

Today we come to the last in our Bible passages to learn and live by; a passage which presents a challenge to each of us who profess the faith of the risen Christ and who are his disciples. These verses from the end of Matthew's Gospel are often known as "the Great Commission" as Jesus sends his disciples out into the world to continue his mission. But before we look at what the passage might be saying to us in this time and place let's set it in context in Matthew's Gospel.

The scenes that precede these final verses have been filled with drama and struggle. The power of the resurrection seems clear in the account of the resurrection, as the earth shakes and an angel descends to roll back the stone. The guards are overcome, the women are terrified, and the tomb is empty.

The angel's voice is one of command, for he tells the women to direct the disciples to Galilee where they will see Jesus for themselves. Then, before the women can follow through, the risen Jesus appears and repeats the command that the disciples should go to Galilee. The plot thickens as rumours spread that none of this resurrection news was true, that the disciples were the ones who had stolen the body. Against this backdrop, our passage begins.

The disciples who go to the mountain have not seen any of the Easter drama. They have not seen an earthquake or the angel descending. They have not seen the risen Jesus or heard his voice. All they have is the directive from the women, "Go to Galilee." So they go, trudging northward from Jerusalem to Galilee, not knowing whether the women's word is true. The concluding verses of Matthew's gospel give a vivid glimpse into what it means to be disciples of Jesus, fully trusting that when he calls us he will be with us and give us all that we need to accomplish the task he sets before us.

When the disciples meet the living Jesus, some worship, others doubt. Among these disciples there is both worship and uncertainty, both devotion and hesitancy. One might expect something clearer. They are in the presence of the living Christ, after all. But this mixture of faith and doubt also characterizes discipleship.

How does Jesus respond to this mixed group of worshipers and doubters? He gives them all the same commission: "Go and make disciples." The command to "go" is what brought these disciples here to Jesus and the command to "go" is what will take them out to others. We might have expected Jesus to do something different, like calling for the uncertain to get things figured out, and

for the hesitant to answer their unanswered questions. But instead, Jesus simply speaks to them all in the same way, "Go and make disciples."

One wonders whether it's a good idea, to have this group of disciples who do not have their act together going out to make other disciples. Jesus might have been more selective in whom he called and sent. But apparently Jesus sees things differently. Jesus commissions not perfect disciples, but people who both worship and doubt. This is encouraging for many of us who may feel totally inadequate for the task of making disciples.

So here at the end of Matthew before Jesus ascends to the Father, Jesus' last words to his followers were not, "Go and find a comfortable church and have cosy bring and share lunches." His last words were not, "Go and sing the songs you like in worship. Jesus didn't say, "Try to do some good every once in a while." Jesus said, "Go and make disciples!"

Jesus doesn't send us into the world to be silent about what we have seen and heard and tasted. Jesus sends us to make disciples of everyone, not just people we know or people we are comfortable around, but everyone who does not know him! He also doesn't preface it with, when you have spare time, when it's convenient for you, or when you decide you're comfortable to do it! There is urgency in Jesus' command then and now. Jesus sends us into the world to make disciples: to bring others into the discipleship community and equip them for ministry.

This might feel like a tall order to many of us but there are many simple ways that we can help make disciples. Those of you who go to home groups, when was the last time you invited someone to go with you, giving them a chance to experience a loving Christian community; introducing them to prayer and God's Word revealed in scripture? We have an Alpha course starting soon, how many of you have been actively praying and thinking about whom you might invite? We can also make disciples by how we live our daily lives, how we treat others in work and in the community, by seeking to be servants to others in need as Christ was. We don't have to be academics or great orators to make disciples! We have received freely from Jesus through his death and resurrection, and Jesus tells us in Matthew 10 verse 8 'Freely you have received; freely give', in a little while we will sing "Freely, freely, you have received; freely, freely give. Go in my name, and because you believe, others will know that I live.' Because you believe, others will know that I live.

Such a challenging command demands a great promise and we certainly have such a promise. Jesus told the disciples "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Jesus promised to be with us all the days of our life. We can take great comfort from this promise and this promise will keep us going through good times and bad.

Having spent the previous sixteen years serving God in Africa, the great missionary, David Livingston returned to his native Scotland to address the students at Glasgow University. As he stood before those young men and women, the tremendous price he had paid was plain to see. His body had been emaciated by the many fevers he had suffered and one arm hung useless at his side, the result of being mangled by a lion. The essence of his message to those young people was: "Shall I tell you what sustained me amidst the toil, the hardship, and loneliness of my exile? It was Christ's promise, "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

What Christ promised to the disciples on the mountain top two thousand years ago is ours today. The presence of God which Livingston experienced can be experienced by us today. The companionship of Jesus Christ is offered to every believer as we make our way through this world.

Jesus by means of his Holy Spirit promised to always be with those fulfilling His Great Commission. Always means all the days. Days of strength as well as days of weakness. Days of success as well as days of failure, in youth and old age and in the day of physical death.

Remember, we will be with him and he will be with us all the days of our life. We are not alone! Jesus promises, "I am with you always, to the end to the age." It sustained David Livingston, and it can sustain us. In Jesus' name, Amen.