

SENT ONES**MATTHEW 28:16 – 20***by Elaine Poproski*

The story of our faith doesn't begin at Matthew 28. It doesn't even begin at Matthew 1. The story of our faith begins *in the beginning*.

In the beginning there was nothing – a dark and formless void. In that nothing, God was. Into that nothing, God spoke – God breathed – and the nothing became life. It became stars and planets and moons; it became forests and oceans and deserts; it became birds and fish and animals of all sizes and shapes; it became people.

And it was good. It was very good.

But then sin – an insidious infection – death and darkness – slipped its way into the good that God had made. It slithered and squirmed – God's enemy, set to destroy everything good – everything God loved.

And so God has been at work to heal all that was made – to rid the world – all creation – of its infection – to renew life – to bring light. But it's not a simple task. In John 3:19 we read that people loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

And so, God's work to bring healing – to bring restoration – began with one person and that person's family out of whom God built a people – a people set apart to be God's people. They were to be light to the nations – hope amidst despair – life in the face of death.

Out of this people – this light to the nations – the light of the world was born – a child named Immanuel, which means God-with-us.

This child grew up. He invited men and women to follow him as he traversed the land of his people, teaching about God and about God's kingdom, demonstrating life as God intended. He reminded them what it meant to be light to the nations – to embody God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. But there were those who preferred the dark. They sought to destroy – to annihilate the Light of the World. They killed him. They saw him buried. They thought they had won. But the darkness did not – cannot – overcome the light. The light burst forth from the tomb. Death was defeated.

And yet...

The world was still not rid of that insidious infection called sin. The world and its people were still not fully restored to God. But it had begun. God's kingdom had come.

Jesus invited his followers – his disciples – to meet him one last time, before returning for good to the Father's side. He had some final words – some final direction to offer. He had a mission for them – a mission to continue his work – to continue God's work – to declare and to demonstrate that God's kingdom had come. We call it *The Great Commission*. It was meant for those first disciples, but it's also for us. This is what happened (it's in Matthew 28:16 – 20):

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.

There's something really great about this. When they saw him, they worshiped him. These Jewish men, who knew the commandments backward and forward, who knew God's repeated imperative to worship no other gods beside him, worshiped Jesus.

But some doubted.

I don't know what it is about that little phrase that I like so much. It's written almost like a throw-away line. Like Matthew just mentions it in passing and it's no big deal. But some doubted. They worshiped him, but some doubted. They doubted, but even in the midst of that doubt they worshiped. I think what I like about this is that there was no expectation of perfection on the disciples' part. It's possible to be Jesus' disciple and still have some doubt. I find that really hopeful. I mean, do any of us have perfect faith? Aren't there days, or moments, when we find ourselves wondering...

It's said that Martin Luther, that great reformer of the sixteenth century, was plagued by doubt. But he worshiped.

Mother Teresa, that 20th century saint whose day-to-day life was itself an act of worship, suffered profound doubt. But she worshiped.

Do you doubt? You're not alone. Disciples who knew Jesus in the flesh, who had met him in the flesh after his resurrection, who stood with him on the mountain in Galilee, doubted. But they worshiped. Even in their doubt, they worshiped. There's something profoundly hopeful about that. There's something profoundly encouraging about that. We don't have to be perfect – we don't have to have it all together – before we come before God. We can come with our doubt.

They worshiped him, but some doubted...

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

This is the mission. This is what it means to be Jesus' disciples after Jesus' resurrection. To be Jesus' disciple is to be sent; it's to go and make more disciples – more followers of Jesus – more people committed to God's kingdom and God's ways.

It sounds really straightforward, doesn't it? Go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them. But if it really were that straightforward, we'd all be doing it, wouldn't we? I mean, if we've decided to be Jesus' disciples, we must think it's a good thing – an important thing. Why wouldn't we go out and make disciples?

I think, maybe, we don't actually know what it means to go out and make disciples. I think we maybe define it too narrowly – like it's about convincing people Jesus died for their sins – their misdeeds – and if they just confess them to Jesus, he'll forgive them and they'll be spared the horrors of hell. But this isn't what discipleship is.

I mean, yes, it's about the truth that in Jesus' death and resurrection, we have been freed from sin – we've been forgiven. But that's not the whole story. Jesus isn't, and never was, just some kind of magical get-out-of-jail free card. Jesus has always cared deeply about us as individual, unique people, but what he did and what it means to be his disciple is so much bigger than me or you; to be a disciple is so much more than just me and my salvation and my future assured.

What Jesus did and what it means to be his disciple is nothing short of the restoration of all creation to right relationship with God. It's about people, but it's also about the birds and the fish and the animals of all sizes. It's about the forests and oceans and deserts. It's about the stars and planets and moons. It's everything – everything restored – healed – freed from that insidious sin-infection. It's about God's kingdom come in full. It's about the light of the world that the darkness could not and cannot and will never put out.

To go out and make disciples of all the nations is to go out and invite people into God's kingdom. It's to go out and demonstrate, like Jesus demonstrated in his life, what God's kingdom is like. It's to go out and live publicly like God's kingdom has already come. It's to go out into the darkness and shine, even knowing that as we do, the darkness will try to snuff us out.

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

We go out like Jesus went out. We go out to serve, not to be served. We go out to love, not just our friends, but our enemies. There's a great prayer attributed to a 13th century monk we know as St. Francis of Assisi. It expresses beautifully what it means to be a disciple sent by Jesus. This is the prayer:

Lord, make me a channel of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may never seek so much to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

This is what it means to be Jesus' disciple. This is what it means to be sent to make disciples of all the nations. I wonder, if we prayed this prayer every morning, what kind of an impact might that have on our ability – on our willingness even – to go as we've been sent.

Let's take a few minutes with his prayer. I have a version that was put to music back in the 1940s. As you listen, maybe consider if you're able to make St. Francis' prayer your prayer.

[*Play the song.*](#)ⁱ

You know, sometimes we forget that Jesus didn't send us out alone. He sent us with each other. But even more importantly, he sent us with his Spirit. That's how this gospel of Matthew ends: *And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*

I heard someone say that this is why we call this the Great Commission instead of just the Great Mission. It's a Co-Mission. We go in partnership with Jesus. We go with the Holy Spirit.

Jesus may have sent us to all the nations, but he didn't send us anywhere he isn't already present. God is already at work; his kingdom is already there; we go out to what is already being done. The only question is this: what is our response to Jesus' great commission? Will we go as we've been sent?

ⁱ Angelina. "Prayer of St. Francis." *Songs of the Faithful*, 2004.