**WHAT NOW? MT. 28:16-20, JN. 20:19-31, APR. 7/24**

The Sunday following Easter is often referred to as “low Sunday”. That’s both amazing & sad. **We journey through a heightened time of spiritual awakening during Lent, reach the climax with Jesus’ resurrection, then in some respects fall off a spiritual precipice**. You can see it in the typical fall off in attendance in church. Some may feel they have done their spiritual exercise & move on or back to other “priorities”.

Well **what do you follow up the resurrection with?** Can it get any better? What can we speak about that keeps the heart that has peaked growing even more? The answer lies in recognizing **the resurrection is not the end, it is only the beginning.** Jesus didn’t disappear after the resurrection & leave us to figure out what our response should be. He appeared frequently be-fore the ascension & told us what He wanted from us & for us—what we should know & do.

Let’s **look at what the Gospels say after the resurrection**. It’s a place where we typically don’t spend enough time.

**Matthew** is very clear about Jesus after the resurrection. It’s an important time. Jesus knew He would have only a limited time to be with His disciples before His ascension. So **what-ever He said would provide important direction** for the time when He wouldn’t be bodily present. On that basis **the most important role for Christ-followers** is to “go & make disciples … baptizing them in the name of the Father & the Son & the Holy Spirit & teaching them to obey everything” Jesus commanded them. **We tend to leave the making of disciples to others** who we think are called or are somehow more qualified to do that than we are. Especially when it says to make disciples of all nations, we think we’re off the hook for that because that must be the work of missionaries, not us. **Not so fast**. We do desire to be disciples of Jesus, do we not? Then, I’m not sure it’s legitimate for us to “cherry pick” which parts of discipleship we agree to.

That said, **we can be disciples right in our own back yard**. We can not only share the Gospel with our family & friends verbally, we can live it before them. **Typically it’s more important what is “caught than taught**”. The Gospel that is seen is far more effective than the Gospel that is preached. It was **Francis Xavier** who leaned on that; “Share the Gospel, & if you must, then speak it.” So your living example day by day will draw others to Christ. It’s evangelism—calling others to discipleship, that is what Matthew speaks of in closing out his Gospel. **This Great Commission is what is on the heart of Jesus**.

**Matthew addresses 2 other things**. **1st, all authority in heaven & earth has been given to Jesus**. It’s something that those who ridicule Christianity miss. Jesus isn’t just a prophet or an inspired human being or some kind of lesser god. He is Christ, the Son of God, God, an equal fullness of the Triune God we worship. He doesn’t have any need to run off & consult the Father about matters or decisions—though, while on earth He prayed continually to the Father. The Father & Son, along with the Holy Spirit, are 1, & the same. **2nd, He will be with us to the end**.

In spite of that, in Matthew, **the 1st meeting of the disciples with Jesus after His resurrection doesn’t come off flawlessly**. “When they saw Him, they worshipped Him; **but some doubted**.” It hardly seems possible, does it? After all Jesus had done, after all the time they’d been together, some—thankfully they aren’t named—of His disciples, His closest followers doubted Him. **I wonder what that means**. Does it mean that they doubted He really was the Christ? Or did they doubt that the One now before them was the same One they walked with before His crucifixion? Or, did they doubt that the resurrection really happened? Or was it something else? It’s not really clear. But some doubted. **Hold on to that** for just a few minutes.

**Mark’s ending needs an asterisk** because the earliest manuscripts (which usually are considered to be the most reliable since they’re closest in time to the events described) didn’t include Jesus appearing to Mary or later appearing to 2 men on the road to Emmaus or Jesus appearing to the disciples while they were eating. This part also speaks of “their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen Him after He had risen”. Like Matthew, it says, “Go into all the world & preach the good news to all creation. **Whoever believes & is baptized will be saved**, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” **Being baptized isn’t a work of saving our-selves**; it is a natural expression demonstrating you belong to Christ & obey Him. But this part of Mark is the only Gospel that says signs will accompany those who believe: “In My name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; & when they drink deadly poison, it will not harm them at all; they will place their hands on sick people & they will get well.” It sounds like Paul’s exploits on his missionary journeys.

**Mark supports what Jesus said in Matthew**—that His disciples are to go into all the world & preach the good news to all creation. If you believe Jesus for what He says, you will be saved; if you don’t, you will be condemned. That’s as clear as can be. **The other common piece is that the disciples themselves were slow to believe; they doubted**.

With that in mind, let’s look at John. On Sunday evening of the resurrection when the disciples were together with the doors locked for fear of the Jews **Jesus came**, stood among them & said, “Peace be with you.” He showed them His hands & side. They were overjoyed.

Jesus repeated His greeting of peace & then said, **“As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you**.” **He breathed the Holy Spirit on them, much as God breathed life into** Adam or into the dry bones, giving them life in Ezekiel. **And He gave them more**: “If you forgive anyone her sins they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” **Wow! That is big**!

Now **this does not mean** that we are given the power to forgive sins. Only God can do that. But it is certain that it is a great privilege of the Church to convey the message of God’s forgiveness to people. It is the duty of the Church to convey forgiveness to the penitent heart. And let us not miss **the other biggie** in this brief passage. Just as God sent Jesus, Jesus sends out the Church. And by implication, **the Church is never to send out its own message**. It is only commissioned to send out the message of Christ—not of its own wisdom or strength.

**Are you seeing the connections** in these post-resurrection engagements with Christ across the Gospels? **We are responsible to go out into the world & preach & share the good news of the Gospel. We are sent by Jesus who is sent by God. Jesus has the authority to tell us & the ability to guide & enable us. The other consistent is this matter of doubt**.

With that we turn to **Thomas**. Thomas wasn’t with the other disciples when Jesus appeared in their midst. They told him, but he wasn’t buying it. He wouldn’t believe until he put his finger in Jesus’ hands & side. Hmm. Jesus said, “Because you have seen Me you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen & yet have believed.” From that, **we tend to conclude** that Thomas didn’t have much faith. But **that might be a presumptuous** assessment. In the 14th chapter when Jesus tells the disciples they know the way to where He is going, it’s Tho-mas who’s brave enough to tell Jesus they don’t know where He’s going so how could they know the way. It’s because Thomas asks that question that Jesus responds, “I am the way & the truth & the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me.” **We would be infinitely poorer if Thomas had not spoken up**. And Thomas certainly didn’t have a faith crisis when Jesus said they were going back to Judea to see Lazarus who had died, even though the last time they were there the Jews had tried to kill Jesus. It was Thomas who said, “Let us go with Him, that we may die with Him.”

**This Scripture isn’t included to ridicule** Thomas. It’s there to show us that even Thomas, the disciple can be like us. Conversely, we can be like Thomas. **There are times in all our lives when we are just like that Thomas. We doubt. There are times when we are like the other Thomas—full of faith & strength**. Who’s going to show up—the you who is strong in faith or the you that falters into doubt? They both exist in the same person. And to make it more complex, they can exist side by side at the same time. Think about **Elijah** who challenged 450 Baal prophets & exposed the emptiness of their faith. God incinerated Elijah’s bull sacrifice & the stones on the altar & the water soaking them. But immediately after enacting God’s show of power, he was on the run, hiding from Jezebel, who threatened to kill him. **Right in the face of what God had just done, Elijah doubted**. Or remember when Jesus was with the man whose child was dying. Jesus told him to believe. The man’s answer was timeless. “I do believe. Help me with my unbelief!”

The other thing about Thomas is that **he accords Jesus the highest praise in the whole Bible**. Once he’s moved by Jesus’ loving knowledge & care of him, he’s all in. **“My Lord & my God!” Can you share that same exclamation of Jesus in your life?** If you can, & I believe you can, make that infectious claim to others this week. Don’t go into “low week” or “low praise” mode. **Declare to others the Lord who loves you & who has saved you from yourself & death to graciously give you new life**!