

“The Disciples”

June 11, 2017

Text: Matthew 28:16-20

Island Heights UMC, Island Heights, NJ

Trinity Sunday

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

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."

Some Doubt

Today's short passage ends the Gospel of Matthew and takes place on a mountain in the northern region of Galilee. How did we arrive once more on a mountain, a place so common for Jesus and his disciples?

It was the day of resurrection and Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were instructed first by angels at the tomb and then directed by Jesus—the resurrected Jesus—who they encountered on the road. “Go,” Jesus says, “*tell the disciples to meet me at the mountain in Galilee.*” It must have been a spot known by all of them. This is where Jesus directs them.

And when the disciples see Jesus, they worship him, but some of them also doubt. Only eleven disciples are on the mountain. One is gone. Tragically, Judas is no longer part of the community, casting a dark cloud over the day and perhaps causing some of the nagging doubt in their minds.

The Re-Centering of Authority

Jesus must sense this doubt as his revelation unfolds. His response announces his position in the grand design of all that is: “*All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me.*”

With his death and resurrection now complete, this is the new reality of Jesus Christ.

Caesar is no longer at the center of the universe. No, not Caesar, not any government nor any military force, nor any economic system. The news is world-changing for those earliest disciples, and just as eye-opening for us: Authority over all creation is embodied in Jesus the Christ. Let this thought sink in. While all forms of authority seem to provide the orderly framework of our lives, true authority rests at the center of all things in the person of Jesus.

It is upon this new reality the Church will be built, and the world transformed. And this is what will form a community of discipleship in which teachers and students of the faith will grow.

Baptism

We are all on a journey. All of us are learning. We witness it today with our Sunday school promotions. Next week is Confirmation Sunday, and six of our youths will confirm and profess their faith. Every Thursday morning twenty or so people meet in Fellowship Hall for Bible study. The fact is we are *all* life-long learners. Like the attenders of our Saturday evening SacredSpace service who are learning about contemplative, meditative Christian worship; like the choir who continues to sharpen their theology through music; like each of you when, on your own time, opens the Bible and looks into the holy Scriptures, absorbing and digesting what you read, and considering how it applies to your everyday living. We are all students and teachers of the faith. And the journey all begins with baptism. Our initiation into the community of faith. Jesus says, *“Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”*

Today the journey begins for Lilianna. And now, through baptism, the mark of a Christian is on her and expressed in the name of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In our own small way, which will make a world of difference in her life, we have obeyed Jesus’s instruction.

Remember that over time, students become like their teachers. In all aspects of life, modeled behavior is how we learn. We imitate our teachers. For the sake of Lilianna, never forget this.

Whenever we consider what we will do in any situation, do we not at some level think of what our teacher, our parent, our mentor would do in the same situation? And while it has become a bit corny to even say it, don’t we still ask ourselves, “What would Jesus do?” Along with many other things, Jesus is a teacher. His followers called him Rabbi. And through the Holy Spirit, he continues to instruct us.

God is forever forming and shaping a community of discipleship, a community where there’s a Teacher to guide us, and a space for us to learn.

Go!

But then Jesus says, *“Go.”* Sometimes, the instructions are very clear. The directions are easily understood. *“Go. Make disciples of all nations,”* he says, *“baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”*

Disciples make more disciples, and disciples practice disciplines. Yes, we need a place to learn and a Master to teach us; we are in a community of discipleship, where we have much to learn from each other. But what we learn can never be held down in mere theory; it must be practically applied to our immediate everyday circumstances.

We must go!

Reaching today’s world with the good news of Jesus Christ to cause curiosity and a desire to come and see what it’s all about is what we will be doing. Making disciples in

the 21st century will not be what it used to be. We are in a rapidly changing world and must adapt and be resilient or lose the Church's voice. But we are never alone.

Empowered and United

This is why we go with God, why we go with Jesus, and why we go with the Holy Spirit. The promise from Jesus is that he will be with his disciples to the end of the age. To the end of their age, to the end of our age, to the end of all ages. The good news is Jesus is with us all the way. In our study of the Holy Spirit over the last several weeks we know we are going nowhere without the presence of God in our lives, in our families and in our communities. We know that a sustaining community is one that reflects the loving community of the Trinity. This is how we are all connected, to each other, and to God. This is how we are empowered and united.

We are baptized with a new kind of power, and a new kind of authority. And we are not alone. We carry the mark of Christ who promise to be with us *"until the end of the age."* As recipients of this gift, we respond by teaching others new to the faith.

We follow the mission of the United Methodist Church by making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. And the local church remains the primary setting for being equipped to make new disciples. Which is why it remains vitally important for the Church to be united in its effort. When Gail read from Paul's letter to the Corinthians she said,

"Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you."

If we will continue to be a community of discipleship, where all we learn is immediately applied to the contexts of our lives, and everything can be transferred to the next generation of new disciples, we must be at peace with each other. We must be united especially when we will be forced to be flexible and deliver the good news in new and innovative ways that stretch our understandings, test our traditions, and dare us to engage the new world emerging all around us.

Some Final Thoughts to Consider

So, can God still work through the general Church?

Can the Holy Spirit still move through the United Methodist Church? A church once famously known for its ability to make new disciples as new towns were established when the country was young and moving westward.

Can the kind of love as demonstrated through the sacrificing life of Jesus still be manifested in a place like Island Heights United Church?

My belief is yes, or else all is for nothing.

Will we teach our new disciples the ways of God? Will the young ones here today have a lasting memory of the wisdom poured into them in this place? The answer must be yes, or else we will be responsible for a lost generation.

And will we remain open and teachable, regardless of how long we have been at this, and take responsibility for our own never-ending learning in this journey of faith? The answer can only be yes if we still have breath to draw and a mission to accomplish.

May God bless us by continuing to form and shape our community of discipleship, in which we will always reflect the love that emanates from the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.