

Rev. Anne J. Scalfaro
16 April 2023

10:30 a.m. MT Worship
Second Sunday of Easter

Calvary Baptist Church
Denver, Colorado

“The Time to Hesitate is Through”

Second Sermon in the Series, *Compassion & Commission* (Annual Theme: “Spirit of Curiosity”)

Matthew 28:16-20

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

NOTE: A sermon is a spoken word event. This manuscript served as a guide but is not exact to what was preached in the moment.
NOTE: Parts of this sermon are adapted from a sermon I preached at Calvary on June 11, 2017 called “DIY Discipleship.”

When it comes to home improvement, there are two kinds of people in the world: DIY-ers and HAP-ers. You know, those who *DIY: Do It Yourself* and those who *HAP: Hire A Professional*.

My husband Damon falls in the DIY camp. A few years ago when we decided to install recessed lighting throughout our house, Damon said he’d do it. I asked, “*Have you ever done this before?*” He said, “*Nope.*” I said, “*Do you know how?*” He said, “*Not yet.*” I said, “*Do you even know anything about electrical work?*” He said, “*eh...I’ll YouTube it.*”

Sure enough, a few months and a lot of dust and debris later we had 32 new LED recessed lights throughout our downstairs, all on dimmers and in zones. It was really impressive.

From swamp coolers to sprinkler systems, Damon is a 100% die-hard, determined

“Do-It-Yourself-er.” Before he’ll ever hire anyone, he’ll research it first to see if he can do it himself. I’m the opposite. Before I even *think* about doing something myself, I’ll research to see if there’s someone out there who can do it for me, how much it’ll cost, and how fast I can get them out to the house to do it.

You could say that Damon is of the mindset: “*If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again...*” And I’m of the mindset: “*If you’re pretty sure you’re not gonna succeed– then don’t waste time trying!*”

Now I admire DIY-ers for their “can-do” spirit and wouldn’t you know, when it comes to spreading the message about our faith, today’s text validates the *Do-It-Yourself-ers*, and it calls the rest of us, the *Hire-a-Professional people* to account!

Now let’s just have a brief review so we all understood just

who these DIY-ers are that Jesus is talking to right now in these final verses of Matthew's gospel...because Lord knows, they are certainly not "Professionals" – even after three years of on-the-job training!

As we saw last week on Easter morning, the earth quakes and shakes and an angel descends to roll back the stone of Jesus' tomb. The guards are overcome, the women who came to the tomb are terrified, and lo and behold their fears and emotions are justified because the tomb is empty. The angel tells the women to not fear and to direct the disciples to GO to Galilee where they will see Jesus. But, before the women can take a step, the risen Christ appears himself and repeats that same command that the disciples should GO to Galilee.¹

Now the disciples (the ones in today's text) have *not* seen any of this Easter morning drama themselves. *They* were not there for the earthquake or the angel. *They* have not seen the Risen Christ or heard his voice. And as you can read in the verses right before today's text

(Matthew 28:11-15), their reputations are on their way to being ruined by rumors that they have stolen Jesus' body and perpetrated a hoax to get others to believe that Jesus is alive. At this point, all these disciples have is the directive from the two Marys who were at the tomb: "*GO to Galilee.*"²

And maybe because they realize that when they *should have stayed* by Jesus' side a few days ago, they left, now when they are told to GO to see Jesus, the last thing they're gonna do is stay. And so they GO. And Jesus reveals himself to the disciples as he promised. And when they meet the living Christ, Matthew says that they Worship AND they Doubt.

Isn't that curious? They are in awe enough of the resurrection that they worship, while still doubting that it could be true. Praises were sung, but not without some skepticism.

I love that Matthew includes this detail of doubt. Because it mirrors our own lives, doesn't it?

Very few of us are here today in

¹ Craig R. Koester, "Commentary on Matthew 28:16-20," *WorkingPreacher.org* (19 June 2011), accessed on June 10, 2017 at

http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=936.

² Koester, *ibid.*

worship without any doubt. And many of us who have severe doubts in our faith, still show up to worship – prompted by something, the Spirit perhaps, to keep trusting that our doubts are doorways into discipleship, not roadblocks against it.

Matthew makes it clear. Among Jesus’ most “dedicated” disciples – even after the Resurrection (the miracle of all miracles, the sign of all signs) – even amongst Jesus’ most dedicated disciples – there is both Showing Up and Second Guessing, Devotion and Doubt. We might expect a clearer and stronger faith from these guys; they are in the presence of the living Christ after all! But it seems that even for Those Who Get to See Jesus Alive After His Death – even for them! – Discipleship is characterized, in part, by Doubt, not Certainty.

You know, sometimes we’re tempted to think, *“If I had only been here on earth when Jesus was here, then faith would be easier. If I could have seen him feed the 5,000...heard him preach the Beatitudes ‘live’...put my fingers in the nail holes the way Thomas did...[if*

*only MY child had been miraculously healed]...if only I had been there [THEN], my faith would be more rock solid [NOW].”*³

Perhaps. But also, perhaps not. And actually, probably not. Let these disciples be testimony enough to us all: Faith is finally and forever a mystery whether we can bolster it with physical proof and evidence or not.

And yet, in our Doubt, there is Divine Presence. Jesus is still there with his less-than-dutiful, perpetually-doubting disciples and he compassionately promises them his abiding presence to the end of the age. Jesus doesn’t seem concerned about their doubt at all. He doesn’t try to fix it or correct it. He cares way more about their devotion than their doubt, and he pledges his presence and devotion to them in return.

Matthew’s gospel ends with such comforting words, *“I am with you always.”* It’s a beautiful bookend the gospel which begins in chapter 1, verse 23, with the angel telling Joseph that the baby born will be called *Emmanuel*, *“God with us.”* First

³ Scott Hoezee, “Matthew 28:16-20,” *Calvin Seminary: Center for Excellence in Preaching* (5 June 2017), accessed on June 10, 2017 at

http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/trinity-sunday-a/?type=the_lectionary_gospel.

and last, the Gospel Good News is about God's Presence With Us – "Always and in All Ways," as my mentor and pastor George Mason would say.

This is the Grand Benediction that capstones the Great Commission: No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey or faith's journey – doubter, struggler, full-fledged believer – Christ gives us ALL the same promise: "*I am with you always.*" Christ's presence with us is not predicated on our belief in him; if you hear nothing else today hear this – Doubters get Divine Presence too! Even when we struggle to feel God's presence, we are promised it is there.

And with this compassionate promise of, "*I am with you*" comes this great commission: "*go and make disciples.*"

The command to "Go" (as in "*Go to Galilee*") is what brought these disciples here to Jesus in this moment and the command "Go" (as in "*Go to all nations*") is what sends them forth from this moment into the moments of the rest of their lives.

"Go" is an imperative; it leaves no room for hesitation. Jesus

doesn't say "*But before you go, figure out your theology first*" or "*before you go, ditch your doubts,*" or "*Before you go, make sure you have your act together and you know what you're doing.*" Or "*Before you go, make sure you've confessed all your sins and cleaned up your life,*" No, he just says, "*Go.*" No qualifiers. No exemptions. There is no "spreading God's love" Licensing Test to pass, no Discipleship Degree to obtain – there is only this – a commission (to "*Go*"), with a promise of compassionate presence ("*I am with you*").

And yet – most of us, I'm willing to guess, would rather HAP (hire a professional) or 'outsource' the Great Commission, wouldn't we?

Not the "compassionate presence" part, no *THAT* part we want to feel, that God is with us, but the other part? The part that says "go ye therefore and make disciples?" Well, we'll leave *THAT* part to the Professionals.

We don't dare try to DIY the Great Commission. For some reason, we think that telling people about God's redemptive love and grace for the world is

for ‘other people’ to do and not for us to do. ‘Someone else’ will do that, not me. I gave to the Mission Offering, after all – isn’t that what *that’s* for? Isn’t that what ‘*those* people’ do? Or the pastors can invite people to church; that’s *their* job, not mine.

Fact is, no matter who we are – we are ALL full of excuses as to why we DON’T tell people about God’s love and life-changing effect on our life.

It’s crazy. We’ll tell people about the new movie we just saw and how great it is, without fear of whether they’ll agree or not. We’ll tell people about a great new restaurant we tried, without fear of whether they’ll like the food as much as we did or not...but when it comes to our faith, we don’t tell anyone – and why? Because we’re afraid they may not agree or may not like it?

Well. The truth is, we let doubt, fear, insecurity, the trauma of coercive experiences, and any number of other reasons keep us from doing the ONE thing Jesus asked us to do following his resurrection: share his message and teachings with others.

The irony is that *most of us* would say that our faith means so much to us; that it is at the heart of what helps us get through life. Even if we have doubts, we are still here – aren’t we? Something about Jesus or Church connects with us or compels us or sparks curiosity in us. If that were not true – you’d be somewhere else this morning or if you’re listening to this online later this week, Lord knows if you aren’t interested – you’ll just click over to the next podcast or Tiktok video. But you are here. We are here. Why?

What is the disconnect in our being present in this place and our desire to experience God’s love – and yet our reticence to speak out aloud about and share God’s love with others? I know it’s not that we don’t *want* others to experience God’s love and transformation too. Surely not, right? Lord have mercy – just flip on the news or open the paper – the world needs the life changing, transformational message of God’s love. This is urgent, right?

As the character Lucas says in one of my favorite movies from my youth, *Empire Records*, “In the immortal words of The Doors, ***“The time to hesitate is***

*through.*⁴

Our hesitation in speaking out about our faith is neither helping nor healing; it's hindering the coming of the kin-dom of God here on earth. What are we waiting for? What are we afraid of?

The Great Commission is for ALL of us. And it is something we are to be doing Here and Now – not Tomorrow or Sometime in the Future – but Today. No excuses.

And Jesus not only doesn't leave room for excuses...he in fact, treats as 'normal' the very thing many of us use as an excuse – Doubt. Whether it's doubt about our faith, doubt about our abilities to share our faith (if we are learn-ed enough), or just doubt in general about whether or not sharing our faith is effective or helpful.

Jesus gives the Great Commission to Doubting Disciples, not Perfect Professionals, or Fully Believing Folks.

And think about it. How appealing is it – ever – to have someone who is so sure of what

they know and think is right to be telling you what IS right and what you should or shouldn't to? When does that work? Never, right?

Expressing a little doubt is invitational, it's relational...it shows that we're in this together. And that WE don't have ALL the answers. Think of how different the history of Christianity would be if we had shared our faith with Doubt rather than Dominance? With an invitation rather than force?

I think many of us hesitate or hem and haw about sharing our faith because we have come to think of the Great Commission as more like the Great Coercion. We think of it as Forcing our Faith on others or pushing a Fixed Faith onto others, rather than inviting people into a journey we are on ourselves...a journey of discovering and invitation, of living and learning – together.

And yes, certainly Christianity has a horrific history of harm. Many have forced faith on others through violence and conquering – all in the name of Christ. The Crusades are one example of that. And there are

⁴ Quote from Empire Records accessed on April 15, 2023 at <https://www.quotes.net/mquote/28603>.

plenty of examples of missionary work where cultural dominance and colonization has occurred, literally erasing native cultures in the name of ‘evangelizing’ people. The harm done in the name of Christ – over centuries and all over the world and still today – is very real and it’s impossible to quantify. Because of that – *even in cases where we have named that harm and sought repair, even now when we think of our missionaries as Global Servants, who are trained to work alongside the peoples they serve – learning from them and empowering them within their skill sets and culture – focusing on meeting needs versus forcing faith...even with that change in approach* – we still see the wounds and scars that Christianity has caused – and that maybe we ourselves carry – and that makes us back away, doesn’t it? We shut down.

But – in so many ways – we’ve given the harms and hurts that have been caused in the name of Christ *more power* by letting those things in our past become an excuse for why we stay silent in the present. Nothing gets repaired or healed when we are silent. Or when we pretend something didn’t happen. The best thing we can do is speak

up. Name those as horrific wrongs. Call ourselves and others to account. Seek repair for them, and then tell a different story – a new story today.

The story Jesus told...a story of Inviting people into Belonging. Which is what baptizing is, by the way. A rite of inviting people into the belonging of the new Christ-following community...marking them as Jesus people, and finding their beloved identity in God. Remember the voice that spoke at Jesus’ baptism: “*this is my son, the beloved, in you I am well pleased.*” Going forth to ‘baptize people’ means helping them find belonging and claim their belovedness. And sharing faith, or ‘making disciples’? That is as simple as obeying Jesus’ teaching ourselves and sharing it with others. And what is Jesus’ teaching? Not that we BELIEVE in him or force others to, but that we LOVE God and LOVE others. The Great Commission is based in the Greatest Commandment.

Look at the symbolism here. Jesus is all about the teaching part of his ministry in this moment. They are on a mountain. Remember the Sermon on the Mount, where he

taught them what it looks like in practical detail what it means to love God and to love others? Jesus has gathered his disciples on a mountain because mountains are places of teaching – and transformation. “Making disciples” has nothing to do with Force and everything to do with Faithfulness. For in order to teach, we must be life-long learners ourselves.

I think Jesus wants us to “make disciples” because he knows we need other people to help us come to understand who he is and what his love is about. People different than us. That’s why he said “GO.” Go. Get out of your comfort zones – Go. Go see glimpses of God, experience the image of the Divine in all Disciples, not just in those around you. Go to all nations. Or today we might say – into all neighborhoods, for there are plenty of nationalities all around us. We certainly don’t have to leave our city to find the diversity of people God calls us to create community with.

Just as I know many of us here today are at Calvary because we have been harmed by churches in our past, and need a spiritual community that can help us heal – so, too, does the world need to know a God that is Love...a

God that calls us to love...not by believing in Jesus but by following Jesus’ teachings and enacting them in the world. Truly – that is really what is at the heart of the Great Commission. Not forcing faith, but teaching faith. Not bullying, but belonging. Not gaining more church members, but growing meaning-filled communities that reflect the light and love of Christ.

Jesus did not give the “Great Commission” to religious “Professionals.” Remember the ‘professionals’ are the ones just a week ago who conspired with Rome to have Jesus killed? No, Jesus gave the “Great Commission” – entrusted the “Great Commission” to ordinary disciples – fellow doubters – people who sometimes get it right and more often get it wrong.

Jesus gave the “Great Commission” to imperfect people because he knew that if we waited until we felt we were perfect or our faith was perfect – we’d never go anywhere or say anything.

Friends, the world is not being served by our doubts and our hesitations, or anything that is keeping us quiet. The world

needs to know God's message of Love that is *Open to All, Closed to None*. There are too many other voices out in the world shouting Hate and Power and Violence. Where is our voice? Where is *your* voice?

Amen.

I know it takes courage to talk about faith, but the time to hesitate is through. God is with us, ALL of us, always and in all ways. And that means God *needs* ALL of us – in our own unique way – to tell someone about the Love of God in a way only we can. Your life experience will speak to someone in a way that mine will not and cannot.

And – you don't have to quote the Bible, you can just remind someone they are beloved.

You don't even have to mention Jesus – you can just do something in Love that is as radical as what Jesus did when he talked to the Samaritan woman at the well, sat and had dinner with Zacchaeus, or forgave the Empire that crucified him on the cross.

When we start doing THESE kinds of things...well...we'll be making disciples for sure. Starting with ourselves. Doubts and all.