

Resurrection and the mountain of commission

Please read Matthew 28: 1-20 and Isaiah 52: 7-10 and then pray; *'Living Lord, as we celebrate the resurrection and victory of Jesus, fill us with love, joy, and hope; and empower us to share the great good news that He is risen. He is risen indeed! Amen! Hallelujah!*

We are moving towards the finale of this series of messages based around some of the very great mountain locations contained within the bible and the history of salvation. Next Sunday, we will end with the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, and today, in a little while, we will climb a mountain in Galilee with the eleven disciples/apostles, and with Jesus now risen from the dead. It is only eleven disciples/apostles after the tragic demise of Judas Iscariot. **But each one of us will add to this evangelistic company**, for what Jesus heralds and pronounces from this unnamed mountain in Galilee (28:16) will always echo in the ears of His Church – until the end of this age, and Jesus our Lord returns with power and great glory. It is the clarion call of Jesus to His Church – **to go and make disciples!**

However, before we climb the mountain in Galilee, we must we approach, with some very brave women, a garden tomb in Jerusalem. Before we hear the words of Jesus from a mountain top in Galilee, we must understand the enormity of what happened in a tomb located not too far from Golgotha. Matthew begins this final chapter of his gospel with a stunning and shocking revelation before he wraps his story up with a great commission and a glorious promise. The two parts to this chapter are one in so many ways. We begin at the tomb.

I love the resurrection narratives contained in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. I hope you do too. They present the most glorious story in history from different angles, but they are totally united in their message of hope and new life. In Matthew, we begin as each of the gospels does, very early in the morning, just before dawn. *But the darkness of the long night is beginning to lift.* Women who have loved and served Jesus are heading for the tomb where he was hurriedly laid on Friday, just before the Sabbath commenced.

Mary Magdalene heads the group. Matthew alone tells us of a 'violent earthquake.' This seems to be a follow-up (perhaps a massive after shock) from the one on Friday which took place at the very point of Jesus's death. That earthquake (27:51) shook the ground violently as the great dividing curtain of the Temple was torn from top to bottom. The earth split – and so did the Temple of curtain!

Sunday – early morning – the earth shakes again. Our attention has now moved from the women to the tomb scene itself. We are told that an angel of the Lord 'came down' from heaven. He approached the tomb. With a cool, calm nonchalance, the angel rolls the disc shaped stone covering the entrance to the tomb to one side. We are given the impression that the stone is moved with consummate ease by this mighty heaven-sent angel. To top it all, the angel then jumps up on top of the stone and casually sits upon it, waiting to share some news with the visitors he is expecting. He is waiting for the women to arrive.

It is Matthew that tells us how Jesus's tomb had been officially sealed with a Roman seal of security and then guarded by a quaternion (4) of well-armed soldiers. The women had not considered the seal and the soldiers but they were concerned about how they would remove the heavy stone to gain access to Jesus's dead body which they desperately wanted to fully and reverently anoint. **The angel sent from God – dealt with all the problems that women might have come up against.**

Friends, is it not amazing how God does this for us so often. We wonder and fret about seemingly large problems that await us in the future, only do discover that God has already by his grace and power dealt with them on our behalf. God knows what lies ahead for you, and He knows what is needed for

you to overcome. And if it needs and takes an angel to help, God can send one for you! However God chooses to remove the stone for you, just know this – he will remove the stone! However large, however heavy, however seemingly impractical, or impossible! The stone will be rolled away for you.

Now the **appearance** of the angel which God sent on behalf of the women is interesting. We are told by Matthew that the angel's appearance 'was like lightning,' and his clothes were as white as snow. Where have we heard something like that earlier in this gospel? **Upon which mountain** did we hear about Someone whose appearance and clothes were as powerfully bright as lightning and as dazzlingly white as snow? The same was said about Jesus on top of the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:2 Mark 9:3). What we have in both instances is the sheer power of the glory of God. And it is this mighty and awesome glory of God that the angel reflects into the faces of the unfortunate guards – who literally drop down and act as if they are dead! They have been struck by the power and glory of God reflected from the angel. Like defeated boxers, they are laid out on the floor!

Problem solved – and so Matthew returns the focus upon the approaching female disciples of Jesus. And now we come to the key reason of why the angel has been sent. It is not to open the tomb so that Jesus might leave! Jesus has already gone. The angel opens the tomb so that the women may see for themselves that Jesus has gone. They do not need their spices. They will not be anointing a dead body today. The angel announces to them the good news of Jesus's resurrection. This is the greatest news ever shared with any individuals, and these women are the first to hear it. Here are the angel's words of greeting in full;

'Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.'

The women are introduced to the reality of Jesus's resurrection by this angel. Can you try to imagine what might be going through their minds and racing through their hearts? Shock, disbelief, fear, elation – and a thousand and one questions. At what point do you think they fully realised that resurrection was something that Jesus had promised weeks and months before? The women will meet the risen Jesus soon – they will see him, they will touch him, they will clasp his feet. But for now, they are given a new task, a new responsibility. They are not anointing a dead body any longer. **They are instead, told to go to the disciples and announce that Jesus lives again.** They will not be anointing, they will be announcing! And this what happens.

Matthew writes about their encounter with Jesus. John tells us in his gospel of a special encounter Mary Magdalene has with Jesus who she mistook for the gardener. Part of their message to the disciples will be that Jesus wants them all back in Galilee to meet with him there. There is to be an appointed time and place for a special meeting – **and that will be on top of a mountain.**

And that is where we go now. Before that mountain top meeting, all the disciples, including the doubting Thomas, had encountered the risen Jesus. They have eaten with him, they have rejoiced with him, they had received grace and assurance, peace, and full restoration. But we now move to this mountain where Jesus gives the disciples a spectacular task. A commission. The great commission.

'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the very end of the age.'

Every disciple of Jesus, not just these eleven, is called to act upon this great commission to the nations. Disciples must make more disciples. Those who have come to obey Jesus as their risen Lord and Master

must teach others how to obey. Those who have been baptised must see to it that others are baptised in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

This message 'to go and to share good news' is what links the resurrection story in verses 1-15 to the mountain top commissioning story in 16-20. The first job of the Church, the primary task of the Church and of Christians is to be heralds of good news. And at the very heart of this good news is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. We are called to declare the message of the living God.

In Matthew 28, this begins with the angel speaking to the women (5-6). It continues with the women speaking to the men (7-8). Now it must continue through all disciples until the Lord returns, beginning with the eleven from the mountain. We are, as I said, to make up the numbers. We have a gospel to proclaim. So, our first challenge is to be ready and willing to announce the fact that we know that 'Jesus is risen and Jesus is Lord.' It started with this mountain top commission. It is given to the whole Church. We are to be heralds of good news.

Listen to this from **Isaiah 52: 7-10** and see the link between the message of the prophet and the message of the apostle Matthew. (Read) The apostle Paul makes this link in **Romans 10: 14-15**. (Read). We must never be afraid or ashamed in any way to announce the good news which emphasises what the apostle Paul describes as **of first importance**; (1 Corinthians 15: 3-5) 'that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.'

The news of the resurrection must be shared with **all**. And **all** is the key word repeated in the great commission.

All authority has been given to Jesus who passes on that authority to his disciples.

All nations must be reached.

All must be taught to obey and follow Jesus, beginning with their baptism.

And Jesus will be with his Church in this task – **all – ways (in every task) and always (forever)**.

And the resurrection is preached and shared **through our actions** as well as our words. We must show through our love, our practical care, our open hospitality, our praying with and for people, through the overflow of our compassion, mercy, grace, and kindness that Jesus does indeed live! A challenging question to each of us is this. Do you/we advertise and reveal the reality that Jesus lives and reigns? Are you a good and authentic advert for the resurrection? When people enter this place, and into our fellowship of love and kindness, do they experience the living presence of Jesus among us? Can Jesus's resurrection be seen and known through all our compassionate outreach in the schools which we serve? Does the local community meet 'Jesus living in us' and through our caring pastoral work? E. G. Robinson wrote this: '*The Christian Church has the resurrection written all over it.*' Friends, do we have the resurrection written all over us?

Let me end by focusing on two things which Jesus announces/promises with great power on top of this mountain in Galilee. Firstly, He states that He has all the authority and power in heaven and on earth. This means that He has by His resurrection already won and conquered all evil power. He passes on the authority of His Kingdom to his disciples. He also pours out the power of His Spirit upon us from on high. The Pentecost promise! Disciples have all that is needed to succeed. This comes *at the end* of his ministry does it not? Jesus will soon ascend to glory.

At the beginning of his ministry after his own baptism, he was tempted by the devil in the barren wilderness. You remember we ascended the Mount of temptation with Jesus. The devil led Jesus up a

high mountain at the beginning of his ministry, and promised all the kingdoms of the earth with all their power and wealth to Jesus – if he would but bow down and worship Satan. Jesus did not bow down. Jesus resisted and defeated the devil through the power of God's Word. Now on this mountain in Galilee at the end of His time on earth, having defeated, stripped, disarmed, and humiliated the devil, (Colossians 2:15) Jesus receives what the devil 'promised' and far more. He receives all power and authority **in heaven** and on the earth. The devil could offer him nothing from heaven. Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth! And Jesus clothes His Church with this power and authority. We have all we need now to finish the task and take the gospel to all people of all nations. **(Read Luke 24: 45-49)**

But friends, what Jesus tells is that we not only have the power and the authority for the great task in hand, we have **the presence**. Is not this the most precious of promises? *'And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.'* Jesus guarantees his presence will be with us in this task of living and sharing the gospel of his death and resurrection. At the beginning of Matthew's gospel, we are told that Jesus is 'Immanuel- which means **God with us.**' (Matthew 1:23) And now, at the end of His victorious time on earth, and as he readies himself to return to His Father, he stresses again **'God with us – always – yes, even to the very end of this age.'** Then He will return, and we will know His presence forever in His eternal Kingdom.

The resurrection guarantees and affirms that God will never leave you nor forsake you. That is why I began today reading 1 Peter 1: 3-6 from the New Living Translation. Here it is once more, and we this I close:

All honour to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for it is by his boundless mercy that God has given us the privilege of being born again. Now we live with a wonderful expectation because Jesus Christ rose again from the dead. For God has reserved a priceless inheritance for his children. It is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. And God, in his mighty power, will protect you until you receive this salvation, because you are trusting him. It will be revealed on the last day for all to see. So be truly glad! There is wonderful joy ahead, even though it is necessary for you to endure many trials for a while.

May we be fearless and faithful witnesses of Jesus's resurrection until the end. We will be raised at the last day by the One who is the Resurrection and the Life. (John 6: 39-40, 11: 25-26) Jesus was the first to be raised, the first fruit of the harvest – but all his disciples are to be raised as he was. Thanks be to God – who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:47) Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son, endless is the victory, Thou O death hast won.

Amen

(Revd Peter J Clarkson, Easter Sunday 5.4.26)