

Sermon for April 26, 2009

Text: Matthew 28:1-20

8:30am, 9:16am, & 11am Worship

Title: Keep Pouring It Out

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First Presbyterian Church, Lancaster, PA

The Text: Matthew 28:1-20

The Resurrection

¹After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. ²There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

⁵The angel said to the women, **"Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."** ⁸So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹Suddenly Jesus met them. **"Greetings,"** he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, **"Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."**

The Guards' Report

¹¹While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. ¹²When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, ¹³telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.'" ¹⁴If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." ¹⁵So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

The Great Commission

¹⁶Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, **"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."**

Introduction

My daughter and I flew out West to help move my mother from Nevada to California. We worked hard, saw lots of family, and enjoyed the beauty of the desert as we drove the U-Haul truck from Las Vegas to Orange County, CA. I loved soaking in the grandeur of the snowcapped mountains. They reminded me of the greatness and beauty of our Creator God. I thought that scene could not be outdone. I was mistaken. Coming home we flew out of Baltimore to Lancaster on a small ten seat plane called a Cessna 402. We took off late in the day and quickly were above the clouds. It felt like we were floating as we cruised just over the tops of the thick, puffy clouds. The sun was setting on the left and storm clouds with lightning were to the right. There was only one other passenger beside Brynn and me. We were in a quiet, holy awe the whole trip.

During the flight the pilot watched his dials and controls, checked a little map in his hand, and spoke softly to the control towers with his headset. After half an hour I knew we were getting close to Lancaster, but I could not see through the clouds. The pilot steered the plane straight down into the clouds. We could not see in any direction for more than a few feet. We kept steady on our descent through the thick clouds. With less than thirty seconds from landing, we popped out the clouds with the airport runway directly in front of us. The lights on the runway were in the shape of a cross as they guided us to a perfect landing. Wow! That was amazing! By carefully listening to the control tower, watching his dials, and checking the map, the pilot was able to land almost without seeing the runway. That takes faith!

Background

In our passage today, Jesus is getting ready for a big trip. He has finished his work on earth and is now going to leave the disciples soon and join his Father in Heaven. Before he leaves, he wants to make sure his disciples are ready for their work on earth. Like the pilot of my plane, *they will need lots of help and great faith.* Jesus has the disciples meet him on a mountain in Galilee to give them important last minute instructions:

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¹⁹**Therefore go 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 I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."**

These are the last words of Jesus. They are known as the Great Commission. These are important. If we have missed what Jesus is saying, he wants us not to miss these words. Let us break them down into key parts and then put them back together in a way that give us our next steps.

1. Jesus is King! All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Jesus is reminding us what the book of Matthew has declared throughout its pages, **Jesus is the King of Kings!** His birth, baptism, life, teachings, death, and resurrection all proclaim this truth.

- He was from a Hebrew royal lineage as a direct descendent of King David. (Mt.1)
- Foreign Magi studied ancient prophecy, saw his holy star, followed it across the wide desert, and then honored him as the King of the Jews. (Mt. 2)
- At his baptism, Jesus is joined by the Holy Spirit and the Father to declare his place of honor. (Mt. 3:16,17)
- Jesus heads to the desert and confronts the Devil face on. Through the power of his word, Jesus sends Satan running. **“Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.”** (Mt. 4:10)
- Then Jesus travels throughout Galilee and Judah proclaiming his Kingdom, **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”** (Mt. 4:17)
- His teachings were done with the authority of a King. Jesus did not quote other commentators; he declared the truth about our lives. He made God understandable. He showed us how to live by his words and his deeds.
- Jesus is not just another great teacher, not a super Dr. Phil, or a way to health, wealth, and success. Jesus is the King of all and any kings in the whole galaxy and beyond. Jesus is King.
- This King has power! Jesus died on the cross to break his people out of the bondage of sin and death. He now lives in the lives, hearts, and minds of his followers. Jesus rules from the inside out. He makes his kingdom inside of willing and welcoming lives.
- Jesus is waiting for you and me to invite him to be King in our lives, today and everyday.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus the Messiah, the King.

2. The King sends us out! “¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

Since Jesus the King, he sends his disciples out to complete his work. Jesus exercises his authority by passing it on to us. What is our job? We are to go and make disciples by: 1) inviting people to love and follow Jesus, 2) setting them apart in Jesus’ name by baptism, and 3) instructing them to live by all that Jesus taught.

Where are we to go? Everywhere. Today about 2 billion people are Christians. That is roughly a third of the world’s population. The followers of Jesus have spread the word in each generation and it has spread. However, there is much good work to do. The word for nations here is “ethnos” or ethnic people group. According to the Joshua Project there are 16,307 people groups on our planet. Forty-one percent or 6,651 are considered unreached. ‘Unreached’ means they have less than 5% of their population as professing Christians. Of the 6.6 billion people in our world, 2.7 billion do not have much exposure to the love and grace of Jesus Christ through people who love and follow Jesus. You and I are still needed to pass the good word on.

What is the good word? The good word is that Jesus loves us! God made each one of us unique and for special work. What does Jesus command us to do? Love God and love others. We pass it on by loving the people around us. We pass it on by feeding the hungry and housing the homeless. We fulfill Jesus’ Great Commission by supporting the work of God here and around the world with our time, energy, prayers, and resources. Some people feel like they do not have much to give. We all have something to offer others: our time, our careful listening, our various talents, our prayers, and even our assets.

In your bulletin you will find a brochure that outlines ways we can give to God’s work now and when we are gone. One of the most important ways each us can bless the world and future generations is by prayerfully including God’s work in our estate plans. Jesus should come before a school, a hospital, or other good civil organizations in our giving now and at the end of our lives. The work of God should be our first priority and the others come after. When Jesus says to seek God and his Kingdom first, I think he is serious. God comes first. The kingdom of God even extends to our wills, in our checkbooks, in our calendars, and in all of our relationships. If Jesus Christ is truly King of our lives, he rules in all aspects of them.

3. The King is Always with Us. - “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

I am so glad this verse is here. It would be impossible to do the work of Jesus without the life of Jesus living in us. Jesus promises to be with you and me always. Always. Thank you, Jesus, that you never leave us, abandon us; turn your back on us. You died for us and now are forever committed to us. As followers of Jesus Christ you and I are given good work to do everyday. My work will be different from yours. God’s spirit and word will guide you and me to people and situations that need us. Jesus will be there do help us to what we need to do.

Making disciples is a pretty straightforward process. Making disciples means allowing people around you to see the God in you. You love them. You serve them. You ask God to open their hearts to his love and truth. You invite them to dinner to get to know them. You ask how you can pray for them. You invite them to the places you are fed spiritually like worship, a Bible Study, or serving in the city or in Honduras. I have heard about 10% of God’s people have the calling and spiritual gifts to be full time cross-cultural missionaries. That means the rest of us need to be encouraging them to discover their gifts and supporting them. We can also be reaching out to the world right here in Lancaster...international students, refugees, and immigrants abound in this community. Can we find more ways to welcome and serve them? I think so.

Conclusion

On my trip out West my Mom kept asking me if there was anything of her stuff I would want. I told her I just wanted her. I do not need any more stuff. One thing I do have from my mom is a Shirley Temple 4 1/2” milk pitcher made in the mid-1930’s. It was part of a breakfast set you could get with a box of Wheaties. She got this when she was a little girl. I like this because it reminds me of my mom and prompts me to pray for her. This little pitcher reminds me of my task each day. God has filled me with His love and forgiveness and I am to pass it on. Every day God gives you and me opportunities to pour care, compassion, concern, forgiveness, joy, hope, and love into the lives of others. Daily we allow God to fill us up through prayer, the Bible, and listening to the Holy Spirit inside of us. Daily we pour out into the lives of others. Keep pouring it out.