

Gospel Lesson**Matthew 28:16-20****Sermon****Eleven****AJ Mealor**

I don't know how many of you remember, or who was here back in March when I used this passage a video I made announcing our new twice a month evening worship service RefleXions. IN the video I focused on Christ sending out his disciples into the world to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to all, and while I still believe that was a great interpretation of this text, especially for the way that it was being used, a missed a few glaring that the points that the text makes about who Jesus is talking to.

The text says in verse seventeen that when the disciples, who were now eleven, pointing out and reminding us of Judas' betrayal, when they saw Jesus they worshiped him; but not only did they worship him, some doubted. Are we surprised by the disciples' response? Yes? No? A little bit? They are responding no differently than any other time in Matthew's gospel. In chapter 14 Jesus walks on water and before they worship him they were terrified of him until he spoke, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." A few verses prior to our text this morning in verse nine of chapter 28 it says that Jesus spoke to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary and they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." Once again in Matthew's gospel, we find that not only did Christ's followers worship him, but they feared him as well. And here when the eleven disciples see him, they worship him, but some doubted.

This duality of emotions is nothing new for the disciples, and I'm sure Christ is not surprised by their reaction either; I mean he was just raised from the dead. This idea of a duality of emotions is no different from us today and the way we look at Jesus. Worshiping, and doubting; doubting and worshiping. For the past couple of Sundays we have been affirming our faith using the Apostles' Creed. I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. But some days we believe more than on others. I believe in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord who has not only crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. Moreover, "I believe in the risen Christ, who can be trusted to bring in the kingdom of mercy and peace, where every tear will be dried and death and pain will be no more". But sometimes we wonder when and where and how.

This was the case for the disciples, it was the case Matthew's church that he is writing for, it is the case for the church of the world today, and it is the case for our 126-member church here in Decatur, Georgia. Sure the circumstances have changed but the emotions have not. We worship but we doubt, we are fearful but we are joyful. We worship on Sunday mornings when we hear the word proclaimed by Joel, and sing the wonderful hymns selected by James and sung by the choir, we worship. But we also doubt. When something bad happens to a family member, or to ourselves, we ask where is God right now. We say things like, "If God was real God wouldn't let this happen to me." We doubt when tragedies occur such as the recent earthquakes in China that killed thousands, the cyclone that hit Burma and has left

millions homeless, and their dictator is not allowing foreign aid into his country to assist his people. We get down on our knees and ask God where he is in all of this. If you are truly Emmanuel, Lord with us, then why do these atrocities occur? We are joyful at the birth of a new baby and what the possibilities for a child hold for the family and the community around him or her. We may even be joyful when one of our loved ones passes because of the pain that they have had to endure in this life, but we also fear for when our time comes.

There is a constant pull between these emotions every day that we live, these emotions are felt not just by the weak of us, they are felt by the most pious of us as well. And the pastor is not free from these emotions either. No one is exempt for these emotions, we have been made this way. We are humans, and it is okay to doubt and to fear. But the good news of this text is not found in our relationship with the disciples or Matthew's church. It is not found in the line they worshiped him, and some doubted. It is found where Jesus gives these same worshipers and doubters, the same ones who are both fearful and joyful, the Great commission.

Christ does not give his Great Commission to a group of people who are solely worshipers or joyful. He gives it to his disciples who also doubt and are fearful of what is to come to next. He is addressing those are constantly asking questions either wanting to know more, or asking questions because they do not understand and want Jesus to slow down and explain it again or in another way. These are people just like you and I and everyone else in this world. Constantly asking Jesus why he did this and that, or why do you have to die? Christ does not give his authority and power over people like him, he gives his power and authority to people like us. Those who worship him, yet doubt, and he commissions them to, "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."

Christ has given the disciples the duty of going out and spreading the word of God, all that power to eleven people. I sure they were happy, they were going to go do some evangelizing right then. But I'm wondering when one of them said woah, woah, woah. We've got how many, one, two three four five...eleven. We've got eleven guys here, enough for a football team, and we're suppose to do what? The eleven of us are suppose to go around the world making disciples of others, you've got all this authority and power and you're sending just eleven right? Ok, alright, I'm just making sure. I'm guessing that would be like Christ coming today and telling us to do the same thing throughout Georgia, all I can say is at least we would eleven. Eleven men charged with going through the world and making disciples of others, and teaching what Christ had taught them. Yes, I am sure they doubted for at least a few minutes, just as we would.

But Christ also said this in verse 20, "And remember I am with you always to the end of the age." Christ was not just going to leave the disciples, we continued to be with them as he continues to be with us today as we spread the good news of Jesus Christ throughout the community, making disciples of others, and teaching what Christ taught his disciples. Just as Christ did leave his disciples by themselves he also will not leave us. When we worship and

are joyful Christ is with us. When we doubt and are fearful Christ is there. We sometimes ask for God's presence in our lives, but God is already there for us, we just need to have the ability to listen.

God will not abandon us. God will remain with us every moment of each and every one of our lives. That is who God is, that is the blessed assurance that is found in Jesus Christ. No one and no thing can guarantee that except for God. When we doubt which road to follow Christ will be there. Christ did not just leave his disciples after giving them the great commission. If he had they would have been so overwhelmed, their ministry would not have gotten off the ground. But it is in the last sentence that calmed their hearts, and moved them to spread the teachings of Christ throughout the land. And remember I am with you always, to the end of the age. Until He comes again, Christ is with us. Do not be overwhelmed by the task of spreading the good news, because it is not only our load to bear, if it were we could not do it, and we cannot do it alone. Christ is ever present in our daily lives and in the ministries of this church. If he wasn't then yesterday was just a carnival by a community social group, and it wasn't.

In closing I will read the scripture again. Think about where you are in your life. Have you been holding back because of fear or doubt? It is okay, Christ's message was for people just like us. Let us listen again for the word of the Lord. Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worship 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." Christ is with us always, until he comes again. I look forward to seeing everyone tonight at RefleXions where we will talk about the other three verses in this passage, and what does it mean for our church to make disciples, baptize, and teach others about Jesus Christ.