

Matthew 28:16-20^{vi} vii

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some 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."

^{vi} About the Gospel: Matthew 28:16-20

This Great Commission gathers up the themes that Matthew has woven throughout his work. Jesus' ministry begins and ends on a mountain in Galilee, the place of revelation. There he inaugurates the mission of the Church.

Jesus makes a declaration, delivers a command and gives a promise. He has now received the authority of the exalted Son of Man and gives it to his disciples. He commands them to make disciples of "all nations," removing the geographical and ethnic restriction of Jesus' own ministry and of the disciples' previous mission.

The earliest accounts of baptism mention only baptism in Jesus' name, but the living experience of the baptized assembly led to the trinitarian formula as expressing the full reality of the new life.

To the disciples, Jesus now extends the full range of his ministry to them. Before they had been commissioned only to preach and heal, now they are to teach all that Jesus commanded them. Finally Jesus promises to the disciples his ongoing presence. The pledge of his name, Emmanuel, "God-with-us," is now fulfilled for his gathered people.

^{vii} Reflection and Response

We might measure our routine greetings—"How are you?" "Have a nice day!"— against those of today's scripture passages: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you" (2 Corinthians 13:13). "Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

Granted, that may be a mouthful to toss off as the bus pulls away or the car engine roars. It's not a fitting conclusion to most phone conversations, and probably won't catch on as a slogan for news reporters signing off. But it gives the members of liturgical traditions a reason to be thankful.

In church we can often hear words that are profound and soul-stirring, that call us to a vision of what we are about. A constant diet of committee meetings and shopping malls, tax forms and junk mail might reduce us to the mindless level of stolid workhorses or industrious ants. But then Paul interrupts: "Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?" (2 Corinthians 13:5).

We need that reminder. We need to know our heritage. We are the spiritual descendants of the little band of eleven who gathered on a mountain in Galilee. Doubt was there too, but its presence did not shadow the magnificent mandate of Jesus. Once before he had taught the Beatitudes from a mountain, and once before he had blinded the disciples with his glory on a mountain. It does not bother Jesus that his audience is small and scruffy. To them he entrusts a mission that reaches beyond Israel to all the nations of the earth.

Matthew begins by naming Jesus Emmanuel, "God with us" (1:23). He ends with an echo of that abiding presence: "I am with you always" (28:20). "Always?" the cynic might ask. To which a firm believer like Malcolm Muggeridge might answer: "Every happening, great and small, is a parable whereby God speaks to us, and the art of life is to get the message."