
Matthew 28:16-20. ¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

**You have been blessed with a close connection with your God
The triune God creates an intimate bond with each of his believers.
Don't doubt, but know and believe that God is with you always.**

The apostle Mark doesn't even use the word disciples, he just calls them the Eleven. The Eleven... but of course, it was more than just a number, this title testified to the close connection that they shared with Jesus. Can you imagine what this intimate inner circle saw and what they heard as they were taught and trained by Jesus himself? Jesus went throughout Galilee and he spoke to crowds upon crowds of people, but there were these men who went from town to town with him. Each path another classroom as Jesus often taught along the way, each stop another experience in the presence of God's Son. Can you imagine the close connection, the things that they learned, the things that they saw and heard, and the close bond that they enjoyed? The Holy Evangelists give us chapter after chapter of the experience of being a disciple, but really these words are only a taste of what they saw and experienced during their time with Jesus. In fact, the evangelist John tells us ***Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.***

All this written down for us was a sample of what they saw and heard! Can you imagine the close connection that they formed with Jesus, that they enjoyed with Him? And it was not just the things that they had heard and seen, but the bond that must have been created between these men, the brotherhood that had been formed with each other, and with their teacher. Maybe you can think a group of classmates that you grew so close with over the years that still today you regard them almost like family. These were Eleven men who spent three years with Jesus, learning from him. Imagine the bond that was built. They weren't just eleven men, but they were the eleven disciples, and each one shared a special bond with their Savior.

And now they were coming together to see Jesus after his death and his resurrection. The stories were spreading, ripping through the Judean countryside,

buzzing from person to person. Jesus had told the women, to tell these men, to go ahead of him to Galilee, that same Galilee that had served as their open-air classroom and training center. And Jesus had determined that they would meet in a quiet and a serene place, on the top of a high hill, so that he could visit with this special group once more. And so, those eleven men went to the mountain and they saw him. Their hearts must have leapt, their spirits must have soared when they saw him. Everything he had told them was true. He was the Messiah. He was their Savior. He was alive. And so they bowed in reverence and awe. They worshipped him.

But even after all this, even after the time spent listening to his word, learning from him, seeing him there in front of them, still they weren't quite sure. Matthew tells us, ***"When they saw him, they worshiped him" but at least some of them if not all of them, they doubted.***

That sounds a bit surprising, why would they doubt, but then we think of our own situation. Even after all that we have seen and heard, even after all the years of listening to his word, coming to God's house, sitting at the feet of our Savior; even after all these years, we have our doubts. Even as we sit in this church, in this place that some of you were baptized in, confirmed in; even in this place where we have come to his table and time and again have been assured of his sacrificial love, even in this place where we have time and again proclaimed the victorious truth of the resurrection, we still have moments where we are unsure, times that we in our weakness doubt. We may not have seen him in the flesh, but we have seen and experienced the power of his powerful word of truth. The font, the altar, the pulpit, the words spoken here, the assurances that come to us Sunday after Sunday, even as we sit in this familiar place, in God's house, the doubts still come. They come from the human space in our hearts, we are hesitant, slowed by reason, by what we see around us, and we doubt.

Notice that we aren't really told what the disciples doubted. We are told that they just doubted. Surely, they no longer doubted the historical fact of Christ's resurrection, for he was there in front of them, bodily he was there in their presence. Matthew rather seems to indicate that in their doubt was that they were double minded. They had been taught by the best. They believed Jesus and his Word. They had now seen him raised from the dead, but.... But soon he would be leaving. But they were just this small little group and what difference could they make in such a big bad world. They had all the assurances that they needed and yet in their fears and in their uncertainties, they doubted. And so, Jesus sensing their fears does not scold, or thunder down words of rebuke to shake some sense into them; instead he calms their fears, he chases away their doubts as he speaks the very words of assurance that they needed to hear.

18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Jesus came close to them, gathered this special little group to

himself and assured them of his power and his authority over all things; and then having assured them he sends the eleven out into the big bad world with this monumental task and with this incredible promise. First the monumental task: *Go and make disciples*, teaching them to obey, to hold on to everything I commanded you. And then this incredible promise: *surely I am with you always to the very end of the age*.

For us today, we may not be able to see Jesus in person one more time like the eleven, but still his message, Jesus' word of truth, is placed before us and it is still very much as clear as day. There is nothing deficient about the message. He died and rose again. He takes away our sin. He gives us victory over sin, and death, and hell. He lives and as our ascended LORD he continues to rule over all things for all the good of his family, the Church. It's all there for us, confirmed and made certain in Christ. He who kept all his promises, he who fulfilled his Word, will do the same for the things that we are still waiting for. In faith, we know that he will come again. In faith, we know that he will take us to be with him forever. He chases our doubts away, so that we might be single-minded as we live our lives for him.

The Lord had forged this intimate connection with his disciples, the things that they had seen and heard, had bond them to Christ, had united them to each other and brought them so close to their God, and now he reassured them. He gave them these words of incredible assure. *I am with you always to the very end of the age*.

Due to the problems that we face, the weaknesses within us, and the big bad world which sure knows how to make our faith and make us feel small at outnumbered, we doubt, we waiver, we are not quite sure about following Jesus. We are not quite sure that we can follow this God that we can't see and seems all the more hidden when we have difficulties touch our daily lives. We have those moments, but God speaks to us, he speaks to you these wonderful words of assurance.

And so this is the truth, the words of assurance that we need, and Jesus delivers to us. He is in control and he is with us always, and in his grace and mercy he loves us so much that he sent out messengers of his grace to connect us to himself. And in his grace he unites us to his church, which has grown from a small little intimate group to a great cloud of witnesses, billions upon billions in the church today and we are also united with those who came before us, and yet he does not treat us as a number, but in his love he makes it so that he put his name on each one of us, he connects us to himself intimately and personal. And through the brotherhood of believers through this family of the Church keep us in this intimate bond until we are with him forever. In his grace, and through his means of grace, he connects us to himself and creates and strengthens this wonderful bond. Through baptism, in particular, he puts his name and on each one of us as he brings us into his family. The same simple formula has been passed down through the ages as the message has spread to the nations. *In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit*, and as the water touched your skin and the word touched your heart each one of you were added to his eternal kingdom. And by the grace of God a close and intimate connection is forged and maintained. We don't have to simply imagine a close

bond with our God and Savior, because we have one. You are connected to this ancient brotherhood of believers. You are connected to Old Testament believers and New Testament Christians as God has given us the gift of faith. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all and yet we are each special to him. You don't have to imagine a close and intimate bond with your God. You don't have to doubt that the LORD is with you. This is his promise to you. This is the good news of the Gospel. You are his disciple, you have been brought into his inner circle, you have been made a member of God's family. Our LORD knows each and every one of us and surely he will be with us always to the very end of the age.

Through the power of the Word, through the power of the sacraments we are connected to our God, who knows a thing or two about relationships, for our God is triune. Our God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, living in harmony since before the creation of the world. And this God of love: the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit who each loves the other perfectly, also loves us and wants to know and experience his love, and so he sends out his messengers of grace to baptize, to teach us about the love of God, and how we are to live in love and harmony with God.

We don't have to imagine a close connection with our Savior. We don't have to doubt his presence in our life. We have been given the gift of a close relationship with our God. The Son of God came to save us, to redeem us to make us his own. Through the gift of faith, through the gift of the Spirit, working through his means of grace we belong to our Lord and he lives in us. And through this gift of faith in Christ Jesus we have the privilege of living our lives knowing that we are not only disciples, but we are children of God, we can call our God, Father. This is the gospel message that assures us of God's love, that compels us to live in love of God and love of neighbor, and this is the good news that we can share with our children, with our family, with the nations. We don't have to imagine. We don't have to doubt. We have been given the gift of a close relationship with our God. He has brought us into his family of believers. And he promises to be with us always. Thanks be to God for the comfort and the confidence we receive from his word. Let us live for him with a single-minded purpose and faith. Let us live for him who has not only brought us into this incredible family of God that spans through the ages, but he has graciously placed his name on each one of us and promises to be with each one of us. Praise be to the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit, who has called us to be his own and who has promised to be with us always. Thanks be to the Triune God. Amen.