

How Are You Going

[Matthew 28:16-20; Psalm 96](#)

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I know a young girl who grew up in a home where no one went to church. Her parents, who both had come from very devout homes, believed in God, but had no regular religious practices. Since her father was from a Catholic family, she had a crucifix in her bedroom where she could see it every night as she was falling asleep. She saw it every day for years. Now a crucifix is a very good reminder of the suffering that Jesus endured on our behalf, but you have to know the story to understand the cross. Anyway, one night her grandmother was tucking her into bed and told her the story of Jesus' death. But she also told her dear granddaughter about the resurrection. The granddaughter's eyes filled with tears and she said, "Thank you for telling me. I just knew there had to be a good end to the story."

The resurrection is a good outcome we stake our lives on the truth of it -- but it is so much more than a happy ending to a tragic story. The resurrection, as they say, changes everything. Let us pray.

We ask, O Lord, that your Holy Spirit would be present in the hearing and the proclaiming of your Word, and may your Word settle down in our hearts, minds and wills so that we may be transformed more and more into the likeness of our only Savior Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

So, just how does the resurrection change everything? Well, we need to make it clear that just believing that a dead body came back to life doesn't necessarily change things. Believing that the tomb was empty doesn't either -- the leaders of the day believed the tomb was empty, but they continued in their old patterns of life. And, up to this point, the disciples had actually seen the risen Jesus, but they weren't setting the world on fire just yet.

As a matter of fact, this text in Matthew begins with a real hint of shadows over our band of disciples. Eleven disciples are heading out to Galilee on the word of the women who had given them that message from Jesus. Eleven. They had always been known as The Twelve. They aren't anymore -- Judas is no longer with them and he's not with them because of his faithless betrayal and a faithless suicide.

But, even though they are not all they were or could be, they head out. Even this journey is sober. They are heading out to meet someone who might not be there, but they are daring to believe that the Lord might actually meet them at the end of the journey.

If you read the whole gospel of Matthew you will know something of Matthew's theological geography -- It is on mountains that Jesus clears up confusion, revealing that his words are indeed the words of God. Remember the Sermon on the Mount and the Mount of Transfiguration. If you want to know who Jesus is and what God requires of you -- well, that happens on a mountain.

So, confused about events and crippled by loss, they head for the mountains, hoping to hear a clear word from Jesus yet again. This demonstrates something we see in scripture from beginning to end: we do not wait for our faith to grow so that we can then follow Jesus; we follow Jesus and our faith grows.

And as this story unfolds, we see that played out even more when they get to the mountain for we are told that when they saw the risen Jesus, some worshipped and some doubted. They did both. Now this is actually a helpful detail to have. It's good to know that those first disciples lived with a mixture of worship and doubt. The text doesn't tell us just exactly what their doubts were, but clearly they were not bubbling over with assurance that they knew everything that was going on.

And I love what Jesus does. It's so counter what most of us would do. He doesn't confront their doubt. He doesn't judge their doubt. He doesn't even try to clear up their doubts. It's almost as if the doubts don't matter to Him. And this is where things get really good.

This has all the ingredients for a big finish -- a dead man has returned to life and now he's giving his last words. (It usually works the other way, doesn't it?) This is the time to gin up the special effects, get the John Williams music really cranking to majestic or sentimental levels and then have Jesus speak with heavy reverberation.

But this is not a Hollywood ending. There is a matter-of-factness about this that actually teaches us something about what is being said and what is about to happen, for this is not an otherworldly or cryptic announcement for the elite. This is the next step for anyone and everyone who would follow Jesus.

To a band of imperfect and flawed believers, Jesus first reminds them of who He is. The One who had been dead stands before them alive and subject no more to death. The One, who in death had been the most powerless, has been given all authority and the One who had been the most lowly on the cross is Lord of all. Now there's something kind of important about the word all. It means exactly that -- all.

We tend to make exceptions. We sometimes think it means most or we think that since it's Jesus we're talking about, his authority is just religious and spiritual. But it means all. And there's good news in that! This is not oppressive or tyrannical. It is, in fact, the ground of our hope. There is no authority that can trump Jesus.

If Jesus declares that your sins are forgiven, there is no psychological authority that can make it not so. If Jesus declares that you belong to Him and his church, there is no sociological authority that can undo that. If Jesus is Lord, there is no power on earth that can lord it over you. They may try and we bear the wounds and scars of those attempts.

Every time we come into worship in this sanctuary, we understand this. The Word of God is proclaimed to you between stained glass windows that powerfully show us that we live between a time when other authorities rebel against God and a time when God will fully and finally triumph. We hear the gospel between the original creation and the new creation. We live in an in-between time. Knowing that we belong to the One who has all power and authority gives us the courage to live there.

But our lives are not just to be lived with courageous endurance. Jesus tells us He has been given authority so that we will know that we can and must go into all the world. The south transept windows shows us what happens when God's people move out into a broken world the sick are healed, tyrants are confronted, lives threatened by disaster are saved and the gospel is preached.

You all know this passage. Since the mid-19th century it has been called The Great Commission. Many trace it back to the pioneer missionary William Carey. It is a great commission but somehow it came to mean that we send missionaries to go overseas. But, if we understand it rightly, we come to realize that this is not a call to special persons for extraordinary mission. It is, rather, for all of us. Now don't go pack your suitcase just yet. Let's look at this.

Most all of our Bibles translate this as "Go" when more properly it should say, "Having gone." Our going is not so much a command as it is an assumption. Let me repeat that: Our going into the world is not so much a command as it is an assumption.

Jesus assumes his followers are not going to stay on that mountain and build a shrine and wait for pilgrims to come to them. Jesus assumes, in fact, he knows that you are not going to stay put. The circumstances of life will keep you on the move—they will keep the church on the move. The disciples will disperse and they will continue to disperse and that sets a pattern for always moving out and into all the world.

The going is not just a great commission; it is also a great expectation of the One who is Lord of all. So, how are we going?

We go with a command to make disciples. We are to live our lives and bear witness to Jesus in ways that make people want to learn more about him. That is what a disciple is—a learner. That means we go just like Paul and his colleagues went to the Thessalonian church: So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel, but also our very lives. The words of the gospel are backed up with the works of the gospel.

Someone has said that in the comings and goings of the early Christians, the gospel was gossiped all over the Mediterranean basin. And that 'gossip' about Jesus was matched by actions for we know that the early Christians turned the world upside down.

The people of God, however, have always been on the go. This is not a new thing with Matthew. We read of Abraham going to an unknown land so that through him all the people of the earth will be blessed. We see Moses going back to Egypt to confront Pharaoh and then lead the people out of slavery. We watch as Isaiah goes to a rebellious people to speak God's word to them.

God sends his people on the way so that what they know of God can be shared with a world that is dying for grace and truth. Psalm 96 is a wonderful expression of how all of us can do that. When we read this psalm it is as if we are right back on that mountain with Jesus and his disciples.

There Jesus declared that all authority was his. This is the same authority that belongs to God alone, just as the psalmist here declares that we can sing a new song because "the Lord is king, the world is firmly established; it shall never be moved."

How are we going? If we share the psalmist's conviction that God does have established the world and will not let it be moved, then we can move out into the world in the face of injustice, in the midst of all the unfairness in our lives and with all our brokenness and doubt. It may seem like the world is falling apart, but God holds it together.

We can defy (not deny, but defy) all those awful realities and proclaim that we live under God's claim. Going into the world with that kind of hope will draw people not to us, but to the One who gives us hope.

How are we going? We go with the One who created us and who has gone to hell and back to save us from destroying ourselves. Hear the promise that follows the Jesus' expectation and commission: Look! I myself am with you, all of your days. There's that word again—all. Not just some of the days, not just the days when you think you're good enough for God, but every single day of your life, Jesus is with you. This is not a passive presence or a silent partner—Jesus is our advocate, so he could just as well be saying, "Look, I will not only be with you every day until the end of time, I will fight for you. You are not alone."

No wonder God's people sing new songs!

Amen.