

Matthew 28:16-20      CC 9&10.30 1<sup>st</sup> May 2011

I remember clearly the joy and elation of standing on the top of Ben Nevis having walked up it with my friend Matthew. Yet even as we stood there taking in the view sipping water he said, "that's fine now on to Scafell Pike!" There were more mountains to climb up if we were to do the three peaks and so we set off back down the mountain and began our journey on to the next mountain.

For the disciples of Jesus there had been a lot of journeying, of going on to the next place.

Indeed our series in Mathew which concludes this morning has seen Peter James and John going up a mountain in Galilee where Jesus was transfigured. Having come down they travelled with him to Jerusalem and up the mountain into that city on Palm Sunday. They had followed him at a distance to the hill of Calvary and so probably were not surprised to get the instruction from Jesus which we saw in Matt 28:10 last Sunday, "Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." Discipleship is about movement isn't it? They were followers of Jesus and that seemed to involve them in a lot of going. So Matt 28:16, "Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go."

While they were there v18 Jesus came to them and he spoke. These are the last recorded words of Jesus in Matthew's gospel and so we might reckon they are important and certainly they are famous last words. They are just three sentences linked together. They give us a huge claim a big ask and a great promise.

### **1. A huge claim v18**

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." That was a huge claim!

Through the gospel we can see something of Jesus' authority. Having spoken the sermon on the amount people were amazed because "he taught as one who had authority" (Matt 7:29) – there was authority in his teaching. He showed authority over evil spirits as he cast them out, authority to heal, authority over nature as he calmed the wind and waves, authority over death as he raised people and authority over sin as he forgave the man lowered through the roof. The response of those listening was that he was blaspheming (Matt 9:3) because only God can forgive. However, the response of the people was to praise God "who had given such authority to men." (Matt 9:7) Now he claimed all authority, in heaven which means he has authority over "angels and archangels and all the company of heaven" - as we sometimes say in the Communion Service; and over all the forces of evil in the heavenly places. But also all authority in earth that is over everything on this planet. Jesus is Lord over every person and we either bow to his authority and share in his blessings or we reject that authority and face his wrath and judgement. It was a huge claim and it was the claim to be God for only God has such authority and Jesus had shown he was God through the resurrection.

Friends can I ask have you submitted to Jesus as Lord? Are you living your life under his reign and rule as a citizen of his Kingdom? If you are then probably you can testify to the many blessings of being in the Kingdom of God, of peace with God our Father, of answered prayer, of certain hope for eternity, of small joys along the way as Jesus gives us gifts we don't deserve – blessings all mine with ten thousands beside. But if you have not yet accepted him as saviour submitted to him as Lord then let me encourage you to do that because of God's love for you and his desire that you should be his child. But also because of the wrath of God which will come on judgement day if we continue in our rebellion. Jesus huge claim made rightly because he is God demands our response.

## **2. A big ask v19-20a**

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

The reason Jesus spoke of his authority was because he was sending his disciples out to continue his mission and as such they went with his authority as his ambassadors. Now I know that we can find that difficult as we apply it to us in our day. I remember seeing an episode of Only Fools and Horses where Del boy has had a tough time but then he makes up with Raquel and all seems good so as he approaches Nelson Mandela House with all the evidence of a recent riot around him he starts singing one voice singing in the darkness and as it happens starts another riot. Now often we can feel that we are one voice in the midst of many with different world views and we wonder whether our voice has any value. But Jesus was saying you go with my authority and therefore our voice as his representative does have authority.

What we see here once more on the lips of Jesus we hear that word “Go”. It reminds us that the Christian faith is about movement. So we speak of being pilgrims, of being on a journey of faith or in the race. Jesus did not expect his disciples to sit behind the closed doors of that upper room any more than he expects us to sit within these walls.

Their going had a purpose, “go and make disciples” that is go and help people become followers and learners of Christ Jesus. It was a clear command which is often referred to as the great commission and it echoes down the centuries to us today. We too hear Jesus say to us go and make disciples. And Jesus made it clear that there was no limit on where they were to go for he called them to make disciples “of all nations”.

The movement of Christian faith is missionary. It is pushing the boundaries, it requires Christians to be pioneers. Later Jesus would tell these disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they received the Holy Spirit and then, “you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Christians are called to make disciples across the world.

I had an email on Thursday reminding me that 17<sup>th</sup> August is the 250 anniversary of William Carey, a great son of Northamptonshire. It is Carey who is described as “the father of modern mission, having in 1792 written, ‘An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens’ through which he persuaded others of the importance of mission amongst those who up until then had been mainly disregarded and then with Thomas Fuller and others on 2<sup>nd</sup> Oct 1792 in a house in Kettering established the Baptist Missionary Society.

Since then Christians from this country have taken seriously these words of Jesus and gone out to all nations to make disciples.

We today are called to do the same. But I should imagine that Peter and the rest hearing what Jesus said would have gulped and been quite anxious. For such a small band it was indeed a big ask and as we contemplate working out the great commission in our own day it is also a big ask. So how do we do it? How can we in our own day be involved in making disciples of all nations?

Can I suggest four p’s to help us.

The first is **prayer**. There is so much that can be done by prayer. Some countries are closed to Christians but not to the power of God in answer to prayer. Some places are so far away that we cannot possibly go there but we can through prayer. Some people seem beyond our reach but not God’s. Whether we have a desire to see people come to faith and grow in Jesus in North Korea, in your office in your home prayer is key.

The second p is **presence** . That is by being the followers of Christ in the world we point people to him. I have been often been in situations where people have blasphemed and then apologised to me. Making a difference simply by being there. As we live as Christians our presence acts as Jesus put it as salt and light. We can add a flavour to the world around us be it in our office, our sports club, our social group through some social action like Samaritans or street pastors. We are there because of Jesus and in being there we point people to him.

But that is only part of it isn't it. It's fine to cause people to change their actions by being there but that can often be simply repressing rather than changing. The unruly child in the classroom may well hold his noise while the teacher is there but when the teacher's presence and influence is removed he is again unruly. Christ was concerned not to repress but transform people. So as well as with our prayers and along with our presence which can cause people to stop certain actions and perhaps question their way of living we need to go with our third p, **proclamation**. That was what Jesus said, “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” The mission of the church is focused in Jesus, the word of God, and continues to be focused in his word. It is through the teaching of the gospel and then the teaching of the Bible that we will see people come to faith as disciples of Jesus and continuing to grow in him. Now I know that many will say but I am not a teacher. We

recognized that in Lifeshapes when we looked at our base ministries we saw not all of us are teachers anymore than all of us are evangelists. If I could put it in terms from the days of the exploration and settlement of the USA the evangelist is a bit like the pioneer pushing back the frontiers as they bring people to faith and the teacher and pastor is more like the settler coming along behind and establishing towns and infrastructures or in discipleship terms helping people to grow in their new found faith. We all have different roles as we have different gifts but this is where the fourth p comes in and that is

**Partnership** – Paul thanked the Philippians for their “partnership in the gospel” (Phil 1:5). In our own day we need as a church to work together to make disciples. Some of us will have teaching gifts and be able to help people grow in faith but we may not be the evangelists who can help people come to faith. We need to work together. We also can work together in the area of prayer as we form partnerships and pray for people whom we long to see come to faith. Partnership, doing it together is it would seem very important. As Jesus said to them “go and make disciples” perhaps their minds went back to earlier days when Jesus had said to them, “Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.'” (Matt 10:6-7) and he sent them out in pairs, as partners together. So who is partnering you as you work out Jesus great commission. I know that often in times of evangelistic missions people have been encouraged to create prayer triplets to pray for friends to come to faith but surely we need these continually because the great commission is a constant call of Jesus to us. Partnership but of course the partnership is not just with our human friends but also with God and here we come to

### **3. the great promise v20b**

“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” The disciples were not going to have to fulfill the big ask on their own. Instead the promise of Christ is that he would be with them. I spent several summers working with friends on the South Devon coast. They hired out motor boats on the sea. In the evening we would moor up the boats in a line stretching out from the beach. Obviously we were dependent upon the tides and sometimes if we, or usually I had misjudged the tide we would come the next morning to find the boats high and dry. Then there was nothing I could do to lift and move the boats. But when the tide came in so they lifted. On our own there is little we can do to lift the kingdom of God. But when we are in the tide, part of the church moved by the spirit of God then there is great strength. This is the partnership we have with God, as we go he is with us.

God had promised to be with Moses, with Joshua, with Jeremiah and now Christ promises to be with his disciples. This echoes again something from the opening chapter of the gospel. Just as he was given the name Jesus because his mission was to save his people from their sins so he would be

called Emmanuel which means God with us. Now he himself promised that. I love the word here “surely” it is a word of assurance – there is no doubt that as we go so God through his Holy Spirit is our constant companion and enabler.

Here we have the last words of Jesus in Matthew’s gospel. There are important words, words of challenge yes as we seek to work out in our own day and situation how we make disciples but words of real encouragement as we realise that Jesus is with us as we obey his command.