people who have been arrested. Some people are in custody simply because they cannot afford bail. Especially in the context of COVID, civilians being arrested for peaceful protesting (or just standing in the wrong place at the wrong time) run the risk of exposure to the virus. Now, more than ever, it is important to bail people out of jail. There are multiple initiatives that are working to bail people out of jail, including the Bail Out Black Mamas initiative.

Read more about that project here

https://www.democracynow.org/2019/5/10/black_mamas_bail_out_da_y_movement

Journal: Take one of Jesus’ verbs above. Go, make disciples, baptize, teach, remember. Which of these verbs calls to you? Why?

Closing: Sing/watch Mahalia Jackson’s version of “I Couldn’t Keep It To Myself,”

For a video, click here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IdbQm8YCybU>

Said I wasn't gonna tell anybody but I...

I couldn't keep it to myself.

Said I wasn't gonna tell anybody but I...

I couldn't keep it to myself what the Lord God Almighty has done for me.

Prayer:

Dear God,

You are the God who never leaves us without resource. We thank you for all that we have. We thank you for a reasonable portion of health and strength, even if it's not the quantity we expected.

God, we need to spread the good news. We need to do as you told us in your teachings. You tasked us to “proclaim release to the captive and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” You called us to be your hands, feet, and heart in the world.

As we continue to do your work in the world, help us to feel your presence. Give us space to breathe and rejuvenate. We will remember that you are with us always, even to the end of the age. We will remember that you are our God, even unto death. We will remember that you love us just as we are.

In Jesus’ name we pray,

Amen

Works Cited:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/01/style/minnesota-freedom-fund-bail-george-floyd-protests.html>