

July 26, 2015

TEXT: Matthew 28:16–20

TITLE: Final Instructions

¹⁶Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*

God has resurrected Jesus from the dead, just as Jesus had said God would do. And Jesus' disciples are preparing to meet him in Galilee, the land of the Gentiles on the designated mountain, as Jesus had instructed them to do. Mountains play an important and significant role in Matthew's gospel. At the beginning of Jesus' ministry he went away to a mountain for a time of communing with God and while there Satan came to tempt him; it was on a mountain that Jesus was transfiguration and had a meeting with the prophets Moses and Elijah, in the presence of three of his disciples; after healing the sick and feeding of the crowd with five loaves of bread and two fish, Jesus retreated to a mountain for a time of prayer and refreshment; Jesus healed crowds on a mountain by the Sea of Galilee; Jesus' sermon on the mount identified who the blessed of this world are and that they would inherit the Kingdom of God; Jesus often spent time on the Mount of Olives and lest we forget it was on the mount of Calvary, Jesus was crucified. We've known modern day prophets who have had mountain-top experiences. Most familiar is Dr. Martin L. King, Jr.'s final proclamation that he had been to the mountain-top and looked over and although he might not get there with the rest of us, he assured us that we would get there one day. Mountain tops are places of God's divine revelation and instruction.

Upon the disciples' ascent and meeting with Jesus on this unnamed mountain, Matthew tells us they worshipped him. Just as the Magi worshiped when they encountered the Messiah at his birth, and the women worshiped the risen Jesus at the tomb, the disciples worshiped, recognizing they were in the very presence of the risen Savior and Lord. Yet in spite of their worship some doubted. Matthew makes room for doubt alongside worship in the wonder of this scene on the mountain and in the glory of the resurrected Jesus.

Often worship and doubt goes hand in hand. I am reminded of Peter, who stepping out on faith was able to walk on water, but becoming frightened doubts and begins to sink; or Thomas' doubt in John's resurrection story. Doubt is not to be viewed negatively or a flaw in the lives of believers. Our occasional doubt places each of us directly in the resurrection story alongside the disciples on the mountain, awaiting Jesus' instructions. If we had it together all the time and were super Christians, without any ever doubting, we might be operating in our own strength and be arrogant, self-assured and selfish in our understanding of who God is. Leaving room for doubt allows us the ability to know

God and for God to be revealed in new, wondrous and unimaginable ways. There have been and there will be times in our Christian walk that we doubt what God is doing in our midst and realize later it was or is our own fear limiting our ability to understand and see, as the prophet Isaiah proclaimed, “God is doing a new thing, and we did not perceive it!”

Beloved, God is doing a new thing—everyone regardless of their age, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation, are accepted as proclaimers of God’s word.
God is doing a new thing—people are free to marry those they love regardless of their sexual identity or gender.

God is doing a new thing—all are welcome into the house and family of God, period. Jesus says to his disciples, “all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” And yet nothing in their current surroundings would suggest that to be true. Jesus is on an unnamed mountain, with a congregation of 11 and some of them are doubting and not really sure who they have come to worship. And without missing a beat, Jesus instructs them, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, more specifically of all foreigners, people who are not like you, Gentiles.

Telling the confused and disoriented disciples they are ordained and called out to teach, lead and instruct the people of the earth, would be akin to telling us today to go into the world and cure cancer or HIV, protect and clean up the environment, provide just and safe housing for all who are homeless, feed all who are hungry, defend and safeguard all who are abused, mistreated, disenfranchised or neglected, or fight for economic justice for all people, none of these are impossible, but all are extremely difficult nonetheless.

We are witnesses to and co-laborers with many who are responding to Jesus’ call to make disciples—Pastor Randy and the delegation who travelled to and are on their way back from Malawi; Chenoa who has ministered for many years alongside the people of Bolivia fighting for environmental and human rights; the Kirkpatrick/Yoders recently returned from teaching and ministering in the Middle East; many who have and continue to travel to the borders of the United States and Mexico to understand and minister to those who are attempting to make a better life for their families; and all those who are unknown to us who have gone out in the name of Jesus to make disciples, and to help the world a become more humane and just place. They have heard and are heeding Jesus’ instructions, understanding that God has gone before and it is theirs and ours to make disciples by being God’s interns on the ground, baptizing and teaching, not in our own authority, but under the supervision of the risen Savior; practicing, making mistakes and learning from them, asking questions, and loving neighbor as we are loved. Jesus instructed, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them all that I have commanded you.” Teach, make and be my students, put yourselves and usher others into a lifelong learning process of knowing me more fully, teaching them they are my own and belong to me and therefore are to follow my instructions, my commandments.

And now Jesus gives his final instruction, words of assurance. “Behold, see, I am with you always, all the days, every day, to the end of the age.” You need not be weary, afraid or discouraged; behold, I am with you. As Pastor Randy preached a few weeks ago, take nothing for your journey; behold, I am with you. You shall not be overcome or defenseless; behold, I am with you. Your weakness, shortcomings or mistakes are made strong in my strength; behold, I am with you. My grace is sufficient to keep you; behold, I am with you.

Moses asked God, in whose name shall I say I have come, to which God answered, “I am,” “I will be who I will be.” Jesus’ instructions come with the certainty that we are never alone, that his spirit has gone before and accompanies us, leading, guiding, protecting and providing, opening closed doors, hearts and minds, filling empty and desolate places, resurrecting dry bones, spirits and attitudes, overcoming apathy, injustice and prejudice.

Jesus’ final instructions are solid as a rock, with the fourfold repetition of the word “all” —**all** authority, **all** nations, **all** that I have commanded you, **all** the days, always, as they are followed by words of promise and reassurance, “Behold, see, realize, understand, know beyond a shadow of a doubt, I am with you.” I am the one who is named Emmanuel, God with us, and will be with you always. Amen.