

24 May 2009

## Getting Down to Business

### Matthew 28:16-20

We've had a lot of guests here in the 2 ½ years since we came to London. Our parents have come multiple times, our daughter and her husband have visited, and we've had a handful of friends who have stayed with us for days or even weeks. As I talk to people about their experiences if they've moved over here from the States as we have, this is a pretty common story.

Julie and Ian and I have settled into a pattern when we know that guests are coming. We try to stock the house with some of our guests' favorite foods, we charge up our visitor mobile phone, put some money on the spare Oyster card, and then we start cleaning the house. There's a sense of expectation, even when we're doing the most menial things, of what it's going to be like to have some visitors around. The last step is usually making a list of things to go out and do.

Usually, the first thing we do is pick up a 24 bus near our house and ride it all the way to Westminster Abbey and back. You see a lot—Camden, the West End, and Big Ben. You also come back up right in front of the church. Mostly we do that first because it's cheap, and most of our guests from California fall asleep early on that first day. Bus fare isn't much to risk.

The work of getting ready for a visit is a part of the hope of seeing someone special again.

*16Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*

*19Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

As we wrap up this series of Easter messages that will take us into Pentecost, it's good to be reminded of what we continue to celebrate during this season:

**We celebrate Easter to remember the miraculous raising from the dead of Jesus the Messiah—God in human form, who came and lived and served and loved and died in order to demonstrate the depth of God's love for all of his creation.**

That's our baseline—the foundation for whatever else we might say in this season or any season. At Easter we celebrate the lengths God will go to in order to demonstrate his love for us.

We've been looking at the appearances of Jesus after Holy Week—after the crucifixion and resurrection. Jesus appeared to his disciples and to hundreds of other people in those strange days after his death. It's those appearances, and the way they're written about

and understood in the Scriptures, that make up the basis for our faith—for our hope that Christ really is who he said he is, and that he can do what he said he would do.

We've also been trying to get some perspective on just exactly what the Atonement means for us. The Atonement is the theological term for what God has done to bring us back to him. During the run up to Easter we talked about how Christ's atoning work offers healing for all of our relationships: with God, with ourselves, with each other and with the earth. This is crucially important stuff for us to wrestle with as we grow in our faith as disciples of Jesus.

The Atonement is like a drama that happens in three acts: the Cross, the resurrection, and Pentecost—the gift of the Holy Spirit. On the Cross, a price is paid for the sin and brokenness in all of our lives. The resurrection—the Easter miracle—demonstrates that God has power over all things, even death. And the gift of the Holy Spirit is God's way of inspiring and empowering each of us to be the people he made us to be in the first place.

We should be very clear on this point: It's the Atonement—the work God has done to bring us back to him—it's the Atonement that makes us who we are as Christian individuals and as a community of Christian faith.

I quoted Scot McKnight here last week. Listen to how he describes the link between the Atonement and the church:

'Atonement, if we let the Bible speak for itself, is about creating communities of faith wherein God's will is done and lived out.'

*The Atonement is about creating communities of faith wherein God's will is done and lived out.*

Last week I talked about Peter's recommissioning—about the role that repentance and forgiveness and restoration play in each of our lives and in the life of this church. The need for repentance is something we're going to talk about from time to time in the coming year. Your church Council had a very productive and inspiring conversation about it this past week.

All of this matters because we're just about ready to celebrate Pentecost. Next Sunday we remember the gift of the Holy Spirit—the very presence and power of God, given to prepare us and equip us for the life of faith. Next week we welcome a guest to come and stay with us, and so this week we're doing a little housecleaning.

In our text this morning the remaining disciples meet Jesus on a mountain. Whether or not this is the same place where Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew seems to be using it as a reminder or a closing statement from that sermon.

They gathered there and worshipped, even in the midst of some doubts. That alone is instructive for us—after the traveling and ministry and growth, followed by the traumatic events of the visit to Jerusalem, the disciples were still struggling with what to believe.

But that didn't stop them from answering Christ's call to come to meet him one last time.

When Jesus begins to teach them, we know from the other Gospel accounts that he's helping to prepare them for a visitor—for a new arrival—the Holy Spirit. We saw a few weeks ago that Jesus said to the disciples: 'I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.' In other words, stay where you are and get ready for a visit you won't believe.

In our text this morning Jesus has shifted to talking about what the disciples were going to do together once the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost.

'All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me,' Jesus said. That's a pretty bold claim, but it's the one that gives the disciples the confidence to believe that Jesus is going to make good on all of his promises.

'Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...' Now we're getting into it. Now we're getting down to business. This is the one-line version of the marching orders Christ gives his followers, his church, to all of us here in this room today.

'Go and make disciples of all the nations.' For us this morning it's important to notice that Jesus' marching orders come with a plan and a promise.

The plan comes in two parts. First, there's this bit about baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. There's a lot more to that than just dunking or sprinkling water. Think back on the baptism we had here last week. Baptism is a three-part covenant between God, families and communities of faith.

The plan here is to commit ourselves to living and nurturing each other in faithful communities—gatherings where young and old, single and married, mature disciples and new believers can grow together, can worship together, can support each other through times of terrible sadness and reckless joy.

To baptize is to initiate relationships that are anchored in the journey of faith, and that's where we get to the second part of the plan.

'Teach the people to live by all that I have shared with you.' That's a big part of the plan Christ leaves for all of us. The Christian faith is by nature a shared faith. We're called to share it with people around us who might be curious. We share it on a daily basis with people we live with and work with and worship with. In this part of the plan Jesus is reminding the disciples that it's not enough just to know him. The call on each believer is to introduce him to our neighbor.

They must have been thinking: 'This guy is crazy. He has no idea what we've just been through. We should be on a beach somewhere, healing up from all of our hard work.'

Jesus anticipated their response to his plan, and he offers a promise along with it. 'You don't have to do all of this alone,' he said. 'You won't be left to figure all of this out by

yourselves.'

'Surely I am with you always,' Jesus said, 'even to the very end of the age.'

That's the promise. That's the announcement of the visitor who is coming. That's the call to get the house ready and to start mapping out where you're going to go.

For us this is a reminder as we prepare to celebrate Pentecost next week. The Holy Spirit comes and inspires and empowers all of us to live the lives God calls us to live from the very beginning.

For us this is a reminder of who we are and what we're called to be as a community of faith—as a church of Jesus Christ in this community.

We say it a lot around here, but this church is built on a foundation of Jesus Christ and it's expressed through Fellowship, Worship, Discipleship and Mission.

We gather and build relationships together in Fellowship. In Worship we remember who we are and whose we are as we honor God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In Discipleship we learn and pray and grow together as we learn what God calls us and prepares us to do. And in the end, all of this is turned outward as we serve the world in Christ's name—as we do our part to accomplish the Mission of Christ's church.

Listen to the text again. Listen for where we see the Fellowship, Worship, Discipleship and Mission in Christ's marching orders.

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

Every visit begins with an invitation. As we prepare to celebrate Pentecost next week, let's make this last song our prayer as we invite the Holy Spirit to be here, in each one of us, and in this church family.

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on all of us today and always. Amen.