

+ Matthew 28:16-20 + Down and Doubting + Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY +
+ 1st Sunday after Pentecost: Holy Trinity + 11 June 2017 +

What was Jesus thinking? After all his disciples had done, after all the ways they had failed him, after all that he endured when they failed him, after all of that, he still goes through with it. The Lord, who had risen from the dead just weeks before, did something none of us would probably ever do. He gave his disciples a big responsibility. Think about that for a moment. If someone has failed you not just once, but repeatedly abandoning you in your time of need, failing to trust you even though you've kept every promise to them, publicly disowning and even betraying you, would they be the first one you'd go to if you need to entrust a big responsibility to someone?

...But that's what Jesus did. What was Jesus thinking? As that small group of disciples went "**where Jesus had directed them,**" they looked pretty rough. Years before, some had been fishermen. One had worked for the Roman IRS. Another had been a religious zealot. One was a doubt-filled twin brother, while a couple others were rather skeptical. The rest were common, ordinary men. Three years earlier, they weren't impressive, and as they gathered on a Galilean mountain, they didn't look any more impressive. In fact, you could say they were down and doubting. Matthew, who was among their number, tells us that "**eleven disciples traveled to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had directed them.**"

If you recall the life of Jesus, how many disciples had he originally called to follow him? Not eleven, but twelve. Why were only eleven on that mountain? No one was off visiting family or on vacation or finding another line of work. No, those eleven disciples were down a man because one of their number—Judas Iscariot—had given in to his love for money. He betrayed Jesus for the cost of a common slave. Sadly, despair overtook him, and the only solution he saw was not his Savior, but suicide. Twelve became eleven.

As they made their way up the mountain, the Eleven saw Jesus, so "**they worshiped...**," but "**some doubted.**" Some doubted? Only weeks before, Jesus had risen from the dead. He had appeared to some of the faithful women and to Mary Magdalene. He had appeared to two disciples on the road to a town called Emmaus. He had appeared to most of the other disciples, but had to come back a week later because Thomas had convinced them they were just seeing things. Later Jesus appeared to some disciples on the shores of the Sea of Galilee providing them a huge catch of fish and breakfast on the beach. He appeared regularly and repeatedly to them and others over the course of forty days, but still "**some doubted.**"

How could some still doubt? Matthew doesn't explain their doubts. Did they have doubts about the power of Jesus or the grace they had experienced or the amazing news of a Savior who defeated death? Did they doubt what Jesus had told them about being his witnesses from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth? Was there uncertainty or hesitation left in their hearts wondering, "What do we do now?" We don't know why, but we know they doubted.

Do you ever catch yourself wondering, "What was Jesus thinking?" What was Jesus thinking when he made you a Christian? After all, when his Holy Spirit called you to faith in him, in many ways you were pretty rough too. You weren't impressive. You weren't powerful. You likely weren't a cultural mover and shaker. Maybe you were even a little skeptical at first. Yet he still welcomed you into his family of believers.

...But take a closer look. You and I find ourselves among those down and doubting disciples trekking up that Galilean mountain. There have been times when you've failed him, times when your choices brought shame to his name rather than glory, times when you've hidden his name or the fact that he has placed his name on you, times when you've been likelier to abandon him than to stand by his side. And yet Jesus still has a big responsibility for you!

You're part of a body of believers, but it's a small congregation. Hundreds don't pour in through our doors, even though we offer for free the rare treasure of the pure teaching of God's Word. The facility is beautiful, but doesn't have all the bells and whistles of larger congregations. We're located in an area with easy access to thousands of people, but how many even know we're here? Short on manpower, short on resources, we look pretty down!

...But let's bring that closer to home. Do you ever feel like you're a man down at home or at work or at school or out in the community? "I could do so much more if only I had a better paying job or if my spouse helped more with the kids or if my teachers weren't so hard or if my neighbors cared more. I don't know how I can possibly make a difference in the world around me." And suddenly you're feeling incomplete, unable to accomplish what you think God wants.

The doubts start creeping in. You've had your share of doubts like those disciples. We all have. "Lord, are you really listening to my prayers? Are you really going to keep your promises? Are you really going to guide all things for my good? Are you really my living Savior? Is it really worth following you when the people around me think I'm foolish?" Maybe your doubts are actually uncertainty. "Lord, I don't know what to do! Where do I go from here?"

Maybe your doubts are a little broader than that. "Will we always be a congregation "down a man"? Will we ever make a difference in this community? Will we ever be able to financially stand on our own two feet? Will we always have a pastor? Does Jesus really have the power to bless our congregation? Will we really be able to take on that big responsibility he gives us? Where do we go from here? What do we do? What about the future?"

So when those down and doubting disciples made their way up that mountain, did Jesus chew them out for their failures? Did he confirm their doubts? Does he confirm ours? Does Jesus look at you and me and hesitate? "Yep, you guys really screwed up. You've brought shame to my name. You hid the fact that you were a Christian or even denied me. You haven't been the father, the mother, the spouse, the child, the student, the employee, the church member, the pastor, the neighbor that I expect you to be. You've failed me! So I'm going to find better, stronger, more reliable Christians to take your place who don't need to grow as much as you do." Is that what Jesus says at the end of Matthew 28? Is Jesus really that harsh and cruel? No! In fact, Jesus doesn't even give us time to get over our doubts. Without hesitation, he gives us the same mission he gave his disciples, but before he does, Jesus wipes away our doubts.

"All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth." "Brothers and sisters, why do you doubt? I've got you covered. Everything that happens here on earth and out there in the universe and in heaven? That's all under my control. You have no need to doubt that I defeated death. I control life and death. In fact, I control everything. Are you worried about what's going on in your life or in the life of your congregation? Are you uncertain about the present or the future? I've got you covered! Do you worry that I can't bless you? I hold heaven and earth in my hands pierced for you. Why doubt?"

Contrary to all expectations, Jesus entrusts us with his mission. **"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations..."** Making disciples includes taking the saving name of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—to people from every nation, every race, every language, every culture. Does that mean we're just supposed to talk about Jesus? Giving the reason for the hope that we have is a major part of the mission that Jesus entrusts to us as his Church. Telling people sick with sin and unbelief about a Savior who saves their lives is absolutely part of what we are to do. Yet verbally sharing Jesus isn't our only mission. No, Jesus tells us to **"go...and make disciples of all nations..."**

Christ's followers were to **"make disciples"** by **"baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."** They were to bring people in their lives and people they met to the triune God. With water and Word, they were to bring them into the family of the triune God, who would do his work in their hearts. Rescued by the risen Christ and brought to faith by the Holy Spirit, they could then use all their God-given gifts to serve him and others.

What does that mean for you and me today? Making disciples includes bringing your loved ones to the triune God through the waters of Holy Baptism. Moms and dads, grandmas and grandpas, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters, you play an important role in carrying out this mission! You bring the people you know and love, young and old, to be baptized, so God can put his family name on them making them part of his family. By doing so, you allow the Holy Spirit to work through means established by your heavenly Father to bring forgiveness for their sins, faith in their Savior, and the gift of life eternal.

...But there's even more to making disciples! Christ's followers were to **"make disciples"** by **"teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you."** How does Jesus want that to look among us? Parents, how can your children learn everything Jesus has commanded them? Teens and adults, how can you learn everything Jesus has commanded you? Friends, how can you give the Holy Spirit the opportunity to work growth and strength and wisdom in your heart and the hearts of your children? Through the study of God's Word. Parents, that means you bring your kids to Sunday School. You pay attention to what their learning. You have devotional time with them at home. Kids, that means paying attention in Sunday School or when you and your family spend time with Jesus in his Word. Teens and adults, that means being in Bible study, taking advantage of group Bible study opportunities, and spending personal time with Jesus in his Word. Being in the Word is the best way you can grow as Christ's disciples!

Making disciples of all nations was never meant to be a one-and-done of activity. Teaching Christ's followers all that God's Word has to say is an ongoing, lifelong activity for every God-given soul from birth to heaven. Like those disciples, you get to be part of it! Jesus gives you the glorious privilege of being part of his mission to **"make disciples of all nations."** And you know what? That can be scary! "I don't know if we're able to do that, Pastor! I don't know if I'm able to do that! We're short on manpower. We're small and unimpressive. Financially we're so-so..."

Are you the first believers to be "down a man"? Weren't the Eleven short on manpower and resources too? Before doubts start creeping back, realize that just as this mission is ours, so are the promises. As he did for his disciples, Jesus has one more promise for you. **"And remember, I am with you always** (lit. "all the days"), **to the end of the age."** "You may be down a man, but with me you're never short on manpower. With me, you're never short on resources. I'm with you every day until the end of time. That's a promise guaranteed with my blood, my life, and my empty tomb. Remember that promise, because I guarantee it!"

Jesus knew what he was doing when he entrusted such a big responsibility to a bunch of unimpressive failures. He still knows what he's doing. The triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—continues to entrust his mission of making disciples of all nations to down and doubting Christians like you and me. Yet his mission does not go without blood-bought promises—the promise of his authority over everything in heaven and on earth; the promise of his ever-guiding, ever-strengthening, ever-forgiving presence all the days of our lives. So we go with the gifts our Father has given. We go in the Spirit's power to carry out the mission our Savior-God has entrusted to us. We go to make disciples from all nations until Christ comes again. Amen.