



2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Easter 11/04/21  
Matthew 28:16-20  
The risen Jesus sends His  
disciples out to make disciples

### **Reflection [1] Some disciples doubted**

When they eleven saw Jesus they worshipped Him but some doubted. Don't you just love the way the Gospels tell it like it is. "Some doubted". We might expect that on seeing Jesus alive again the disciples were changed into ecstatic worshippers. In John, Thomas is so doubting it becomes his name. Luke tells us that the Eleven did not believe the women when they said Jesus had risen, 'because their words seemed to them like non-sense'. Here Matthew tells us that some were still doubting even when, as Jesus instructed, they'd made the journey to Galilee to meet Him.

Some think Matthew is referring to some of the Eleven as doubters, others to some disciples who were there with the Eleven. Either way the word 'doubted' does not point to dis-belief but to a hesitation of acceptance. As the Gospels often show us Jesus' disciples had difficulty coping with His predictions that He would be put to death and after three days rise from the dead. They had seen the crucifixion. They could grasp that. It meant death. The end of hope. It made a despair in them that acted as a block. They could see Jesus. He seemed like He had been before; yet He was also different. So some hesitated.

That's often our reality. We too can hesitate, when it comes to faith in Jesus. Morden in his book on Discipleship, helpfully points out, Jesus doesn't challenge the doubters. Where they hesitate He accepts, affirms and commissions. They and us with all our own hesitations about speaking to others are trusted by Jesus to make disciples of others.

Jesus doesn't look for us to make disciples of everyone we meet. He didn't. He's authorising us to have a go. And when we do have a go and find that difficult, worry-some and full of all sorts of fears, regrets and doubts over what we said or didn't say we are not failing Him, but following Him.

It's a way we take up our cross, it's a way we are being true to being His disciple, it's a way we show we really love Him. For in our love we will have a go at doing what we would never ever otherwise attempt.

## Reflection [2] What is Jesus saying to us?

Imagine this is a bible study. And the leader asks us: what is Jesus saying to us in this passage, what would you say? Perhaps you'd be like me? You'd read the passage and think, it's obvious, Jesus is telling us to go and make disciples, baptise them and teach them to obey what Jesus taught us. And you might wonder: is there something more I'm supposed to see, because I don't see it. And so you don't say anything for fear of not saying the right thing, to the embarrassment of yourself and the disappointment of the leader.

Of course there are always depths to be discovered in the Bible but the Bible was not written to be a study book for PhD students. It was written to tell us about God and people and what pleases God or does not please Him. It was written to be a guide to our relationship with Him and other people. In being that it sometimes simply says: as my people, do this. Go and make disciples is a straightforward *do this* state-ment. But when God says do this, He doesn't leave us to get on with it by ourselves. He is the God who is with us.

When we think of the disciples meeting the risen Jesus we may well expect Him as He does in Luke and John and Acts to mention the Holy Spirit. But He doesn't do that here. If this were a Bible study we might get so stuck on that we don't notice what Jesus does say. Which is why bible study leaders ask us: what is Jesus saying here?

He says two things which give a context for our disciple-making. Firstly He gives us his personal and creation deep assurance that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him. He is in charge. There is no limit to His authority. It's not some authority over some aspects of our lives. It's not complete authority over some parts of the world but not of others, so Europe say is covered but not China. He has all authority everywhere forever in heaven and on earth.

His authority is our authorisation to make disciples. That's a thing to remember when people challenge our discipleship going. We are the obedient servants of Christ's authority.

Secondly Jesus is not an absentee lord. He is Emmanuel, God with us. Whatever time we live in; whatever place we dwell; whatever action we do; whatever way we are Jesus is with us. A truth that should very possibly be more upfront in our lives than perhaps we let it be. If we really recognised that Jesus is with us in all our living would we so readily live in ways that do not please Him; or be so unaware of our need for confession and repentance?

It's in the context of His unlimited authority and unbounded presence that Jesus

commands us to make disciples. From His point of view it's not an option. Neither is it a request, in the way of Sargeant Wilson in Dad's army: I say would you awfully mind forming a line. Neither is it a special activity. It's not 'go' as in the way of going for a job interview or going to visit the doctor. The word 'go' is the simple expression of our daily living, as you shop, work, and play, so we disciple.

You will surely notice that very few of us do that. We are doubtful of Jesus' authority. We have a tendency to confine His presence with us to when we're being religious. We have re-constructed making disciples, from our ordinary way of being for all of us into an extra-ordinary special task for just some of us. We have become like birds who could once fly but have had their flight feathers pulled and now think that flying is only for the gifted, the daring or the crazy.

Jesus calls us to make disciples of all peoples, baptising them in the name of the Trinity and teaching them to obey what He commanded. Disciples are not baptised converts. Disciples are not people who claim to be saved but never do what Jesus says. Disciples are the baptised who trusting in Christ seek to do what He commands.

God gives some Christians the gift of evangelism, but He calls every disciple to be a disciple-maker. Evangelists make converts, but converts need church disciples to make them into disciples.

As flowers offer scent or babies generate joy so Christians disciple disciples – it's meant to be the fruit of our Christ-centred obedience. We don't need to be special people or give the work over to special people we just need to be disciples. Amen.

## Reflection [3] Be encouraged

When we see discipleship as a special activity or task to do, we can easily burden ourselves with a sense of failure and guilt when we don't do it.

But let's consider that Jesus knows we will struggle to be disciplers of disciples. And He knows that even as He commissions us to make disciples. Such is the trust He places in us. Such is the encouragement He gives us. He doesn't ask us to do what we cannot do. As I said earlier when God says do this, He doesn't leave us to get on with it by ourselves. Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us. He is our enabler of what He calls us to be and do.

As Paul tells us in Philippians 2, we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, even as he also tells us for it is God who works in us to will and to act for His good purpose.

Yet how are we to go discipling others?

Our discipleship of others begins with our own discipling. We should have been taught to do all that Jesus commands us, But were we? It's very possible that we were not. So they may be a deficit in our lives that we need to address.

Growing in our discipleship can be encouraged by books and teaching but it's less a process of education than an apprenticeship, learning in being with others as they are and do what we are called to be and do. Our discipleship is meant to be the fruit of a long line of discipling disciples. A line that goes back all the way to Jesus Himself, who as Paul in Philippians tells us was obedient even to death.

Perhaps the best analogy is that of parenting. Most parents don't teach their children how to cook by giving them special cookery lessons but by engaging them in cooking their meals together. Neither do parents teach gardening by giving their children an encyclopaedia of flowers and trees to learn with follow up testing, but by engaging them in the activity of gardening. And what makes that work is their love for each other and the joy shared in working together.

Discipling is most effectively taught through a trust relation-ship. Every newly baptised person needs the discipling presence of a spiritual parent, some one who can wisely model Christ's obedience to them.

At the moment we're looking at Paul's letter to the Philippians in our Life Group. This is not a Bible study delving into the depths of scripture. It's an insight into Christian apprenticeship.

Paul writing in 2:12 refers to the Philippian church as "Dear friends" who have "always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence." Isn't that what all parents want their children to be like, people who do the right thing even when their parents are not present. And in Philippians 3 Paul encourages them all to "Join with the others in following my example, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you." And Paul refers to Timothy as one who has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with Paul in the work of the gospel.

Parents teach their children and disciples disciple disciples by being models of life. Children are most eager learners of what they see their parents do. Disciples are just the same.

When Jesus tells us to obey what He has commanded, He is telling us that He is our pattern, our model for life. Our attitudes to others are to be the same as His. We are to look out for His interests not our own. We are to know Him, to live now as citizens of heaven, not focusing our minds on earthly things.

So when we want to be disciplers of others the question is not: is there a training course I can go on that will teach me how to disciple others?

but rather this:

the things that Jesus command us to obey,

Am I doing them?

Is my life making a Christian pattern of obedience to Jesus?

How can I grow in doing so?

Of course none of us can make anyone else a disciple unless we first connect with them. That's why Jesus sends us out. To make connections by seeing the need in people's lives for Jesus; to show them how Jesus answered our own needs, to offer a new life modelled on obedience to Jesus.

What might this be like? It might contain many things but it will always model prayer that trusts in Christ to change situations and lives.

it will always model scripture reading, that seeks to know God and Jesus, for how else can we model Him to others?

it will always model a daily trust in Jesus, a willingness to stand firm in Him even when your family, your friends, your world opposes you.

It will always model a faith expressed in love for others. Not an easy love that makes love a loose word for not disturbing other people's lives, or for letting ourselves off the pain of rejection, or for denying the Lordship of Jesus in tolerance of a multitude of faiths. But love for Jesus is as Paul puts it in Philippians a desire to want to know Christ and the power of the resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in death, and in resurrection from the dead.

It's in prayer, and trust, faith and love all expressing our obedience to what Christ has commanded us that we grow as disciples and go in making disciples. It's not an easy growing, but I believe it is happening. And as we grow in our discipleship so we will become disciples the Lord will bless with sending us those He wants us to disciple. And as parents, to use the old phrase, beget children who beget their own children, so our growing discipleship will grow disciples who grow disciples – in our obedience we generate the virtuous cycle of the Kingdom Good News.

Praise to Christ our Lord.

Amen.