

## **Engaging Discipleship**

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Scripture Readings: Psalm 8

Matthew 28:16-20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came to them and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

### **Beginning: 2 minute DVD exploring the meaning of life**

Early Wednesday morning of this week I received a call from my 22 y.o. daughter Carly who has been traveling and studying in India as part of a class in her last semester at the University of Redlands. "Mom, I called to tell you I'm fine, you don't need to worry!"

"Carly, why, what happened?"

"You didn't hear?" She was surprised... and proceeded to tell me about the estimated 8 bombs that has exploded the day before in the city of Jaipur, killing 60 people. Well, Jaipur happened to be the city she was in at the time, and she had been in a marketplace where one of the bombs exploded just the day before. I opened the Times and read about the attacks...

...my child is safe! But in the past weeks we have had an astronomical rise in the amount of mother's and fathers whose children are not safe, they are gone, ripped away in a cyclone or crushed in an earthquake. The toll is staggering and continues to rise.

Prior to Carly's call and in the midst of all of this news, feeling the depth of the suffering and the pain without having anyway to know, really, at all, I kept finding myself feebly aware of my need to search for meaning, for meaning in my life, for meaning in suffering, for comfort, and a guilt about how much I have.

My child, my precious child, is alive, another mother's is not... what does this mean, what does it mean when the numbers killed and suffering reaches over 100,000 , when in many cases it is a couple's only child. Of course it's happened through out time... and again we of faith are called to attention and to examine who we are in this, and where God is in this, and how we can respond.

Sounds like a pretty depressing sermon, doesn't it? But the place we as people of faith are called to find and enter is a place of meaning and hope in the midst of the greatest darkness. It is not depressing, for the love and the meaning in life with God and Christ are **bigger than this, much bigger.**

As the beloved children of God, as Disciples of Christ, I ponder with you today, what does it mean to have a life of meaning? What is the message we can find today from the

risen Christ, God, who's spirit and presence are with us now, and through all time, beyond the suffering and darkness that feel overwhelming at times in our life.

Jesus gives us the answer in this passage, for speaking with all authority in heaven and on earth, with all that he has done and said in his Ministry, this instruction to his Disciples which is instruction to the church, to us, is the most important he can give for a life of meaning...

“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. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. “

It is easy for us to identify with the Disciples, for at the sight of the risen Jesus, while they worshipped, as we do, they doubted, wavering between adoration and indecision. But Christ does not exclude or express discouragement in the doubt and questioning, and it is precisely to these doubting Disciples, like us, that the Great commission is given.

Now remember this is instruction for the Disciples, representing the church, therefore baptism, the function of the church, is important, to bring people into a life in God's reign. This passage is selected for Trinity Sunday, the Sunday chosen to celebrate the three aspects of our God as Father, or creator, Son and Spirit. For these Disciples in this time, it is a new belonging. We, as members of the body of Christ and his church, are

claimed by no less than the tri-une God. The non-judging Christ offers this as further sustenance to their puzzlement and confusion.

Christ instructs them, Christ instructs us to teach and obey, to nurture all in the community, all around us, of God, of grace, of the hope in the Gospel, and Christ promises the divine presence in response. Emmanuel, God with us, forever.

Here is an important reminder: Our authority in doing this, in serving as the church and as individuals in the name of the risen Christ, is a **derived** authority. We are **dependent** on the one who possesses this authority. As we claim to be Christians, as we embrace the church AFTER Easter, we can count on the presence of the crucified Christ, even in our darkest hour. To claim **we** are some exception, that are not worthy, that the work of the church and Christ's great commission is for others to do, is to discount God, to question or dismiss God's authority.

The Good News is that our God, who knows us SO well, get's that; and God has given us, the created, the constant opportunity **24/7** to claim Christ for ourselves and to share this with others in every way for life. It bears repeating, each and every Sunday, that it is never too late to accept the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ, for the grace and love of God are not only bigger, mightier, more powerful than all of the darkness of the world, but even surpass and transcend the darkness we have managed to create or experience in our own life. . . As we accept the love of Christ, and accept Christ TRULY; we are

renewed, and we are closer to the meaning of our life, to the meaning that Jesus has commissioned to us as a church and as individuals.

Our Core Values, Dynamic worship, Spiritual Discipleship, Inviting Community, Witness and Service, name this well, don't they? Good thing!

And let us remember that when we embrace these values as a church we must embrace them as individuals. *Everything* about these Core values proclaims the absolute necessity of the giving out of ourselves in ways that seek to embrace the compassion and love of Christ.

John Wesley's three simple rules to follow as a way of living are another beautiful; way of expressing a meaningful life:

**Do no Harm**

**Do Good**

**Stay in Love with God**

These three simple rules are drawn out nicely in a small book becoming more and more popular throughout the United Methodist Church, Three Simple Rules by Reuben P. Job, (hold up) who says:

*To follow Jesus is to follow a God made known in Scripture, history, nature, our innermost self, and –most of all—in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.*

*To follow Jesus is to follow One who fully trusts in God's goodness, love, and intimate involvement in the affairs of humankind. To follow Jesus is to desire to be like him in our living and our dying. For some of us, that choice is just too frightening and too demanding; so we follow at a distance or turn away. But deep in the silence of our hearts, we know we want to follow Jesus. We **do** know that is the best way to live fully and faithfully. And so, we pray for grace to be faithful as we say yes to the invitation to faithfulness.*

*The words of Jesus and of Wesley suggest that doing good is a universal command. That is, doing good is not limited to those like me or those who like me. Doing good is directed at everyone, even those who do not fit my category of "worthy" to receive any good that I or others can direct their way. No one is exempt. Like doing no harm, doing good is a proactive way of living. I do not need to wait until circumstances cry out for aid to relieve suffering or correct some horrible injustice I can decide that I will choose a way of living that nourishes goodness and strengthens community. Every act and every word must pass through the love and will of God and there be measured to discover if its purpose does indeed bring good and goodness to all it touches.*

Toward the end of his life, when he was suffering from the accumulated affects of a lifetime of alcohol abuse, an ill W.C. Field was discovered reading the Bible by one of his friends. The astonished friend asked: "What are you—an atheist—doing reading the Bible?"

I'm looking for loopholes," Fields replied.

There are no loopholes, and as we learn and grow in our faith, those who try to find them, or act as if they are available and justified, are the unhappiest people of all. Those who have chosen or continue to choose a life of dishonesty, who misuse power, who exert strong judgement that eventually excludes a close friend or family member, are those who cannot truly gain inner joy and peace.

During the time we were sharing our prayers and concerns at our Evangelism Hospitality meeting last week, Tony came in unable to hide his frazzled state, and with our prompting proceeded to share the challenges of life right now... the recent loss of a job, the resultant need to sell the beautiful Burbank home that he and Gary have shared for years, and the afternoon news that knee surgery to repair an injury is necessary, and his health plan is close to expiring as a result of his job loss. As our caring committee sat and sympathized with concern around the table, Tony then quickly perked up and shared the meaningful experience they have been able to share. Their friend and neighbor's house is in foreclosure and she needs to move out soon, to where? Unable to solve the greater challenge, Tony and Gary have been sharing their meals with this neighbor. In the midst of the mounting difficulties, when many would not find the energy to do good for another, it was clear to all that this opportunity to make a difference with one in a more difficult place added great meaning to their own.

To further embarrass Tony, when I asked his permission to share this story he added more explanation: “Knowing that there are so many people in much worse situations than Gary and me, I try to remember to ask God to help me get my eyes off myself and to see the many needs in people all around me. I hope to be some help, comfort or encouragement to someone whenever I can.”

This is simply one recent example out of my circle of Disciples of what a meaningful life with Christ looks like in action. There are so many examples among you.

We are called to Engage in Discipleship, to share the good news of Christ with one another. ...in our words, our actions, our example, our relationship. We are called by Christ to engage in relationship with one another in ways that promote life, giving out of the life that we have been given, at all times and in all places. This is the meaning in our existence.

We will be blessed as we do our very best to engage in life the way Christ has taught us. The ripples of such Discipleship are never-ending, as is our God and Christ, to the end of the age.

A few weeks ago Time magazine published an article entitled, “Poland’s Anne Frank” about Rutka Laskier, a young adolescent girl who happened to be a Jew living under Nazi rule in Poland, 1943. Like Anne, she kept a diary which was only just recently published. Selected entries show the intertwining of her own struggles with puberty and friendships, anticipation and longing for her first kiss, her turmoil with the existence of

God...along with the incomprehensible fear of death at any moment. You know how this story continues, a few days after her last entry she and her family were captured and murdered in Auschwitz.

Imagine if it were possible to read journal entries of all who have suffered such a tragic fate, human made or natural disaster. It is important to enter this reality, to somehow in our isolated safety at this time, to realize that these staggering figures each represent a blessed creation of our God and no less than us, loved wholly. Yes, our God is bigger than all of this and our faith assures us of this. It is difficult to comprehend in our limited understanding on earth. Our faith asks us to trust in the very mysterious and very magnificent promise of resurrection, each day that we live here, and each day that we continue in a new life beyond this earth.

The spirit and souls of all who have perished, those we see as a death toll in the news, those we have loved for whom we ache and miss so much, are all with God to the end of the age, this is the promise of our God and Christ who brings All authority in heaven and on earth. God the Creator, the son and the great spirit are with us all who are here, present with us as we search for our meaning, and promising to love us through all time.

Thanks be to God.

Benediction (Matthew 28)

Let us go forth in the name of the Father,  
the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

We will make disciples of all nations.  
teach them of our God.

Remember that Jesus is with you to the end of the age.  
Amen.

