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Mystery and Mission
Matthew 28:16-20 & II Corinthians 13:11-13

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Matthew ends his gospel with Jesus appearing to the disciples
To give them a mission that would shape the rest of their lives.
We have heard the words he said so many times, that many of us know it by heart.
Most of us have a picture in our heads of what it was like that day,
The picture we have most likely reflecting our ideals more than reality.
Of a group of eager disciples, dressed in white, ready for the mission,
Of a sunny day on a mountaintop,
Of Jesus appearing in glory, white robe shining
And as the words were spoken the disciples must have felt their hearts swell,
Felt courage growing in them, fully prepared to follow the Risen Christ to death....
Such an image might lead us to think things like....
Wouldn't it be great to have been one of those disciples?
To be so sure of their mission, to be sent out and know what to say?
To be sure of what we believe and confident enough to share?
But our idea of what happened that day changes dramatically when we take the passage in context
Matthew tells us that for those eleven that day, this was the first time they encountered the risen Christ,
They gathered as a grieving, discouraged group, of mixed motives and ideas.
Matthew says that many doubted, which rings true, and matches more closely what we already have
been told about the disciples.
I think that those disciples, and their first hearing of Jesus words that day,
Probably more closely resembled our experience today.
It is not easy to be a disciple today, is it?
How do we share the gospel in a world where observed facts seem to challenge belief,
In a multicultural context? Although we have received God's love and grace,
And we often think we know what it means, we are often not confident enough to share it,
We might get facts wrong, we might look naïve, we may not know the "right" answer
In fact in our own lives, although we have faith, there are often times we have questions about God
To which we have not been able to find the answers.
We know the truth that at times our lives do not align with Jesus teaching,
So we worry that others would think us hypocritical
Too often we think we have to measure up to our idealized picture of those first disciples,
Rather than be honest about the joys and struggles of how to integrate faith and life.
Besides, we can't go into the world, drop everything to deliver God's message to far off countries, to
nations that we think need to hear the message, we have responsibilities,
If he meant this for us and the church in every time, did he really mean what we think he did?
So many questions, so few answers....
So what can we learn about discipleship from the passages we read today?
There are many important ideas in the Matthean passage, that we will not have time to deal with today.
Such as:
What did "go into the world" mean? Was discipleship to be measured in miles travelled?
What about teaching all that Jesus commanded? Would emails do that?
Was this great commission given to all Christians or only for Jesus inner circle?
These are all important, but we will put them aside for today
To focus on what these last words of Jesus might have meant for disciples of all times,
This passage gives us insight into discipleship, the nature of God, and how the two are related.
First is the nature of disciples, then and now

Matthew tells us, as they met Jesus on the mountain top, “some doubted”
Reminding us that the disciples were still the guys who make mistakes, who followed and failed
Jesus knew all about these people, their doubts, their failings, their limitations,
And yet he sent them out to show the truth about him to other people, to make new disciples
What could he have been thinking?
Were there not better qualified candidates?
It seems more like divine comedy than godly planning.
It seems so messy rather than decent and in good order.... but this is what Jesus did....
And continued to do, to send ordinary people into the world,
With little to commend themselves other than to love Jesus enough to do what Jesus asked
And his instructions, if he was sending those disciples out, wouldn't it be good to give them authority?
To give them the “powers”, the knowledge the wisdom they would need
But he didn't...and this should have us wondering why....
Instead of giving them what it appeared they would need,
Jesus told the disciples that all authority is given to him, this would be all they needed.
How were they to do what he was asking?
Quick answer: They were to depend on him for what they needed,
It was and remains Jesus' ministry, in God's hands as disciples Go into the world.
They were not super spiritual, nor highly educated, they had little social status and less money.
YET who better to show the world God's love than ordinary people, living ordinary lives?
Able to make mistakes and forgive, living proof that God's love is for all.
They could not do this on their own, that much was clear, but they didn't have to.
They were to do this with Jesus authority, that carried with it the authority of God.
Everything was to be done in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Spirit,
That Jesus himself would be with them made the difference.
And this leads us to consider the nature of God, and what that means for discipleship.
Over the years after Jesus death, the church wrestled with how Jesus and God were one as Jesus said,
And how we understood the Spirit, after much discussion, many different ideas,
Just before the end of the second century, the church began to put words around what we believe to be
true, that God is one, Jesus is God and both are one with the Holy Spirit,
This doctrine of the Trinity, helps us to understand on one level, and leaves much that will never be
understood.
A caution: Whatever we have come to understand about God is not all there is to know about God
God cannot be contained by our labels, or icons, or the ideas we hold or words we speak
What we come to know about God is meaningless **without coming to know God**,
And we come to know God not by thinking our way but by entering the mystery of God.
The trinity remains a mystery, but not mystery that is a riddle with a solution that can be found by CSI
or Miss Marple or Hardy Boys, that once solved is no longer mystery
It is not like the mystery of socks and dryers that must have a rational explanation
When we talk about the mystery of the Triune God,
we mean an amazing reality that is beyond all our best thoughts
A mystery that we can be drawn into and experience but that defies explanation
It is experiencing a reality that is beyond our reality, encountering something that is wholly Other,
The fundamental nature of the “Trinity” is relationship, or “love”
Jesus gives us a glimpse of this when he said “I am in the Father and the Father is in me”
God is not God outside of this relationship, it is eternal, no beginning no end
It can be glimpsed, but it remains a mystery,
It is into this relationship that we are invited with words like “I am the vine you are the branches,
Apart from me you can do nothing”

It is this nature of God that we are to show in our lives,
It is in the living together, in loving and seeking peace, that others will recognize Jesus disciples
And in our accepting outsiders into the family in baptizing, accepting them at the family table,
Disciples are made over the long term, as we all work together to be one as our God is one.
The early church struggled with this, as does the church in every age,
Paul wrote the church in Corinth, known for feuds and disagreements, lack of generosity, self focus,
Paul encouraging them to continue to strive to be this kind of community,
To agree with one another, to live in peace not in their own strength
But in the strength of the God of love and peace who was with them.
And today we look back and know that Christ was with them as they strove to be church
And make disciples...and hand to hand, age to age, disciples have continued to be made,
Not on the strength of the disciples, but in the Strength of the Triune God.
The truth is just as God used that group of ordinary people, God can use us today.
Not because we are so good, but because our amazing, mysterious God is with us
Sharing faith is not about having all the right answers, or about being perfect,
Faith is shared in the power of God's Spirit, as God provides what we need.
Words of faith are more readily listened to if they come from a familiar face, a friend, a relative, a
trusted co-worker or a neighbour.
Disciples are formed over time,
As people share how they have experienced God's love, in good and difficult times,
And as people honestly share their struggles to integrate faith and life.
Disciples are formed as time is spent together, stories of faith told and reflected on, as true confessions
are shared, forgiveness offered and accepted, as God is in the midst of it all
Jesus said, I have the authority, so don't worry, I'll be with you,
So dare to go. step out of your comfort zone,
Go beyond the walls that keep you safe, and share with all people,
joining with them in communities of faith, to learn together, you can do it,
not because you are strong or wise enough, but because I am with you and will be with you.
I close with a story that illustrates real discipleship.
I had the privilege of attending a funeral this week for a man who has often been in this congregation.
His name was Glen Hallman, he was a traveller, often staying in shelters as he travelled,
He didn't own much, but the stories at his funeral centred on his faith and his joy in sharing what he
knew about Jesus love for him.
He shared with people in the street and in the shelters, in the places he travelled,
He shared with people that most of us would never have a chance to talk with,
Who else but Glen could they trust? Who else could share in a way that they would understand?
Each of us has influence among different people, because of where we live, or work or play or study,
People who will better understand God's love from you, than from anyone else,
You are the experts in your lives, you know how to talk with and share already.
You have experienced God's love, so Go...as Jesus said. Get to it,
Our amazing, mysterious God is with us.
Amen