

Psalm 8, Matthew 28:16-20
“Going out into the world”

I know we still have a few days yet before we are officially into summer but today we are celebrating what feels like summer events. Graduation Sunday as we honor and send off those who after this summer face a very different future than ever before, same with the parents, your, our lives are changed as well. Father’s Day as we tell them to fly a kite, but also give thanks to them for their faithfulness in bringing us up. Trinity Sunday, the Sunday that we try to address the most difficult of theological truths that we hold dear. As well as preparing ourselves to send off our mission teams out into the world. There is a lot to cover this Sunday.

So in the middle of the week while I was struggling to come up with where God was leading me today, I thought I’d go out and do a manly thing. I heard a member of the church needed help putting up a support beam in his barn, so I went in my work shoes, my Jesus sandals, white slacks, and dark polo shirt, and I just seemed to fit in with everyone else. There is something about being with a group of men working toward a common good that really has no rival.

They managed to put the beam in, even while their efficiency dramatically increased once I left. Today we find a bunch of men kind of standing around and looking at each other until Jesus comes among them and tells them to get to work and exactly how to get to work. It is a wonderful Scripture because it so appropriately covers all of the themes that we have lined up for today. Let’s read.

READ

Growing up as a missionary kid we knew these verses by heart, especially the beginning of vs. 19: Go ye therefore into all the world. Every summer we would gather in Ventnor, NJ at the missionary homes there and we knew that our parents and our families were fulfilling this Great Commission. But it took until I became a pastor in a church here in the US to realize that these verses are treasures not just for those serving overseas, but also those serving here at home. We can all fulfill the Great Commission.

Let’s turn now and look at these verses again today. Jesus and the remaining 11 disciples meet each other on a mountain in Galilee. Matthew in vs. 17 gives us some details as to how they feel and what their reaction is to seeing the resurrected Jesus. The first thing we read is that when they see Jesus they worshipped him. In the Greek it is a verb that denotes completeness meaning all 11 of them worshipped Jesus. We see Jesus being worshipped earlier in Matthew

14:33 when Jesus calms the storm they all worshipped him after he brings Peter back into the boat on his attempt to walk on water. The only other time we see the term worship in relationship to Jesus in Scripture.

Our focus for today is going to be on verse 17 because it reflects where we find ourselves as we go through these incredible transitions in life as we are celebrating today. The disciples worshipped Jesus. The Westminster Shorter Catechism asks us the question: What is the chief end of man? Before we get to the answer we see that is the same question that is answered in Psalm 8. The Psalmist asks when I look at the heavens and all that you have created, what am I, who am I, that you care for me. In the New Testament context we can add, but who are we, when see the beauty of the fields and Lancaster County who are we that you love us so much that you sent your Son to die for us. Who are we?

Our chief end, the reason God created us, the reason God cares for us and values us, the reason God came to live among and die for us, is so that we would worship him as we encounter the resurrected Jesus Christ just as this passage has the remaining 11 disciples worshipping our Savior. Today, you are fulfilling your reason for being. Sounds pretty good doesn't it? But verse 17 has some other truth hidden that I discovered this week has a very different meaning that I had thought.

We read they all worshipped but, some doubted. In the Greek there is no defining word some. It has been added to make the sentence flow better in the English. All the translations contain it, and it is a logical sequence. It's fun to imagine who those doubters were. Not Thomas, he already said My Lord and My God. Not Peter, he's already been rehabilitated, not John, he never left his side.

But the Greek word doubted here, from the verb distazo, implies, just as worship did, a sense of completeness, or all. And doubt here is not only all, but it also has the other meaning of hesitation. Just as all 11 disciples worshipped Jesus so here we read when confronted with a reality that doesn't make sense in our day to day life they all hesitate, they all doubt. They are all in this together.

The reason why vs. 17 is so powerful is because we find these 11 disciples who walked with Jesus somewhere on the continuum of worship and doubt. And I can think of no better way to think of our current status on this same continuum as we celebrate our graduates we want to praise God and worship him and give him thanks for raising up our youth, but I'm still a little

hesitant in letting that child of mine go. I'm excited to be finished with high school, but do I really have to face another transition in my life, make new friends, take harder classes? I love you Lord, but is she really going to be okay without me?

Think of yourselves always on that spectrum and in some seasons of our life we can't wait to spend our days worshipping our Savior, but there are others where the doubt seems about all we can manage.

The good news is that God knows where we find ourselves on that continuum. In Luke 16:31 Jesus says that he knows that we will not be able to flee from doubt, even if someone rises from the dead. But this reality in which we live, a sliding continuum from worship to doubt, Jesus is more than aware, and he is able to use us even with our hesitations, and our doubts, for his service. Some I have heard say I could never serve the church because that's reserved for giants of the faith who never doubt and who have their life together. We all live on the continuum between worship and doubt or hesitation. God chooses to use us, in spite of that.

The first thing that Jesus does when he addresses those imperfect disciples is give them an assurance in vs. 18 that what they did next was not up to them. Once they came off that mountain it was up to God what ended up happening. Jesus tells them: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." It is not up to us.

In the Bible there is a very different perspective of self than what we usually think. You always hear think for yourself, but what if your self isn't worth thinking about? There is more and more weight put on the self and we can't bear it. Look at the bookstores and the volumes and volumes of self-help books that we find. The last place we should look for help is from ourselves. We are the ones who got ourselves into trouble in the first place.

By Jesus declaring his authority he is in essence saying, the journey does not begin with you, but with God. Look at all the people in Scripture that we read about. They are nobodies until God makes them somebody, until God gives them a specific mission, a purpose. Mary was a lost, single, pregnant teenager until God called her and she became the mother of God. The disciples were no name fishermen until Jesus said follow me. Abraham was nothing more than a lonely old man until God gave him a promise. I could go on. Our identity, our journey, our purpose we cannot discover within ourselves, but only in God, only in God.

Some of you here today consider yourselves very successful, others of you consider yourselves less than successful. Some may be here at a point of crisis in your marriage, your job,

your family, in retirement. The answer does not lie within us, stop trying to find what is gnawing at you through your own authority, but only within the purpose and the vocation of what God has called you to do will you find it. That's why Jesus begins by establishing his authority.

You know, it is a scary world out there. It is not easy to go and make disciples as Jesus commands in this Great Commission. It isn't even easy to go and welcome someone to the community, or to drop a note to let them know we miss them and we haven't seen them worshipping in some time. Jesus commands us to go outside of these walls, not to wait for people to come into this sanctuary. He says writing letters or making phone calls is no substitute for actually making human contact. The outreach committee has identified dozens, that's right I said dozens of people in this church that for an extended period of time have not been attending church. We don't know why, at least I haven't been told why.

We need an army of people who will be willing to ring doorbells, to visit on doorsteps, to let people know we miss them and that we really care that we haven't seen them. We are sending out 3 mission teams this year and it is a very exciting time in the life of the church. We are fulfilling the Great Commission, we are literally going out into all the world. But once we come home from West Virginia, from Italy, from New Jersey, we will still find ourselves faced with the members of our family for whom we have a responsibility and we must pursue. We still are hesitant, we still doubt that we should really be going to their homes and be directly involved in their lives. We want to require them to be involved in our lives first.

Next week we are going to be looking at Part II, and my favorite aspect of that lesson are the angels telling the disciples as they look up in heaven where Jesus ascended: Why are you looking up into heaven? Go ye therefore, and do something.

When we live our lives between worship and doubt it can tend to paralyze us. But what Matthew tells us here, which is much closer to James' lessons on action, is that we are called to go. When we go the goal is not to convert to a specific philosophy or to make people become more Presbyterian. The goal is to make disciples, people who love Jesus and who will have a unique way of living together in community. Jesus tells us not to go and speak and preach, but go and do, live out your faith in community to those around you.

May God bless us and keep us as we go out into all the world. Amen.