

MATTHEW 28:16-20 CBC 4.4.2021 Easter Day

Please read Matthew 28:16-20 ...

In these words Jesus lays the foundation for our life as the people of the risen Lord. He tells us, with all the authority of heaven and earth behind him, to take the good news of His resurrection to people everywhere, and make disciples.

It's a big vision – “*ALL nations*” – because God has a big heart and He loves people everywhere. Start where you are, said Jesus, but don't stay there (Acts 1:8)! “*GO*” – It will involve effort and sacrifice. Would you rather Jesus had said “*Sit down and put your feet up*”?

But Jesus Himself didn't stay sitting in heaven. He left His comfortable place to rescue us when we were lost. His love caused Him to live on earth and to die for us on the cross. And His heart hasn't changed. The risen Lord loves this world. So He tells us to “*go and make disciples of all nations.*” Not by FORCE – but by presenting Christ to people, and praying that God will draw them to Him by the power of His Holy Spirit, so that their hearts will find their rest and joy in Him.

- Our task firstly is to introduce people to Jesus Christ so that they have a personal relationship with Him. A disciple is a “learner”, but our learning is not theoretical – it's getting to know a person: the Lord Jesus Christ. So our first task as disciple-makers is to introduce people to Him.
- What happens when by the power of the Holy Spirit we're able to lead someone to repentance and faith in Christ? The next step is BAPTISM (v.19) which identifies people as belonging to Christ and to His community, the church.
- BUT the task of disciple-making doesn't end there: “*teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you*” (v.20). The Church is more than just an Introduction Agency! Those who've begun a new life must be shown how to *live* the new life. So Jesus tells us to reach out (evangelism) *and* build up (nurture). Go and grow!

The command of the risen Lord could not be clearer. Yet we face huge obstacles to disciple-making. Indeed, the whole idea of disciple-making is under attack:

- **On the OUTSIDE we face opposition:**
 - **From Pluralism:** Our society glories in the multiplicity of beliefs. Opponents of the gospel charge us with arrogance. What right have we to try to convert anyone?
 - **From Postmodernism:** which denies that there is such a thing as universal truth. There is no “big story” (*metanarrative*) – just lots of little ones. We're told it's unreasonable and wrong to seek a unifying truth to life.
- **On the INSIDE we face our own reluctance:**
 - **We feel our weakness:** making disciples is hard and uncomfortable. It demands a considerable sacrifice of money, time, effort and pride. Who wouldn't prefer a more comfortable life? It's always easier after a hard day to watch the telly than to prepare a Junior Church lesson or build up others in your Lifegroup. It's always easier to talk to the neighbours about the weather or sport than about the gospel.
 - Besides, what business have we trying to disciple others when we have so many spiritual struggles of our own? We fail so often and so badly – don't we need to get our own

spiritual life sorted out first? (*We'll always find an excuse to put off disciple-making to a later date!*)

SO: Our Lord sends us to make disciples, but we're caught between this double whammy: opposition on the OUTSIDE from those who ask what right we have to try to convert anyone; and reluctance on the INSIDE, because we feel we're too weak (an excuse at least as old as Moses).

But it's Easter Day, and Christ is risen! And our Lord doesn't leave us on our own with an impossible task. He knew the obstacles we'd face on the outside and on the inside, and He deals with BOTH –

1. OUR AUTHORITY IS CHRIST'S LORDSHIP v.18

Mt 28 is the first account in the Bible of Christ's resurrection, and it's followed immediately by a declaration of His Lordship: v.18 *"Then Jesus said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.'"*

What right do we have to make disciples? WE have none in ourselves, but Jesus has all authority to call people to Him.

- **v.18 is the answer to our pluralist critics.** Christ's authority is not shared with Mohammed or Buddha or Boris! *"All authority"* is His. Of course this offends against our culture – was there ever a culture it didn't offend? Jesus' claim to authority led to His crucifixion. It made no difference. God vindicated His Son by raising Him from the dead.
- **v.18 is also the answer to our postmodernist critics.** This is the ultimate meta-narrative – you can't get a bigger story than v.18! It's all embracing, and leaves no room for privatized truth. I cannot have a personalized view of the world that will enable me to escape Christ's authority.

SO: v.18 is the reason why we preach: we preach because Jesus is Lord, and has all authority in heaven on earth. That means He has the authority to be our Judge, and so we call people to repent. But it also means that He has the authority to forgive, and so we call on people to come to Him and be saved.

JESUS IS LORD – not the pluralists, nor the postmodernists – and that's why we go on with the task of making disciples even in our pluralist and postmodern culture. The risen Lord is our authority.

But if Jesus' resurrection answers those who oppose us from the outside, does it say anything to the enemy within: our own weakness? Indeed it does!

2. OUR STRENGTH IS CHRIST'S PRESENCE v.20

The risen Lord doesn't deny our weakness, but He meets us where we are and says (v.20): *"Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"*.

That's the answer! Yes, Jesus knows our every weakness. Notice that He gives His great commission to a church which is:

- **Wounded:** v.16: *"the eleven disciples"* – not twelve. They've been wounded by the defection of Judas Iscariot.

- **Hesitant:** v.17: *“some doubted”* – not understanding the meaning of the resurrection – and frankly, afraid.

How can the great task of gathering in God’s people be entrusted to such a feeble and unpromising bunch? It’s because the mission is not primarily ours but Christ’s. *“I will build my church”* (Mt 16:18) – we are His hands and feet, but the work remains His.

And so we must never think of ourselves as on our own (that really would be a hopeless situation!). We have the promise of His presence: *“I am with you always!”*

And since the One who is with us always is the One who has all authority, we needn’t be dismayed. No opponents are strong enough to stop Christ building His Church. Not the media ... not political correctness ... not the new atheism ...

Indeed, because the One who is with us has conquered death, we can even afford to lay down our life for the gospel if that becomes necessary. That was the case for some of the apostles who heard Jesus’ words – and grace was given to them. Thousands of Christians have followed them in martyrdom. But Jesus has authority over death too.

“I am with you always!” That’s a glorious promise, and it’s for us as much as it was for the apostles, because the promise is *“to the very end of the age.”*

CONCLUSION

SO: The risen Lord sends us into the world to make disciples of all nations. He answers our critics on the outside who say we have no right by reminding us that He is Lord – *“all authority”*. He answers our weakness on the inside by promising us His unfailing presence *“I am with you always.”* And on this solid foundation He sends us into the world to make disciples.

He does this, not because He’s a tyrant determined to break people, but because he’s a Saviour come to rescue people and to set prisoners free. He loves even those who hate Him. And so He says to His Church: *“GO!”*

If we take our Lord’s words seriously, the implications are far-reaching. It will mean that some Christians have to leave their comfortable home to go to parts of the world where Christ is not known. For others, it will mean rearranging our priorities so that we give our best efforts to making disciples on our doorstep. One thing it will certainly mean for Corsham Baptist Church is that as we emerge from Lockdown we’ll reassess our church programme in the light of what our risen Lord has told us so plainly to do. Make disciples!

If that’s His priority, it must be ours. What should we be restarting? What needs to be changed? What should we let go? How well are our current activities suited to the mission Jesus has given us? Some may have served well in the past – but do they still? When Jesus tells us to *“GO”*, we know He doesn’t want His Church to be rooted to the spot, but to be mobile, ready to change and to move on – ready to seize the moment to make disciples.

So as we open up again, let’s prioritize EVANGELISM – those activities that seek to introduce people to Jesus. That includes good works which show the love of Christ – but accompanied by words that point to Jesus, or the works are ambiguous. And let’s prioritize NURTURE – those

activities that build people to maturity in Christ: prayerfully studying God's word together and seeking the Holy Spirit's enabling to apply it to every part of life.

Through the centuries, whenever the Church has had a heart for disciple-making, it has prospered; whenever it has ignored the risen Lord's commission, it has atrophied. For the health of the church, we must reach out; for the sake of the lost, we must introduce them to Jesus; for the glory of Christ, we must present people mature in Him.

Brothers and sisters: life passes quickly. Our day will soon be gone. Are we going to use this life well? Christ is risen and all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him. Are we willing to make His priority our priority too? *"Go and make disciples of all nations!"* That's our task. That's our privilege. And the risen Lord will be with us, to the very end of the age.

PRAYER: We praise you, mighty God, because you raised Jesus from the dead and have given Him all authority as Saviour and Lord. Pour out your Spirit on us, that we might gladly spend and be spent in sharing the love of Christ to the ends of the earth. For your glory's sake. Amen.

FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION:

- How is the resurrection of Jesus impacting your priorities?
- Where does disciple-making feature in your thinking and lifestyle?
- How well is our church programme suited to disciple-making? What are its strengths and weaknesses? What changes should we consider making?