

Sermon for Trinity Sunday

'Jesus' authority and the church's mission'

Mathew 28:16-20

Pastor Fraser Pearce

Today let's get straight into the text

Here's how it begins

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee,

The eleven disciples

Of course, if we are familiar with the Gospels

With the four accounts of Jesus' life and teaching

We know that Jesus chose twelve disciples

And if we are familiar with the old testament

We also know that there were twelve tribes of Israel

And that twelve seems to be the complete number

Representing the community of God's people

And yet only *eleven* disciples, only eleven of Jesus' students

Of Jesus' apprentices go to Galilee

Judas, the one who betrayed Jesus

Is not with them

So the number is not complete

And this incompleteness is the result of human sin -of betrayal

And yet we are going to see what God can do

With what, from a human point of view is imperfection and lack.

Human sin, human incompleteness, does not hinder God's work

Let's hear again:

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

Note how the eleven disciples act according to Jesus' word

They go to the place he has directed them to go

The text does not say what they are expecting to find

But it will make clear that what they do find

Is Jesus himself

As they obey the word of Jesus

As they go to where he appoints them to go

They encounter Jesus in his resurrection, in his new life

It is good for us to keep this in mind

As we reflect on where Jesus calls us to be

And to be open to encounter Christ in his risen life

As we live faithfully in our vocations

As we live out the callings that our Lord has given us

Now what comes next is both surprising and encouraging

When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted.

In Galilee, at the appointed place, they *see Jesus*
Now the focus of this text will not be on what Jesus looks like
But on what he says, and the assurance he gives
Nevertheless, we have a picture of the disciples first *worshipping* Jesus
What should we visualise here?
It seems to me we should visualise something like the disciples kneeling before Jesus
Or even prostrating themselves before him
Let your mind dwell on this picture for a while
The disciples worship, they kneel before, they prostrate themselves before
The risen Christ
Jesus, the human being born of the virgin Mary
Crucified under Pontius Pilate, and now risen from the dead
Is the object of worship for the church
Back in the temptation narrative Jesus had said to the devil
Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him Matthew 4 :10
And so in the action of the disciples we see a confession of faith
That Jesus is not only a human being
But also true God

But note that the text adds these surprising words: **but some doubted.**
In the Scriptures there is a close relationship between faith and doubt
Between having Jesus present, but not recognising him
Think of the disciples on the road to Emmaus
Their hearts burn within them as they hear the risen Jesus
Teach about himself from the Scriptures
But they only see him in the breaking of the bread
And then he disappears from their sight – Luke 24:13-15
Or think about Mary at Jesus tomb
She thinks that Jesus is the gardener until he calls her by name – John 20:11-18
Or think about Thomas, who makes an outrageous confession of doubt
Who vehemently declares his unbelief in the resurrection of Jesus
Stating that he will only believe if he puts his finger in the mark of the nails
And his hand in his side
And yet who continues to meet with the community of disciples
And when he encounters the risen Christ with them on the next Sunday
Makes the great confession of faith **My Lord and my God!** – John 20:24-29
All this is encouraging for us in our life together.
Together with faith and with true worship of Jesus
There is doubt in the Christian community
And this does not stop Christ sending his church to all the world
It does not stop the church making disciples
And it does not stop Christ being present with us
So rather than be anxious about our doubts
We are free to receive Christ as he comes to us

Now listen to how the text goes on: **And Jesus came and said to them**

In Matthew's Gospel only twice does Jesus step forward, does he come to his disciples

First, at the transfiguration, where he steps forward to his terrified disciples

Where he touches them, and tells them to get up, and not be afraid – Matthew 17:1-13

And here, where in the face of the disciples' doubt

Jesus gives his authoritative words, what we know as the Great Commission

And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Let's pause here

The primary focus of the great commission that Jesus gives his church

Is not on what we have to do

The primary focus is on who Jesus is, and the authority that he has

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus

When someone in this world has authority

They can go where they are authorized to go

Whether it is to sit on the bench as a judge

Or to sit in a seat in parliament

Or to teach in a school, authority means freedom

To exercise rightly ordered power in the right place

And Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth

There is no place that we can go where Jesus does not have authority

Where he does not exercise his rightly ordered power

He can open doors that would be closed; he has all authority in heaven and earth

When someone has authority in this world

They can command those under their authority

Whether it's a general commanding a captain

Or surgeon directing staff in an operating theatre

Or a parent telling their child to eat their vegetables

Authority means freedom to command

And Jesus has all authority in heaven and earth to command

And to hold to account all who would disobey

There is no earthly or spiritual power that we can encounter

That is not under the authority of Christ

Who is not accountable to him

It is because Jesus has all authority

It is on the basis of his rightly ordered power that Jesus commands his church

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,

In his ministry Jesus had made disciples by calling people

Remember that many people tried to apply to be his disciples

To be his students, to be his apprentices

But it is only those whom Jesus called who had the freedom

To get up, and leave everything, and follow him

Jesus now extends this powerful call through his eleven disciples
And through them to the church
And the call is not limited to those in Galilee or to Judea
But to people of all nations
And how is the church to make disciples, to make students of Jesus
To form people as his apprentices?
Jesus says, **Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.**

The church makes disciples first by baptising people in the name of the Triune God

Let's say someone buys shares in your name
Or buys property in your name
They are making the shares or the property yours, your possession
Now baptism with water and the name of God
Does not look impressive
But it is done with Jesus' authority
And it makes those who are baptised the possession of the Triune God
We find our identity as people loved by God
As people who call out by the Spirit to God the Father
Through our baptism into Jesus

It is through baptism that people begin their apprenticeship with Jesus
And it is as apprentices, as students, as disciples
That we receive and hand on Jesus' teaching
The church is called – we are called - to teach disciples to observe, to keep *Everything* that Jesus has commanded
This teaching process is a lifelong process
In many respects it is not glamorous
It involves patience from the teachers and the taught
It involves repetition, and teaching by example
It involves teaching not one's own opinions, but the words of the Lord
Like the words of the sermon in the mount
Where we receive Jesus' teaching about dealing with anger
Or the need to forgive, or the sanctity of marriage, or the right way to pray
It also means keeping the command of Jesus **'Do this in remembrance of me...'**
Something that we wait patiently to celebrate again

Jesus' last word are not command, but assurance
And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'
As we go on the path of faith, making disciples of all nations
Baptising and teaching, we are not alone: the Lord Jesus is with us
And time itself is no barrier: his authority extends also over time: he is with us *always*
Even here, even now: Let us therefore worship him, even in our doubt
Let us receive his call to make disciples

And let us rejoice in his presence: the presence of the one who gave his life for us
And who now lives and reigns with the Father and the Spirit, one God, forever and ever.
Amen!