

“When Jesus Tells You to Go and Keep Going”

April 28, 2019

Shadow Savior series – 1st Sunday after Easter

If you're a Marvel fan (or even if you're not), you might know that a movie came out this week - *Avengers Endgame*. At three hours long, it's the culmination of a storyline that has captivated audiences and grossed a lot of money. I've seen more people than usual posting selfies from the theater or posting their comments online.

It's been a big deal this week along with the NFL draft if you're a football fan. I got caught in a group text about the draft with two colleagues, and I know nothing about football. I just asked if the people they were talking about were nice guys. I'm sure their abilities and skills are much more important, but it's been a week of lots of focus on outcomes - how things will end, who will go to what team, and lots of time and energy invested – even people going to see the movie multiple times!

If you're into politics, there's the posturing of candidates and the polls to try to figure out who will get the nomination. If you're into church politics, a decision about the vote at General Conference from our Judicial Council and more questions about the future of the church.

If you're walking with Jesus after resurrection, and I hope we are, even though the joy of resurrection seems to wane quickly, we encounter one of the most notable, important, and challenging words that Jesus speaks to us. It's the end of Matthew's Gospel account - and the command from Jesus that gives us our mission - to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Remember Matthew's resurrection account...women at the tomb, guards at the entrance, an earthquake and an angel who rolls the stone away, and a message that Jesus is not there, but is risen and will see them in Galilee. Then Jesus greets the women on their way to tell the others and tells them to rejoice as they worship him.

After the excitement at the tomb, there's an attempt to cover up the resurrection. The guards and chief priests agree to change the story and say that Jesus' disciples moved the body. But then we hear that the women must have told the disciples what they witnessed because they're in Galilee where Jesus told them to go, and it's not a quick trip from Jerusalem to Galilee.

Jesus gives the Great Commission – no one is quite sure when that name stuck, but it did. And what's interesting is that Jesus' call to “go” is based on what he says before. He speaks of his authority in heaven and on earth. Because of his power, he gives the call to go.

We don't always connect the Great Commission to the Easter story, but it's one of these after-resurrection appearances. We've taken a journey with Jesus, our Shadow Savior, who shows us what we need in him. After resurrection, Jesus comes to those in grief, confusion, doubt, struggle, uncertainty, overwhelmed with the past and offers them good news that he is alive. He offers good news that though his death on the cross was real, it wasn't the end. He offers good news of forgiveness and reconciliation even for those who betrayed him. He doesn't just leave his disciples to figure out what to do next; he calls and sends – even stretches them.

They had experienced the fullness of Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection. They had seen God's plan in action. They were on the other side of death and despair. And Jesus comes to them and offers his presence to them.

Jesus takes the disciples to a mountain in Galilee—quite a hike from Jerusalem. The disciples display their trust in him in their willingness to go to the mountain. But mountains have history as special places to meet with God—all the way back to Moses' meeting to receive God's commandments and as Jesus teaching and preaching.

And, Galilee was Gentile country. Jesus brings the disciples away from that coveted spot of God's presence in Jerusalem and goes where people might not think that God is present at all. He explains his divine power – his authority. All that they have experienced with him is because he is God's Son, sent by God to bring salvation to the world.

The first thing the disciples do when they see Jesus is worship him. Even in a confusing and emotional time, worship is still first and most important. Worship is our primary way of honoring God, staying connected to Jesus, and helping each other grow.

Matthew is very clear to say that some doubted. Not doubting that God exists or that God is good, but that part of us that wonders about how God works. What is this resurrection all about? What does it mean? We can probably relate. Perhaps we've prayed and wondered if God would be with us through something difficult or asked questions about why God works in ways we don't understand.

Throughout Scripture, the people God calls aren't perfect. Their faith isn't perfect, and perfection is never a prerequisite for God calling or using anyone. It's quite the opposite. The prophets ask questions of God. The disciples don't always get it. Maybe you've heard it this way: God doesn't call the qualified, but God qualifies the called.

But, Jesus never speaks of their doubt or chastises them for it. He embraces them in love and gives them a charge to continue showing his love in the world. Jesus tells them to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – to bring people into the community of faith.

So the disciples worship, even with looming doubts. The second thing is that Jesus immediately gives them work to do. A three-part assignment: “go, baptize, and teach.” Go to all people – not just those who are like you or those whom you like. John Wesley, the father of Methodism, claimed, “I look upon the world as my parish.” And he really took that seriously – even preaching in the open air when he wasn’t welcomed in the church. How do we live that out? Does our faith go outside these doors, or is it neatly tucked in these seats to pick up when we return again?

At the heart of the Gospel is Jesus our Savior who commands us to go. We’re called to be people of action – not sitting on our hands, but doing his work every day. A girl returning home from Sunday School expressed disappointment with the class’s reaction after the day’s lesson. “We were taught to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations,” she said, “but we just sat!” We get the joke, but there’s truth there – are we actively engaging the mission that Jesus calls us to carry out?

As we serve God, we work in relationship with God and one another. We can’t be disciples alone. We can’t make disciples alone. Jesus called a group up to that mountain to be commissioned in a great commission. Our ministry is not individual or self-serving. We have gifts that are unique to us, but we offer them in community with each other. We have power and support through the grace of Jesus Christ.

We’re in ministry because God calls us to do it and empowers us to do it. Christian ministry cannot and does not exist without the power of Jesus Christ, the Risen One, who calls us up to mountains—all of us—and sends us back to be people who work to make the world more like God’s kingdom.

Jesus takes us to places of vision and mission. Our vision and mission are rooted in his grace. Since that small group gathered together on the mountain long ago, the message of God’s love made real in Jesus Christ has spread and reached millions. God reaches people of all experiences and walks of life, even us!, and God uses us to reach others.

The people who met Jesus on that mountain were not perfect or flawless, but they did what he told them to do. It’s been said that God isn’t so much concerned with our ability than with our availability. Jesus told the disciples what to do and how to do it. He tells them to teach what they know from him. They’ve learned from what he’s said and done. And I wonder if they thought back to the time when someone asked what the greatest commandment was, Jesus said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ And then he added a second: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Teach them to love God and love neighbor.

Jesus’ life was a lesson, and so they learned, with some struggles along the way. God can transform people through love and grace, and we must share and embody

God's love. We know what happens when we go and make disciples, when we actively work to teach others what Jesus taught. Think of Christian education, worship, and other ministries that have shaped you. Think of the people who have lived their faith, who have given God the glory, who have persevered through stuff that you can't imagine, who have spoken of God's grace in their lives. We're always moving on in faith – with Jesus at our side.

And it's sometimes uncomfortable and risky to live out the Gospel. Considering the way that the early church grew, we know that these disciples took Jesus' call seriously. To make disciples is work every day. It means that we're inviting others to be more like Christ. And if that's true, then it means we're always considering how we ourselves are seeking to be more like Christ. We can't make disciples unless we are disciples.

Jesus says to teach everything he has already taught. There's nothing new to create. The curriculum is already complete. The disciples can tell others what they've experienced, and so can we. We can love God and love neighbor, and even claim to call to that word we sometimes back away from – evangelism!

Evangelism is Jesus' call – to share the good news of what we know about him and go. Evangelism doesn't mean shoving a Bible in someone's face and telling them to believe or die. Will that move anyone to true faith? Evangelism means sharing good news. Our words and actions can show Jesus' compassion, bring healing, include those who feel like outsiders, and give new life.

But it's always risky to be part of Jesus' ministry. Jesus on the loose in the world is unpredictable. I think that's why Jesus reassures the disciples. Yes, we're called to action. But the final thing we learn is that we live out Jesus' call as part of a community. I have to remember Jesus' comforting words: "Remember, I am with you always."

The Great Commission is the end game, but it's also the beginning. Jesus knew we might be apprehensive, but the promise fulfills what we know. Jesus is Emmanuel - God with us - and his promise is to be with us, help us, work in us, and even work through us. God gives us what we need to do the work of ministry.

A story is told of when Mother Teresa gathered with kings and princes from all over the world. One man asked her if she ever became discouraged because she saw so few successes in her ministry with the poor. She said, "No, I don't become discouraged. You see, God has not called me to a ministry of success. He has called me to a ministry of mercy." Powerful words from a woman who has shown the world what it means to live out Jesus' commission.

Jesus' words are true. We can trust what Jesus says. We can be certain of his presence. We don't do this work alone, but together as a people loved by God,

redeemed in Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Remember – he is with us always to the end of the age. So, GO and TELL - and GO and MAKE DISCIPLES knowing that Jesus walks with us in grace and strength.

Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed!**

Thanks be to God. AMEN.

In this season, we'll be invited to pray and reflect in worship, even writing some reflections if you feel led. As we seek to be honest with God, I ask us to consider these questions:

SHOW SLIDE: *How do you respond to Jesus' directive to go and make disciples?*

What prayers are on your heart today as you offer God the struggles of faith and stand in the hope of resurrection?

Let us pray...PRAYERS of the PEOPLE & the LORD'S PRAYER