

## Matthew 28:16-20

### The Great Commission

I'm not sure what you're like at listening to instruction or information being imparted onto you. When I was a primary school teacher, I gave instructions all the time, plus huge amounts of information which the children had to take on board and learn. Most of the time the pupils sat up and listened! But as a teacher, I never knew it all and I would tell the children as much. I was always learning. The best learning was achieved through practical activities. Surely that is what Jesus has been doing with his disciples during his time of ministry. Today we're looking at a passage from the book of Matthew where Jesus has risen from the dead and has met his disciples on a mountain and is giving them a very clear instruction about spreading the Good News. They are Jesus' apprentices and now, although it may appear that their apprentice has ended, Jesus will not be leaving them. They will continue to learn, drawing on Him as they teach others.

As an aside, if we look at the beginning of the chapter, we see that the two Marys have taken instructions from Jesus to tell the disciples where to find him. Here we see the less likely members of society in those days, receiving an important message. Back then, women weren't permitted to give evidence in court, yet here Jesus chose them to be witnesses to his resurrection and then give orders to the men to follow.

Verse<sup>7</sup> Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.'

Verse<sup>10</sup> '...Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.'

The disciples follow the women's instruction as we see here at the beginning of today's passage. <sup>16</sup> Then the **eleven disciples** went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.

It's interesting that Matthew states how many disciples went to Galilee, pointing us to the fact that one of Jesus' friends and follower, Judas, had betrayed him for 30 pieces of silver. However, although the group is not complete, one might say, this doesn't stop Jesus delivering his message to them. We, ourselves, are not the finished article, yet Jesus is for us. Someone I use to work with once said to me, "You're so good, going to church." My reply was 'No, I'm not good, that's why I go to church, so I can learn how to be better!'"

Today's reading is referred to as the Great Commission. The word Commission means 'the act of committing or entrusting a person or group with supervisory power or authority'. Jesus is commissioning the apostles, he is entrusting them with the authority of God, to continue His work.

Jesus says, '**All authority** in heaven and earth (the end of verse 18) - Jesus's Father, God, has given him this authority. I know that growing up if my mum said that 'Dad said...' I would sit up and listen because he had the authority in the house, even though Mum disciplined us as well! Here Jesus is saying that the message he is giving comes from **all** authority - from God.

Secondly, Jesus tells them to 'Therefore go and make disciples of **all nations**, (beginning of verse 19). The word disciple means 'student, follower, learner'. The disciples of Jesus were his followers. They took their teaching from Him. Jesus' initial ministry was towards the Jewish population but here the message is to expand that ministry to all people, all nationalities. For the disciples to go further than the Jewish nations. We know that over the past 2000 years, the Bible is the most translated book in history, and to date it is translated in whole or in part into over 3,000 languages. The word of God has certainly been expanded across the nations. The apostle Paul was not in the original group of eleven, but we know that he went on to make disciples of many in the first century. I guess what we have to ask ourselves today is, is this message for us too? If yes, how do we go about encouraging people follow Jesus?

Thirdly, Jesus tells the eleven to 'teach them to obey **everything** I have commanded you.' (beginning of verse 20). Jesus wants the disciples to not necessarily preach at people but show

them how to live like Jesus. Our actions should reflect our beliefs. Make decisions like Jesus. Be more Jesus! How do we do that as individuals or as a church?

I can't imagine what the disciples must have been thinking at this point. They had witnessed their beloved friend and teacher die on a cross in a most cruel way, they had grieved for him, they had hidden away for fear of their lives for knowing Him, and now they are standing in his presence once more. No wonder some of them had doubts! Wouldn't we? However, it was their faith in Jesus and his teachings that made them sit up and listen. Jesus gives them a set of instructions, with all authority from heaven to go and make more of them, make disciples of Jesus in the name of the Trinity by teaching all people how to live like Him.

Finally, we're reminded that Jesus' disciples were not going to be on their own fulfilling this commission. At the end of verse 20, Jesus says that, '...surely I am with you always, to the very end of age.' Throughout his ministry, Jesus didn't leave them and what he's saying now, as he prepares to ascend to heaven, is that he's not leaving them, but giving them the power of the Holy Spirit to assist in their work, which we hear about in Acts 1 ..'You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.'

Jesus has given two important tasks for his people. The first one is the Great Commandment - loving God with all our heart and mind and loving our neighbours as ourselves (Mark 12:30-31). The second one is Great Commission – preaching the Gospel and making disciples all around the world (Matthew 28:18-20).

This Commission to the eleven disciples is for us too. As followers of Christ, we too are commissioned to come along side our neighbours, friends, family and others we meet to show them the love of Christ. In the initiative of Thy Kingdom Come, launched on Thursday, we are asked 'How can we partner with God, in prayer and mission, to see more people encounter the love of Christ this year?' We are called to pray for 5 people that we know. There's also an easy app you can download with daily themes to focus on between Ascension and Pentecost.

Prayer is a big part of mission. We have seen answers to prayer from the prayer walks we started here at St. Mary's in 2016 until 2020 for our community, especially the new estates which have grown over the past couple of years. And it's this very reason, we've just started up our monthly prayer walks again. I know that many of us take comfort in knowing that we can take our concerns to our prayer group who meet every Monday to pray for the needs of our community and beyond. <sup>20</sup> For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.' Matthew 18:20

St. Paul urged the Colossians.

<sup>2</sup> Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. <sup>3</sup> And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. <sup>4</sup> Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. <sup>5</sup> (Colossians 4:2-4)

Which 5 people are you praying for? What acts of kindness could you show this week? We are not perfect; we all have our faults (I have plenty by the way!) but we can always strive towards making better decisions in light of what we know to be the love of Christ. We're grateful that in our churches we have a number of Homegroups where we read God's word and search for answers about how we can put into practise what we have learnt of Jesus' way. We too are apprentices of Jesus, let us never stop learning more about Him; taking that learning and putting it into our everyday lives so that the Good News of the Gospel can be witnessed.

**Amen**