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**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 they doubted. And Jesus came 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."*

As we come to the end of another school year, I find myself thinking about my teachers - both formal, and informal. From elementary school through grad school and beyond, it isn't hard to pick out some of my favorites. My kindergarten teacher was one of the nicest, and sweetest people - she had a song for every transition time in the day, and would frequently teach us from her piano bench. In middle school, I had the same teacher for 7th and 8th grade. He also happened to be my wrestling coach, and I'm not sure if other classmates felt this way, but I knew without a doubt that he believed in me and my potential. I remember him shaking my hand at the end of 8th grade saying something like, "Wherever you go, you're going to be great." My favorite high school teacher taught geography and environmental science. He was really funny, and was always pulling in interesting community voices and vintage reel to reel videos that he had squirreled away because they gave some insight into the Canadian environment that the newer textbooks and videos did not. I remember being amazed that college professors talked to us like we were real adults, and then being similarly impressed by grad school professors who wanted to grab a cup of coffee to talk more, even after class was done for the day.

The Harvard Gazette reported last year that a great teacher does three things well; They establish caring teacher-student relationships; challenge students to think, reason, and communicate their ideas; and convey subject matter accurately and clearly. They also continue to want to learn more as they go - a stagnant teacher is not a vibrant teacher.

For the disciples in the biblical story, Jesus was their ultimate teacher. Jesus established deep relationships, challenged his followers to think beyond the

cultural assumptions of the time, and shared wisdom in a variety of ways. Jesus also understood that teaching was not a one-and-done situation. It seemed that every moment was a teaching moment - not just the synagog or city center. He taught regardless of if he was walking on the road, sailing on a boat, or gathering around a table.

Our passage this morning is among the final verses of Matthew's Gospel, a passage known as the Great Commission, recounting Jesus' instruction to the eleven disciples after they journeyed to a mountain in Galilee. When the disciples saw Jesus they worshiped Him, however we also get this interesting note that some doubted - remember, in Matthew's timeline we're still so close to the discovery of the empty tomb, Jesus' miraculous appearance to the women. Matthew's Gospel also contains an interesting tidbit that there was a political conspiracy to spread the word that he had not risen, but that the empty tomb was because his followers had stolen the body after his crucifixion.

Matt pointed out, as we met this week to plan worship, that Jesus proclaims here that he has been given "All authority in heaven and on earth." And then Bethany reached out to remind us as the week went on that it's actually an echo to the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus claims to have authority as well. If the Sermon on the Mount had been core Jesus classroom teaching, this final word to the disciples may be more like their graduation moment.

It's fascinating to me that both of those times - the Sermon on the Mount, and the Great Commission - occur out in nature, on top of a mountain, with a broad perspective of their geography and context.

As far as bold proclamations go, it feels edgy to me that Jesus positions himself in this way, on the edge of society, out among creation, rather than in the city center among the powerful people of the time, or in the temple or synagog. He's claiming to have the ultimate word in truth, yet does it in a subversive way. He's putting an awful lot of trust in those who are listening to pick up this message, to carry the banner from this quiet place, out into the world.

Like every great teacher, Jesus is trusting that his students have picked up the heart of his message, and are ready to move out on their own. Good teachers encourage learning, but also encourage experience and self-realization. Jesus

could have operated differently. He could have behaved more like a politician's trusted aid or a financial advisor, walking alongside the disciples as they moved about the world, offering them helpful nuggets of advice, making sure they always make the correct decisions, and intervening before a critical mistake is made. Instead he offers his wisdom followed by the freedom to go out into the world carrying the knowledge that has been passed on.

Today is traditionally known as Trinity Sunday on the lectionary calendar, reminding Christians to consider the unique three-in-one and one-in-three aspect of God. There aren't many references to the trinity in scripture - in fact the word trinity is not found in the Bible at all. But it was important to early Christians to wrestle with, and then emphasize this idea - enough that by the time when Mark, followed by then Matthew and Luke's Gospels were finally writing down, close to 100 years after Jesus' death and resurrection, the writers chose to include hints of trinitarian ideas, language that Paul's letters to the early church, which were written before the Gospel accounts, also include as well.

I don't share this in order to send us into a tailspin about the biblical writers timeline or whether what we read in the Gospel accounts should be more or less sacred or trusted than Paul's letters, but to remind us that Jesus, our ultimate teacher, was not an author himself - unless you include those times where he wrote a few cryptic words in the sand. He seems to have felt like his presence and his words were enough. But there are times when I really wish that he had written things down. Wouldn't it be wonderful to have words penned from Jesus himself? Sacred writings from the Great Rabbi, clarifying the more difficult teachings, reminding us what was really at the heart of his message. Perhaps he might have even included an appendix, explaining the more perplexing parts of his teachings, or unpacking what he really meant when he spoke in parables.

I want the teacher's notes, and I want them directly from Jesus so that they don't get twisted or misinterpreted along the way.

It seems Jesus trusted his followers more than that. He did not feel the need to author the final word, but instead took on those traits of great teachers. Instead he prioritized letting his followers think, reason, and communicate their own interpretations and ideas about what he had taught them.

And here's the thing - when I think back to my favorite teachers in my own learning journey, the *content* of what they taught has had far less impact in my life than the *posture* they demonstrated in the classroom. My favorite memories are of the way they sang, laughed, or entered into meaningful conversation. The best teachers made me feel valued and important - what they demonstrated was a posture to move about the world, rather than just passing on the information that they thought I should have.

My favorite teachers knew that shaping better human beings was far more important than creating impersonal students with more collected data in their heads. Sure, their classroom content was important, but not as important as making sure that students felt valued, appreciated, and empowered. Even those teachers that did leave me with text books they had written often spark memories of classroom conversations rather than key paragraphs or chapters from their writings. At least for me, my best teachers were more about the experience, than about the digesting of knowledge on a page.

I believe that this is what is at the heart of the Great Commission. Jesus didn't hand out a syllabus or a set of data points to be memorized and recited; he graduated his students, empowering them to embody the posture he modeled for them.

By prioritizing posture over specific doctrine, Jesus ensured that the message of the Gospel was carried forward not as a static doctrine, but as a living, breathing expression of relationship and care. Perhaps if he left behind a book or scroll of writings, without having the relational aspect, His message would have been forgotten over time. Instead he trusted that his followers would take what they had seen and heard on that mountainside - really throughout his entire life ministry - and do their best to carry that felt spirit to every nation and context, believing that they were sent out by the one who had true authority.

As we leave this place here on Trinity Sunday, may we also remember that we are not sent alone. The final note of Jesus' teaching is a promise: "I am with you always, to the end of the age." This is the ultimate resource for any student stepping out into the unknown - to be able to be comforted by the past teacher's presence in their life. Again, let us remind ourselves that this is not the aggressive intervention of a political aid, shielding us from failure. Instead we are

supported by the posture and presence of the teacher who first valued us. It is that same teacher who comforts and guides us still today by the Spirit's presence in our lives. It's not too different from my continued memories of my kindergarten teacher's singing, my teacher/wrestling coach's unconditional support, my high school professor's unique nuggets of wisdom, the college and seminary professors who surprisingly treated me as a peer.

Friends, may we embrace this Great Commission with the confidence of those who have been empowered and inspired by great teachers, moving into our world with the same transformative posture that Jesus demonstrated and invited his first disciples to join along the way.

May it be so. Amen.