

# Reflection



- Showing love
- Giving hope
- Bringing peace

The Church of St John & St Leonard

## Matthew 28:16-20

### Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> May 2020

*16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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."*

And so today we come to a very familiar passage, the great commission. One I'm sure many of us have read many times and may even know by heart. As I pondered what fresh insight I could bring to this passage today I was struck by verse 17 and in particular the phrase "some doubted". This was not the wider crowd; this was the eleven disciples. So, what was going on?

To answer this question, it is helpful to have a look at the context of this passage. In Matthew's gospel this is the first resurrection appearance Jesus has made to his disciples. After the account of the crucifixion in the previous chapter, we read earlier in Matthew 28 about the women having encountered the risen Jesus running to tell the disciples the good news. We then met the guards and heard their account, and this is the first time in Matthew's gospel that the disciples see the risen Lord. They have received the message the women had given and have gone to the place where Jesus had told them to go, fully intending to meet the risen Jesus. But still, for some of the disciples, there were doubts.

Perhaps the doubt was about whether it was really Jesus they were seeing. That sense of it being too good to be true. But Bible commentator R. T. France suggests that there may have been another reason. The last time the disciples saw Jesus was at Gethsemane when they all ran away, and France suggests that it could have been that they were doubtful of their standing with Jesus and how he would respond to them which affected their ability to worship him.

When there are things we have done that we feel may have let Jesus down, I wonder if that affects our ability to worship Him? I wonder if we ever come to worship fearful of how God might respond to us? One of the reasons we take time to confess our sins at the beginning of the service is to give us an opportunity to put ourselves right with God, to hear his forgiveness and stop anything being a barrier between us and God, allowing us to worship him freely.

For the disciples they climb the mountain with anticipation but also with doubt. But how does Jesus respond. Firstly, we read that he "came to them". In my mind I

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picture Jesus with his arms open wide, reassuring them that they are safe and that they are welcome. Next, he speaks to them reminding them of his voice, restoring what was lost in Gethsemane. And then he commissions them – entrusting them with a huge task – go make disciples of all nations. Reassuring them of his presence with them in every step they took. With this new purpose, being entrusted with such an important task, all thoughts of the failures of the past are forgotten. All doubts about God's love for them and his belief in them fade into insignificance. While we don't hear the disciples speak any words in this passage or indeed again Matthew's gospel, I imagine this encounter to have set them free to worship once more.

The disciples were not perfect, they made mistakes, they were scared and sometimes got it wrong. But these were the people God commissioned with his great commission.

And so as God's people we take our turn of picking up the baton, taking up the great commission of making disciples of all nations. We may feel scared, we may feel like God couldn't possibly choose us. But God draws close to us – reassuring us of his love. He speaks to us and we hear his voice restoring and encouraging us. And then he commissions us to go.

I wonder where God's great commission will lead you this week in your conversations and in your actions.

Rev Vicki Bryson

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