

When Jesus was born, the “nations” came to find him—those Magi who traveled from the East to find the one born *King of the Jews*. When Jesus was having his final conversation with his disciples, he sends them off with a task—to go to the “nations;” that is where the word about him is to be taken. Jesus was born to the Virgin Mary and named Emmanuel, which means *God with us*, according as Matthew says, to a prophecy from Isaiah. The final promise he makes to his disciples is to be with them always...even to the end of the age. Matthew’s story about Jesus goes on in his final chapter right where it began in the first.

We are not reading the end of Jesus’ story in Matthew’s Gospel. We are reading the continuation, in fact because we are reading it, we can claim to be a part of that story. We are his disciples; worshipping him; some doubting; still following; still searching; still obeying; still seeking to fulfill this mission to the nations. And with all that comes the promise.

In Matthew’s day, Jewish teachers trained disciples who volunteered to follow them. Jesus came and recruited his disciples; called every one of them away from what they knew and told them—didn’t ask them; told them to follow him; to suffer with him; even take up their cross. Being a disciple of Christ is not the easy road through life. Of the eleven who were commissioned, the great majority of them were martyred. “Grace”—that gift of knowing God’s gracious love towards us, is not cheap. Those called as disciples will find life constantly testing and challenging what they believe. Jesus made that very plain. Yet there’s still that promise.

In Matthew’s day, Jews baptized Gentiles as they converted to Judaism. John the Baptist preached a baptism of repentance. Jesus taught his disciples the same; baptism acknowledging that we are accountable to God; as God’s own we acknowledge God as Lord of life—of our lives. Jesus sent the disciples off on a mission specifically beyond their natural interest of ministering to their own people. He sent them out into the world to make disciples; to baptize them; to teach them. That message of Christ continues to this day. There are still those of every culture waiting to hear about the way of Christ. It is OK to share what you know even as you honor what someone else knows. Remember, it is the work of the Holy Spirit to open the heart to receive; the mind to understand. It is the work of the disciple to tell the good news—let others know what’s good about knowing Jesus. That’s a hard thing to do—to share what you believe; by what you say; by what you do; by how you live out the principles of Christ in your life. Some “say” it easier than others. Those are the apostles—the “sent” ones. As disciples, we’re all called to live and do what we believe each and every day. And when God provides those opportunities to “share” we’ll find the words to speak. That all comes with a promise that’s greater than any doubt we may have.

In Matthew’s day, a disciple would study the ways of their teacher until they were ready to teach themselves—pass on the knowledge they knew. In this way, the teachers own philosophies would become a part of the life of the students who in their turn would share with others. It is like an ever widening circle—embracing more and more people until the time that the message is silenced. Christ’s disciples “taught” others about the ways of Christ—Christ’s approach to life; his “philosophy” which was his own intimate understanding about God. Christ taught about God’s love for the world; God’s sense of justice for the powerless; for those without a voice; God’s demand for judgment which undergirds that call for righteousness and justice; God’s own merciful way of dealing

with us—forgiving us; making us eternally “right” through the life and death and resurrection of Christ.

It takes time to make disciples. You look at the example of Jesus’ own disciples and even though he called them and even though they lived with him and experienced life first hand with him, they still did not understand the full implication of who he was; nor fully what they were being asked to do. Becoming a disciple of Christ comes through relationship—with other disciples—with the body of believers as Christ’s church. It is the church’s task to “make” disciples. The church is called to “teach” and we seek to fulfill that calling through our Christian Education—Sunday School; Bible Study; I seek to fulfill it here in the pulpit, “teaching” through the preaching. Mission, Worship, Christian Ed; the task lays before us to fulfill Christ’s great commission to *go*; to *baptize*; to *teach*. It is the call of every Body gathered in Christ’s Name. It is a powerful call. It is a defining call as it lays our purpose before us. It is only accomplished as Christ fulfills his promise to us.

In all that the church seeks to be as Christ’s own body in this world; all that every believer seeks to be as his disciple; it all rests firmly upon his final promise to those eleven disciples. It rests upon Christ’s presence with us; his promise to be with us *always* even to the end of the age. We celebrated that promise last week with Pentecost; the presence we know in the Holy Spirit. It is Christ with us that gives us the “sending;” the courage and desire to be his witnesses in the world. It is Christ with us that enables us to live the life of a disciple; to take up our own “cross” and bear it knowing Christ is there with us every step of the way. It is Christ with us that brings his witness alive in our own lives; helps us speak about our belief in him; helps us live our lives according to his teachings; helps us discern our way—make “good” choices. It is Christ with us who brings us into relationship with him in the first place; brings us the desire to know him; helps us understand his word in the Bible; brings us into fellowship with other Christians; helps us get along with one another. It is Christ with us that drives everything we seek to do as his church; drives our mission; drives our teaching; drives the worship we keep; drives all that it takes to keep us as his church.

Christ is with us always; in the witness you are called to proclaim; in the witness this church is called to be. I think we all know that; understand the power and the comfort it brings us. The questions we might ask then, is what are we doing with such a promise as this? Just what are we doing? Amen.

“What are we doing?” Matthew 28:16-20 051808 Mkh