

First Presbyterian Church
Matthew 28:16-20, “Welcome Back to God’s Missional People”
by Pastor Matt Johnson, 6/27/2021

It is so good to have the church building open again.

Welcome back! It feels a little weird to be so excited
about having everyone here when I’m slightly concerned about
somebody getting heat stroke between the church doors and their driveway.

It reminds me a bit of the “everything’s fine” meme, where the cartoon dog is
sitting at a coffee table with a mug in front of him,
but massive flames are raging all around him and the dog says,
‘Everything’s fine.’

We’re back you guys, the virus and the heat, don’t worry about it!
Everything’s fine!

It’s also a little odd to be welcoming everyone back when today’s message
and the whole sermon series is about what it means for the church to go out!

So I’ve called today’s sermon,
“Welcome Back to God’s Missional People.”
And it is, truly, so wonderful to be on our way back
to gathering in the same space together,
while also staying connected online.

Why do we come *here*, anyway?

By my way of looking at it, we come here not because this is the main place
where God is at work, but to be built up, encouraged,
and prepared to be part of what God is doing
every day of the week in the places we dwell in.

We saw last week that God has been up to something from the beginning:

The very creation itself is evidence of God’s purpose and intention.
The calling of Israel through Abraham and Sarah included
blessing to all families on earth.

The salvation of Israel from slavery was not just for their own sake,

but to be a community of grace and mercy to others,
just as God had been gracious and merciful toward them.
They were redeemed for mission.

Being mission focused, then, is not a specialty within the life of faith,
it's the center of the life of faith.

It's not the idea that we need more outreach programs
or to do more things that help people,
but that our whole lives and all the things we love to do
are oriented toward life within God's mission.

Today's passage is quite familiar, but it contains some interesting puzzles.

First, when the disciples see Jesus they worship him ... but some doubted.

This is not doubting Thomas, who doubted the resurrection
unless he saw Jesus in person.

This is the whole group who *are* seeing Jesus in person.

They go to the place the women say Jesus will meet them – not in Jerusalem,
but back on their home turf of Galilee.

And when they get there, they see Jesus.

But he's still a long way off.

They see him, and they begin to worship him!

But ... could this be real? As they worship, some doubt.

There's no judgment in this note by the gospel writer, it's just a reality.

Can you be a Jesus worshipping missional Christian and doubt?

I think it would be a little strange if you were joining
in the mission of God

while following Jesus and never experienced doubt.

If you never question what's going on here, think about it a little bit more.

This life of faith ... *it takes faith*. It's not all obvious and certain.

There is room in vibrant, missional faith for doubt.

As I noted before, I'm so excited about getting back
into the church building.

I love some of the things that are happening in our church right now,
the energy behind some of our emerging ministries.

I give God praise for the retreats we're planning, for the Mac Youth Collaborative,
for the Mission Team's new relationships in South America
and for the Endowment's shift to investments that match our values.

And yet ... I have doubt.

I wonder if God will be there when we step out a little farther.

I don't know if anyone in the city or county
will care about what we do.

I'm usure if we'll have enough participation to support our ministries in the future.

I have doubts about how internet streaming ministry
can translate into real life relationships.

I praise Jesus for all this ... but I also doubt. You, too?

At least those of us who experience
that are in good company with the disciples.

So Jesus keeps walking up the hill and he comes to them all the way up
to the top of the hill

in v. 18, and he gives them the good news.

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”

My friends, *that* is the Good News. Not that Jesus died.

Not even that Jesus was resurrected –

even his old friend Lazarus could say that.

But nobody else can say that “all authority
in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”

Jesus is the King. That's what gives us hope, even in the midst of doubt.

Our life and activity all comes from the knowledge that Jesus –
the one who loves us even at our lowest moments in life,

the meek and lowly one who suffered like we do

– that very same Jesus has all the authority of God
in heaven and earth.

Because Jesus has the authority,

we can take on our identity as God's Missional People

without a special program, without freezing under the pressure,
without anxiety over doing it wrong.

Jesus says, “Therefore, because I've been given all authority, go!”

1. Go make disciples.

What does that mean?

That's a whole sermon series in itself, but basically it means
that those who are filled with the Holy Spirit
entering into the practices of Jesus in such a way that others
can see the good news that God has made Jesus King,
(who brings life)
rather than the powers of the world
(which bring death).

When others see the church, they should see an alternative social order,
a place where things are different.

Along the way, people want to share in this alternative way of life.
They are welcomed by the church community
(any place, any day of the week – not just on Sunday!),
they are drawn by the Spirit and the church into faith in Jesus,
and become disciples who also
pattern their lives after Christ
by God's grace and with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

It's not accosting poor, unsuspecting people on the sidewalk,
and it's not by hiding away and not bothering anyone,
but by living our lives in community according to the Jesus pattern
(which is radically unique and disruptive in the world!)
making places (here, but also in our neighborhoods)
where others feel genuinely included and loved.
That's how we make disciples.

2. Jesus says we are to make disciples "of all nations."

That means we live out our communal life of faith
not only in our places of comfort and ease, but also across barriers
of citizenship, culture, class, race, gender, and so on.
As we saw in Jesus' stories about the good Samaritan
and the Gerasene demoniac,
the way Jesus operated was to cross boundaries
that others found uncomfortable.

So when we go and make disciples, it's going to look like that for us, too.
Now: Do we have to go to every single nation in the world?

Not individually! But as the body of Christ around the world, yes,
the global church has a calling to find places of connection with people
who are not quite the same as us.

3. Jesus says we are to make disciples and baptize them
in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This is the part we're good at! We know how to baptize people and say the right
words.

This means that Jesus' disciples are not out there on their own –
every single one of us belong to God and the people of God.
We have the seal of God on us so that *even when we doubt*,
even when we aren't sure, God holds us and loves us,
and walks with us through
every circumstance we face.

4. Teaching them to obey all I've commanded.

What most of you heard when I said that was,
"Teaching them what Jesus commanded."

But that's not what Jesus said.

The point is not to teach the stories and the theology
(though I'm all about those things) but rather to teach them *to obey*.

The life of Jesus' disciples is not one of right words or right thoughts,
but primarily of right action.

When we follow Jesus, we shift our behavior
to move toward Jesus' way of life.
And it's that way of life that we put on display
in our disciple making.

What does it look like to obey Jesus now as compared to 1,000 or 2,000 years ago?

Well, there are many similar qualities, but the world is also different.

So obedience looks different.

The reality of social change means being God's Missional People
requires learning and experimenting and adapting
to our quickly changing environment.

Here's some of that adaptation in our recent life together:

On April 26th, with very little notice, 17 Presbyterians showed up
at the Oregon Nurses Association rally to support them.
And at one point we all shouted out, “Churches for Nurses!”
You should have seen the look on faces of those nurses!
Do you know what that was? That was sharing our faith.

We didn’t tell anybody they had to believe in Jesus, we just acted in the same way
that we imagined Jesus would. And it was fun!
When we act like that, people notice. It’s different.
And the outcome is not something we have to worry about
in the least.

In all the things we do that are different,
that shift our orientation from maintaining our own security and stability
toward taking risks of love within God’s kingdom,
we are obeying what Jesus commands.
That’s being missional.

So welcome back. I’m so glad you came. But I’m also glad you’re going to go.
Why? Because all authority in heaven and earth has been given to Jesus,
who is with you every step of your life.

Do you doubt that? It doesn’t matter – God is with you in your doubt.
So GO! Get out there. You don’t need a program or a sign up list.
You aren’t alone – all these people and more go with you.

Just live your life with an awareness that God walks with you
and deeply loves each person you encounter –
especially the ones you don’t understand,
who don’t share your background or perspective,
and the more annoying ones.
God really loves them.

So go, Jesus is with us, here, there, or anywhere,
as we live together as God’s missionary people.
“Together in Christ for all,” right?
Let’s say it together as our amen today:
“Together in Christ for all.”