

## Sunday Evening 27th April 2014, Kenneth Gray. Matthew 28:16-20 “Authority”



The disciples had all seen Jesus eat a meal and they had been in his resurrected presence but Matthew records “*When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted.*” The Gospel writers do not fail to mention doubt. For some of the disciples the fact of Jesus’ resurrection seemed too good to be true. Nevertheless, Jesus comes to the doubters as well as the believers and he sends them all on the Great Commission.

This presents us all with a choice - will we “*go and make disciples of all nations*” or will we ignore the great commission? People will not spread the Good News if they do not believe it for themselves; they will not be eager to share what they themselves have not experienced. That is why, in the West, so few are prepared to go forth and spread the Gospel - many do not really believe. Currently the Church of Scotland considers itself to have a “vocations crisis”. God is challenging the Church and people do not feel confident to respond. The Church of Scotland once supported the largest mission field but that is no longer so because we have lost confidence in the Gospel. If we are failing as a church what about as individuals? When did we last go and tell someone about our faith? When did we last take the opportunity to speak to someone about Jesus? It is so easy to put it off. It is human nature to put off difficult or unpalatable tasks whether it be cleaning out our overstuffed closet, or visiting the dentist. So it is with evangelism - we are afraid we won’t know what to say, how to start the conversation so we put it off and leave it for someone else to do it.

Here Jesus is saying that we must not worry about what it will be like to go forth in his name because he promises “...*surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*” We know that his words inspired his disciples to respond. Their doubts disappeared and they set about changing the world for ever.

- Jesus commanded them to “*go and make disciples of all nations*”.

None of the disciples knew anything about some parts of the world at that time. For example places like Scotland lay beyond the edge of the civilised world as it was then known. Even the Romans had given up on trying to civilise Scotland. Yet from these early responses to the great commission the Gospel was over time taken to every corner of the world. This is a reminder for us not to write off parts of the modern world we think of as ‘a lost cause’ - places like Syria, Afghanistan, Egypt seem to us impossible to convert but God takes the opposite view. One of the great lies that Satan has implanted in our minds is that there are some countries that cannot be evangelised, places that the Gospel cannot transform. Jesus’ commission is wonderful and radical.

Kenneth commented that our Kirk Session has recently been reviewing its strategy in relation to the financial support we give to our missionary partners. We have considered things such as ‘value for money’, impact in terms of souls converted etc. but at the end of the day what is important is that we are responding to the great commission to make disciples of all nations.

- Jesus commanded them to “go and **make disciples** of all nations”.

This command brings with it the sense that we are to create something - we are to bring people to an awareness of and a love for Jesus Christ. It is therefore not enough simply to do a leaflet drop and leave the rest to God. ‘Making’ disciples is tiring and costly work. We only have to look at the unstinting effort expended by staff at projects like the Haven to recognise the personal investment of time and energy put in to transforming the lives of the addicts through helping them discover that Jesus loves them too.

When we look at the life of Paul we see his discipling work often found him working persistently with a small group or small branch of the church for years before being forced to move on because of

persecution. He spent time building up the church so that it could disciple others. We have lost the art of discipling others even though Jesus gives discipling a higher priority even than baptising. Yet baptising people in the name of the Trinity has become a divisive issue in the Christian church and sometimes during baptism services we are more concerned about the rituals involved rather than about in whose name we are baptising. To believe in God does not make one a Christian.

Satan believes in God. Christianity is about being baptised into the name of Jesus who alone brings salvation. We find the Trinity a difficult concept so we do not talk about it.

• *“...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”*

If we take the great commission seriously then we recognise what a solemn task we are accepting. We have to obey everything God has taught us and love everyone as he has loved us. Today ‘obey’ is an unfashionable and unpopular word. Look how difficult people find it even to obey the rules of the road when driving. If we are not serious about the great commission then we are not serious about God.

In our world of cultural relativism society has rapidly been jettisoning fundamental truths once held precious that used to hold society together. This is not a way to make society a better place. The world is not a happier place now that some 60% of children in Scotland are conceived outside marriage.

In today’s post-Christian world there lingers on a certain sympathy for Christian values. How much harder must it have been for the first missionaries responding to the great commission! Where we might have given up, discouraged or afraid, the first disciples persevered.

• *“...surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

Everything is easier to bear when there is somebody with us. No matter what we are called to be or to do; no matter where we are called to go the Lord is with us and he will remain with us to the very end of the age, when we will see him face to face.