ARE YOU UP TO THE CHALLENGE?
MATTHEW 28:16-20
SERMON

After the women discovered the empty tomb on Easter morning they went and told the disciples about what happened. They told the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead and wanted to meet them in Galilee. In our text this morning, we observe that the disciples made it to Galilee, just as Jesus instructed them.

But Matthew also tells us about a conspiracy that developed between the guards of Jesus’ tomb and the Jewish religious leaders. The leaders, looking for a way to explain Jesus’ miraculous resurrection, bribed the guards to say that Jesus’ body had been stolen from the tomb while they were guarding the tomb. Matthew summarizes this conspiracy by writing, “and this story has been spread among the Jews to this day”. Thus, the resurrection of Jesus had opponents from day one! Of course, the resurrection has its opponents today. But it also has many believers.

The Lord wants those of us who believe to **share the good news of Jesus with unbelievers so they will become Jesus’ disciples**. If you turn your bulletins to the middle section you will see that this is the point of the message this morning. **Share the good news of Jesus with unbelievers so they will become Jesus’ disciples**. In a few moments we’ll examine Jesus’ explicit instructions in vs.19-20 on sharing the good news of Jesus. But first, let’s look at Vs.16 After reporting on the conspiracy theory Matthew informs us that the remaining 11 disciples went to Galilee, to the very mountain Jesus had told them to go, and that he would meet them at that place. We don’t know the exact mountain referred to in the passage. Perhaps it was the same mountain on which Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount. At this point, the disciples had not replaced the traitor Judas, so there were only 11 disciples. As one commentator has written, “the number 11 limps, it’s not a perfect Biblical number like 12”. Remember, there were 12 tribes of Israel and 12 disciples.

Jesus doesn’t expect his disciples to be perfect. This is true today as well. God sends imperfect people, people like you and me to engage in divine work. Isn’t it amazing that God entrusts divine work to sinful, imperfect people like us? I know that the only reason the church has survived 2,000 years is that God’s behind it all! The Lord empowers and guides the church! Vs.17 I love this verse, for its honesty and simplicity! Note that Matthew mentions the disciples seeing Jesus rather casually. He doesn’t dwell on what Jesus’ resurrected body looked like. Matthew mentions the fact that the disciples worshipped Jesus and this indicates that they viewed Jesus as the Son of God, as a divine being, not simply as a rabbi. Then, Matthew includes this rather cryptic comment, **“but some doubted”**. How can the disciples worship someone they doubted? Matthew teaches us something very important: discipleship, following Jesus includes living in a tension between faith and doubt. We struggle to believe and trust while sometimes questioning and doubting. Remember the father of the boy who struggled with convulsions in Mark 9? He told Jesus in a very candid way, “I do believe but help me in my unbelief!” Matthew helps us understand that doubt should not be repressed or feared but accepted as part of the life of discipleship. Be wary of any Christian teacher or pastor who tells you that it’s a sin to doubt! Vs.18 Jesus begins a series of three inclusive statements. He claims “all authority” in this verse. In vs. 19 he commands us to go to **all nations**. In vs.20 he commands us to teach disciples to **obey everything** I have commanded you. Let’s consider Jesus claim to possess “all authority”. Jesus means that he has executive power. He’s King of Kings and Lord of Lords! God the Father
gave Jesus this incredible authority. His authority and power extends from heaven to earth. Since Jesus has been given this wide-ranging, awesome power, He commands us, his followers to do the following:

1. **Move out and disciple all people groups.** Look in the beginning of the next verse: vs.19a which begins with “therefore”. In my Logic class in college we learned that one uses this word, “therefore” when making a concluding or summary statement based on information that has already been provided. It’s as if Jesus has told his disciples, “OK, I’ve lived with you for 3 years, teaching, healing, correcting, challenging you, giving you commands, dying for you on the cross, being raised for you and based on all that I’ve taught you and all I’ve done for you and others, here’s what I want you to do for me”.

   Jesus commands his 11 disciples to go and make disciples of all nations. The command “to go” really means, **“get moving!”** Get moving!!

   A college choir was all set to present its package of music in a large church. The program of sacred music was to be carried live by a local radio station. When everything appeared to be ready, the announcer made his final introduction and waited for the choir director to begin. One of the tenors wasn’t ready, however, so the elderly leader refused to raise his baton. All this time, nothing but silence was being broadcast over the radio.

   Growing very nervous, the announcer, forgetting that his microphone was still on and that he could be heard in the church and on the radio, said, “Get with it, you old goat!”

   Later in the week, the radio station got a letter from one of its listeners, a man who had tuned into listen to the music from the comfort of his easy chair. When he heard, “Get with it, you old goat!” he took the message personally! He had been doing nothing to further God’s work and this startling message convicted him and got him going again!

   I love that story! We never know how God will speak to us!! The command Jesus gave his disciples on the mountain in Galilee applies to us today. **Jesus commands us to get moving and make disciples!** Perhaps you need to hear and respond to that word today, “Get with it, you old goat!”

   Jesus commanded us to “make disciples”. He didn’t say, “win converts”. A disciple is a learner, a student. The word in the original for “disciple” pictures students sitting around a teacher, learning from that teacher. Jesus wants believers interested in learning about him and then moving out to share with others.

   We must take Jesus’ message of salvation to all nations, literally to all “people groups”. Jesus’ command to go to all people groups connects with God’s blessing of Abraham in **Genesis 12:2-3:** “And I will make you of you a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed”.

   We must make disciples of people in diverse people groups. But we face an enormous challenge: thousands of diverse people groups live in our world with different languages, customs, traditions, and culture.

   Since Jesus’ time many, many people groups have received the gospel. But, thousands of people groups exist today who have never heard the gospel of Christ. We’re reminded of that fact each year when we pray for Muslims during Ramadan, their holy month of fasting. Frontiers Missions, a mission group targeting Muslims, a group we support in prayer and with our finances, publishes a prayer booklet which provides helpful information about various people groups which are predominantly Muslim. Quite a large number of these groups have absolutely
no Christian presence in their population. This means that in order for them to hear the gospel, someone or some people from another people group must move cross-culturally to communicate the gospel to them.

This command to move out and make disciples also applies to us on a more intimate and personal level. Jesus wants you and me to reach out to friends, family members, neighbors, colleagues at work and make disciples of these people! Have you ever made a disciple for Jesus? It begins with prayer, praying for the person, praying for opportunities to share the good news with that person. Be aware of people in your circle of friends, family and work open to change, open to hearing the good news of salvation! Pray for them and pray for opportunities to share with them and then do it!

Besides communicating the gospel and seeking to make disciples, we must:

2. **Baptize new believers and draw them to the church. vs.19b-** Jesus commands us to baptize new believers in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

   Baptism involves much more than simply getting wet in a worship service! It’s much more than a person admitting that they’ve sinned and want to die to their sin and live for God. It’s more than a person identifying with Jesus Christ or wanting to have their children identified with Jesus.

   When we receive the sacrament of baptism, we receive the grace of God in a special way. God pours out his Spirit upon us! In a mysterious and unseen yet powerful way God blesses us. He pours out grace upon us when we receive the sacrament of baptism.

   In baptism we see and experience the grace of God extended to us! God’s presence and power flow through the baptismal waters in an unseen and mysterious way.

   Jesus commanded us to baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The phrase, “in the name of” comes from the world of banking and means literally, “to the account of” or “in the possession of”. Thus, when we baptize in the name of the triune God we place the person in the account of or possession of God. Baptized believers come under new management! No longer do baptized believers belong to themselves but to the One who gave his life for them.

   Baptism connects people with the church because the sacraments were given to the church. When Jesus celebrated the Lord’s Supper he did so with his disciples. When Jesus commanded the disciples to baptize he commanded the group, the fellowship of his followers to baptize. They weren’t sent out individually.

   Thus, we don’t celebrate the sacraments individually. We can worship, pray, read the scriptures, fast, we can participate in many spiritual disciplines individually but we reserve the sacraments for the church, for the corporate celebration.

   The command to baptize involves getting new believers connected to the church. It’s possible to be a true believer in Christ and not be connected with a local church. But to grow in our faith, to be a real disciple or learner involves connecting with a local body of believers.

   Many years ago a pastor paid a visit to a man who had stopped attending worship services. The man had a nice fire going in his fireplace. The pastor walked over to the fireplace without saying a word, picked up a wrought iron poker, found an ember in the fire and separated it from the other embers. Then, he walked over to a chair and sat down still not saying anything. The two men stared at the fire and didn’t talk. After 20 minutes or so, the ember that had been separated from the others gradually went out. The man looked at the pastor and said, “OK, Pastor you’ve made your point. I’ll be back in worship this Sunday!”
I’ve encountered Christians who tell me that they don’t attend church because of a bad experience they had at one time with a church. I respond, “Have you stopped going out to eat?” They look at me quizzically. I continue, “I’m sure you’ve had a bad experience eating out in a restaurant. Has that led you to stop eating out?” Probably not!

I’ve told you before about the “I love Jesus but hate the church” movement. Jesus would never, ever endorse such a distorted movement!! Jesus loves his church!

Believers need the church for support, growth, encouragement, accountability and most importantly, because our Lord loves the church so much he called it his bride. Jesus hasn’t given up on the church and neither should we! Jesus loves the church and so should we. There’s a final command Jesus gives:

3. **Teach believers to obey all of Jesus’ commands.**

Vs.20 Jesus commanded us to teach **obedience to all his commands.** Jesus told us the greatest commandment was to **“love the Lord your God with all of your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind... And the second is like it: love your neighbor as yourself”.** (Matt 22:37-39) We can read a compilation of Jesus’ commands in his Sermon on the Mount.

Teaching obedience to Jesus’ commands involves setting a good example of obeying the commands ourselves. A student pays more attention to a teacher he or she respects. We earn respect by obeying, by following the very commands we teach others to obey.

I had a fabulous 6th grade teacher in elementary school, Mr. Neil Smith. He loved exercise and he loved nature! Through his own example and words he taught us to love exercise and nature too. One weekend parents from our class drove us north to the Bay area. We attended a gymnastics meet between Cal and Stanford. The next day our entire class ran over the Golden Gate Bridge! We camped at Mt. Diablo State Park.

Mr. Smith taught us about Yosemite and its amazing natural beauty. For three months we studied Yosemite. We studied its geography, we made graphs and maps, etc. We studied Yosemite thoroughly! Mr. Smith knew the great photographer Ansel Adams and one day he invited Ansel Adams to come into our class and share his photographs of Yosemite with us. Then, in May some parents drove us to Yosemite and we spent a whole week hiking and camping on the John Muir trail. We had a wonderful time and I have never forgotten that experience. Mr. Smith made my 6th grade year, a very positive and memorable year. He walked his talk! So, to teach others we must live the truth ourselves. Strive to live a truly Christian life!

Finally, Jesus provides an amazing promise in vs.20b. Jesus promises to be with us **“to the very end of the age”**. The phrase **“I am”** literally is translated, “I, myself”. It’s emphatic. Jesus tells us that he, he will be with us! The verb **“ I am”** is in the present tense, not the future tense. This means he’s with us now! The word, **“always”** an adverb, means very single day of our lives, for every generation until the end of the age.

This means that Jesus helps us fulfill the commands he’s given us. He has not left us to ourselves, rather Jesus lives within us by his Holy Spirit inspiring, guiding and directing the work to which he has called us. That’s good news!

As I close this morning, think of someone in your life who needs Jesus. Someone in your extended family, someone at work, a friend at school? Let’s close with a prayer for that person or people you know who need Jesus. Seize any opportunity the Lord gives you to share the good news with the person or people. Let us pray.