

Coming in through the exit—Matthew 28:16-20

Theme: discipleship is about both life-long learning and living in a way that helps others see and hear the good news about Jesus

Discipleship is about learning as well as living. At the end of Matthew's gospel Jesus gives final instructions to his followers that had to do with how these ordinary men and women would pass on the good news about him to the world. The Great Commission is not about going anywhere, it's about being and making disciples—something that involves us knowing the truth about Jesus as well as passing it on.

Questions:

When did we first hear the gospel? What was it about the message that aroused your interest?

write the content of the gospel in two short sentences and share it with the group

What do we think a disciple is?

How can we make disciples of other people?

What does baptism have to do with becoming a disciple?

What is Jesus claiming about himself in this passage?

In what ways do we feel that Jesus is with us?

How much do people need to know about the Christian faith before they can become disciples?

Have you ever led anyone to faith in Jesus? How did it feel?

How do you think Matthew's gospel might help you in living as a disciple in today's world?

How might Matthew's gospel help you to share your faith with others in such a way that they become disciples?

Your stories:

Potted summary

Matthew has told the story of Jesus, climaxing in the cross and resurrection. He has stressed not only what Jesus did but also what Jesus said by constructing his account around five blocks of teaching—the most famous of which is what we know as the sermon on the mount. He's told this story because he believes it tells us how we can know God. And he wants us to share it with the world.

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What the passage is about....

1) 'as you go...'

The disciples have gathered at the mountain—maybe where the sermon on mount was preached (16). Some are still trying to grasp what has happened (17 'some doubted')—but most respond in the only way they can: worship—his life, death and resurrection show that Jesus is special beyond words. Then he speaks (19f): Note the stress here is not on going. That's taken for granted: we go into the world every time we leave the house, go to work, the shops, visit friends, go clubbing, whatever. The issue is what we do when we're out in the world...

2) 'make disciples'

this is the only command. It implies that we are disciples ourselves—disciples (16) make disciples (19). So what is a disciple? Simply put a Disciple is a learner, someone who models themselves on their teacher. This is not just an intellectual thing (learning facts—though the facts are important) but about our lifestyle, walking the way the master walks—see 1 John 2:6—and doing what he does.

3) Baptising and teaching

Disciple making is a life-time's journey. Jesus spells out what's involved...

i) Baptism (19c):

Baptism comes near the beginning of discipleship. Up to that point we're expressing interest, suggesting we're intrigued by Jesus, keen to find out more, weigh up the claims against the competition (of which there's lots). In Baptism, we say: I want to walk as Jesus walked, live a life modelled on his, helped and enabled by all the resources of heaven, I want to be a disciple.

Note the Trinitarian emphasis here—we are marking the start of a life with God, revealed in all his fullness as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a God who redeems and empowers, who loves and invests in his people. There are lots of other gods out there claiming our allegiance. Many of the people we meet as we go will be interested in all sorts of gods. One of our tasks as disciple-makers is to help them to bring the true God into focus.

Note too that baptism isn't a mark of perfection: we still make mistakes—indeed we recognise better than most that we fail to live up to our standards, let alone God's: but we know there's forgiveness (Col 1:14) and endless fresh starts. So we press on...

ii) **Teaching (20a):** learning is a life-long thing. It's good the government and industry has caught up with the idea that we never stop learning. The Christian faith has always believed this. Sadly some Christians don't live that way. We remain at square one our whole lives, missing out on the wonderful things God wants us to learn from him: let's make sure that's not us...!

Learning happens as we hear and digest the teaching of Jesus—that's why Matthew has constructed his Gospel the way he has: stories of Jesus' ministry wrapped around five blocks of teaching about God, the world and the life of faith that we need to learn.

But teaching is not just an intellectual exercise. It's not just about information. It's also about experience—learning what God is like as we encounter him powerfully in worship, prayer, bible study, crisis and elation. God's voice calls us on to fresh and new

experiences of his grace and love day by day as we walk with him.

And this teaching mainly happens when we're with others—though personal bible reading and prayer is part of it. The life of discipleship is a life in community where we learn from each other.

4) Calling the shots

All that Jesus says here is wrapped up in a huge claim that centres on four uses of the word 'all' in this passage:

All authority (18): People have already seen Jesus' authority (7:28-29)—the devil even offered him authority over the world (not that it was really his to give!). But through his suffering, his defeat of evil, death and the devil, God has given Jesus all authority in heaven as well as on earth: Jesus is God's chosen king who reigns and will reign forever (Ph 2:6-11)

All peoples: everyone needs to hear his summons to discipleship. People like us and people very different from us need to hear the invitation to forgiveness and new life through Jesus.

All that I have commanded you: Because he has all authority, we need to pay attention to and obey all he has commanded us. Our way of life must be modelled on his, drawing inspiration and resources from his word, his voice

All the days: he is with 'all the days' until he returns. Each and every day the risen, exalted, triumphant Jesus is with us. In our going to make disciples, he is with us, taking our works and words and working in the hearts and lives of those who see and hear us. And in the struggles of life, each and every day—'all the days'—he is with us, helping us to be the people he wants us to be.