

The Great Claim, The Great Commission, The Great Comfort
First Baptist Church, Vancouver
April 11, 2010
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The Great Claim, The Great Commission, The Great Comfort
Series: The Space in Which He Calls Us to Follow
Matthew 28:16-20

He is risen. Jesus of Nazareth. He is risen! The healer of broken bodies and troubled minds. The man Who was crucified on a Roman Cross. That Jesus. Risen! He is risen. He is risen. So what does it mean for life in this city? In particular, what does it mean for being His Church in this city? On this corner? We say at First Baptist Church Vancouver "We are a people following Jesus" What does that mean? What does it mean to follow Jesus. The risen Jesus? What does it mean to be a community following the risen Jesus?

Will you please open your Bibles to the last page of the Gospel according to Matthew, Chapter 28, verses 16-20. In this text the risen Jesus speaks to His first community of followers. In this text – very familiar to many of us, perhaps too familiar! – the resurrected Jesus makes a great claim, a great commission and promises a great comfort.

Matthew 28: 16-20 .

But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain, which Jesus had designated. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful. And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, (H)I am with you always, even to (I)the end of the age."

What does it mean to follow the Risen Jesus? What does it mean to be a community following the resurrected Saviour? What does it mean for being and doing "church" in this city? It means finding ways to obey His great commission. It means learning to trust His great comfort. Here is the context. On Easter morning the angels went to the tomb, said to the woman, "He is risen... He is going before you into Galilee and there you will see Him" (Matthew 28:7). So they go to Galilee. To a mountain which Jesus had designated. And there Jesus meets them.

On a mountain. If you know the larger Biblical Story, you know how many major turning points in the Story take place on mountains. And if you know the larger

Jesus Story you know how many important events in His life take place on a mountain.

- He preaches His greatest sermon on a mountain – “The Sermon on the Mount”, in which He describes the new humanity He is bringing into being.
- He is transfigured on a mountain – when His face shines in a whole new way; when Moses and Elijah show up to talk with Him; when a voice from heaven says, “this is My Son listen to Him.”
- It is from a mountain across the valley from Jerusalem, that He sees the city and weeps because the city does not know the things that make for peace.
- It is on the Mount of Olives across the valley from Jerusalem’s Temple, where He speaks of His coming again; where He calls His disciples to live alert to His “any-moment-now” return to fully establish the Kingdom of God.

The first time we hear of Jesus on a mountain is during the 40 days He fasted; when He was tempted by the angelic creature who tried to usurper the place of God in the world, by the evil one who sought to rule the nations. “I will give you all the Kingdom of the world”, Satan says to Jesus. “See them from the mountain Jesus? Judea, Galilee, Persia, Greece, Rome. Will give them to you if you just bow down and worship me.” On that mountain God’s enemy dared to take to himself the right only God has. The right to give the Kingdom of the world. Psalm 2. God’s Son repeats God’s speech: “You are My Son. Ask of Me and I will give you the nations as Your inheritance” (2:7). On that mountain the deceiver, the destroyer, dares to suggest he can give the nations to Jesus.

And now on another mountain after His resurrection Jesus has what only God can give! “And when they saw, they worshipped Him.” “ But some doubted”, Matthew adds (28:17) Worship and doubt, they often go together. The word here to doubt does not mean out-right unbelief. It means that some did not know what to make of all that had happened to Jesus. They could see He is alive. And they wanted to stay in that little community following Jesus. They simply did not know what to make of resurrection and ascension and Kingdom and Salvation.

“They worshipped Him”, Says Matthew. Matthew knows how startling a statement that is. Worship a man? The same word Matthew uses in the Christian Story of the magi from the East who finding the infant Jesus bow down to worship Him. Worship a man? The startling thing is that Jesus receives their worship! He does not tell them to stop. When an angel leads the apostle John through the vision that is the last Book of the Bible, John falls at the feet of the angel to worship him. Twice! John, who should know better – worshipped an angel! Twice! And both times the angel is horrified, and says, “Do not do that . . . worship God” (Revelation 19:10; 22:9)

On the mountain the first community to follow Jesus worshipped Jesus. And Jesus is not horrified. Jesus does not say “do not do that”. Jesus received their worship/. Reflecting His own self-understanding. He receives the worship because He knows who He is: He is Immanuel . . . God with us. . . The with-us-God. Resurrected. Alive. And now on that mountain Jesus speaks to the community following Him in the

world. He makes the great claim. He gives a great commission. He promises a great comfort. And in so doing opens up for us “the space” in which He now calls us to follow. A great claim. A great commission. A great comfort.

The great claim. “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me” (28:18) Absolutely crazy if not absolutely true. Insane if not true. It blows the circuit boards. “All authority . . . in heaven!” Mercy! “All authority . . . n earth.” Mercy. “Has been given to Me”. Who does this Me think He is? The great claim is the inherent implication of the resurrection. To the risen One is given all authority.

My friend Dale Bruner renders Jesus’ words this way: “I am the Chief Executive Officer of the Universe”. (Churchbook, 1094)

Again, absolutely crazy if not absolutely true. “I now have the last word everywhere. In the heavenly realm. And in the earthy realms. I now have the last word in every sphere of life in the cities of the world. In the private and the public. In the religious and the secular. In the moral, scientific, economic, sexual, political, legal, medical, educational, business, entertainment. To Me is given the final say in everything”. Mercy! The risen Jesus is not bragging. He is simply stating things as they now are in light of His death and resurrection. “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me”. Not taken as the devil had advocated Jesus do. But given by the Living god Who raised Jesus form the dead.

As I see we, the church in our time, has not even begun to come to terms with what this means. As followers of the risen Jesus we have not even begun to work out all the implications of His gigantic claim.

And no wonder! The implications are literally cosmic! In his letter to the followers of Jesus in the 1st century city of Ephesus, the apostle Paul says of Jesus, that God “raised Him form the dead and seated Him at His right hand, in the heavenly places,

“far above all the rules and authority and power and dominions, and every name that is named and has put all things in subjection under His feet” (1:21-23)

Do you believe this? The apostle John speaks of Jesus as “the first-born of the dead, the ruler of the Kings of the earth” (Revelation 1:5)

Do you believe this? Paul and John are not speaking poetically. They are not speaking mythologically, They do not think of themselves as stating an opinion. They are declaring news, what Russell Chandler, former journalist for the Los Angeles Times, calls “hard copy”. Jesus really lived. Right? Jesus really des an awful death. Right? Jesus really rose form the grave. Jesus really is alive. Right? And to Him “all authority” everywhere has been given.

Again, Jesus is not bragging. He is just stating the facts. $2+2=4$. It takes 2 hydrogen atoms and 1 oxygen atom to make water. B.C. is one of the most beautiful places on

earth. Hendrik Sedin scored 112 points so far. Alex Ovechkin stuck at 109. And all authority in heaven and all authority on earth has been given to the Man who was crucified by those who thought they had all authority.

Authority. The word is *exousia*. It literally means “out of being”. EK – out of. Ousia-being. After Jesus preached His Sermon on the Mount, the crowd were moved because, as they said, “he spoke with authority”. (Matthew 7:29) He spoke with *exousia*. He spoke “out of being”. Jesus’ words that challenged their socks off rang with “out of being”; they resonate with the really real. Which is why whenever anyone meets Jesus they speak of ‘coming home’. He is not a stranger. For He is reality itself. When we surrender to Him we are surrendering to life we are finding life itself. *Exousia*. The really real.

“All authority given to Me” Of course.

And a different kind of authority. Throughout Jesus’ earthly ministry the first disciples wondered about their positions in the Kingdom of Jesus was inaugurating. At one point Jesus said to them: “You know that those who are recognized as rulers among the Gentiles load it over them; and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it is not so among you. But whoever wishes to be great among you shall be slave to all. For even the Son of Man.” According to prophet Daniel all authority is given to the Son of Man. “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and gave His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:42-45).

Jesus exercises authority in an unexpected way. In the way of servanthood. In giving His life for the life of the world. Washing His disciples feet was not a blip on the osyllescope. It was not an exception to the way He lived among them as Lord. He washes feet. Not as a contradiction of His authority but as a manifestation of His authority. Being servant is what having authority is all about. Servant-love is at the heart of the universe. Servant-love is on the throne of the universe. The CEO of the universe washes feet. Jesus exercises His *Exousia* over all by serving all! Mercy!

And coming to terms with Jesus’ great claim is what following Him is all about.

And finding ways to obey His Great Commission. “Go, make disciples of all the nation” Literally, “Go, disciple the nations”. But of course! Given the Great Claim, the Great Commission naturally follows. Given the scope of the claim we are not surprised by the scope of the commission. “All authority. . . all nations”.

“Go, make disciples of all the nations.” The “go’ in the text is not a command. It literally means ‘in going’. The assumption being that once we know Who Jesus is, once we realize He has the place that He has, we go. Once the reality of the resurrection gets hold of us we move. . . we name is mission.

All four Gospels bring this out. In Mark, Jesus says, “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation.” (16:15) In Luke, Jesus says, “Repentance from

forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed to all the nations” (24:47) In John, Jesus says, “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you”. (20:21) And here in Matthew, Jesus says “in you going”. What else are we going to do once we realize the “new space” – which we are living?

“Make disciples of all the nations.” The word is *ethnov*, from which comes the word ‘ethnic’. Make disciples of all the ethnic groups in the world. “They belong to Me. Go, help them live as Mine”.

That is why He is building His church on this corner. It is why he builds any church in any city. We exist to disciple people. Not just individuals but whose people-groups, whole nations! “Bring all people-groups into my great claim”. Bring all people-groups into the new reality in which all authority has been given to the Man Who gives His life for the life to the world! Fulfilling God’s call on Israel. Fulfilling God’s call on Abraham and Sarah so long ago. “Go and I will bless you and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Genesis 12: 1-3)

The CEO of the universe plans to bless the nations by making disciples of all nations. Disciples. Not just converts. Not just church members. But disciples. Disciples who can in turn make disciples. Who can in turn make disciples. Who can in turn make disciples.

I know that the word ‘disciple’ makes some people uncomfortable. I have had people say to me: “I am just a believer. I could never be a disciple.” The Greek term – *mathetes* – simply means ‘learner’ or “student”. A disciple is a “learner”. A disciple a “student”. Always a student. We are always going to be ‘learners’ at the feet of Jesus. “Go, make learners of the nations. Make learner-making learners. Make students. Make student-making students.” Isn’t his exciting?

What helps is to realize that every human being is a disciple. Every person in every nation is a disciple of someone or something or some ideology or some philosophy. The question, therefore, is never, “will I be a disciple?” The question is always, “whose disciple am I?”

If not Jesus’ disciple when whose? Who else has Exousia? Who else speaks out of being? Who else lives giving His life for the life of the world? Who else conquers death? As the disciple Peter once said to Jesus, “Lord, to whom else shall we go. . . You have the words of eternal life.” (John 6:68) The question is never “will I be a disciple?” The question is always “whose disciple will I be?”

What a privilege the Risen Jesus is giving us! “Come, be my disciple”. In the 1st century people would want to have a master, a mentor, a life-coach. So they would go around looking for someone and then apply to be that person’s student. Jesus does not wait for any to apply! Jesus goes around looking for people whom He calls into discipleship. That is why when Jesus came that day to the fishermen along the Sea Shore, and said, “Follow Me”, they got up and followed. “Immediately the

text stresses. They immediately got up and followed. For they knew a good deal when they saw it! Jesus would later say to them, "You did not choose Me, but I choose you." (John 15;16)

In the 1st century, becoming someone's disciple meant, at minimum, adopting the thinking of the Master and imitating the behaviour of the Master. In the 1st century, "come, follow. Me. . . be My disciple. . . would mean, "come, adopt my thinking, come imitate My behaviour." What a privilege! Her to whom all authority in heaven has been given; He to whom all authority on earth has been given, calls us to adopt His thinking and imitate His behaviour. "come, and I will teach you to see the world as I see it." "I will help you talk about God as I talk about God; think about humanity as I think about humanity; think about history as I think about history; think about cities as I think about cities." "Come, let me show you how to behave as a true human being." What a privilege! The fact is, Jesus goes beyond the masters of the 1st century. Three other words describe what He has in mind for His disciples: Attachment, submission, and participation.

Attachment. The rabbis of the 1st century called people to the Law, to the Torah. The philosophers of the 1st century called people to an idea, to a system of thought. Jesus calls people to Himself. Not, "follow Torah". Not, "follow the Idea." But, "follow Me." Be yoked to ME. Abide in Me. Eat of Me. Drink of Me. Live in Me.

Jesus attaches His disciples to Himself. What a privilege.

And Submission. Once attached to Him, He calls us to do what he says. As He says on the mountain, 'make disciples, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you'. (28:20). A process: "teaching". Learning in every new circumstances, in every new challenge, in every new crisis the will of the One Who has final authority.

Notice that Jesus does not refer to His teaching as "doctrine to master" although it is. He does not refer to his teaching as 'philosophy to complete' although it is. He refers to His teaching as commands: all I have commanded you." Being Jesus' disciple means obeying His commands. It means growing I even deeper submission to his claim on our lives. "Why do you call Me, Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46)

And His commands "are not burdensome" says the apostle John. Because Jesus commands come out of His authority – out of being". His commands lead us into life as it was made to be! To submit to His commands is to submit to life! Now here is where Matthew helps us. He so wants us to be Jesus' disciples and so wants us to do the work of making disciples of all the nations that he has gathered up Jesus' teaching, Jesus commands in five books. Five times in his Gospel Matthew says something like 'after Jesus had finished saying these words.' Matthew has gathered up Jesus' words into five sections. Why five? Maybe because the great teacher of Israel, Moses, had five books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

Matthew believes Jesus is more than a new Moses. A lot more! But like Moses, Jesus also has five books.

The Sermon on the Mount – Matthew 5-7.

The Sermon on Mission – Matthew 10.

The Sermon on the Mystery of the Kingdom – Matthew 13.

The Sermon on Managing Life in the church – Matthew 18.

And the other Sermon on the Mount, on the Mount of Olives, on His promise to come again – Matthew 24-25.

I think Matthew is offering us these five books as a kind of “Discipleship Manual”. “Here”, he is saying “take people through these five books, help people live in these five books and they will grow as disciples of the risen Lord!”

Attachment, Submission and Participation. Not just follow behind Jesus. Not just imitate Jesus. But participate in Jesus! Participate in his life which turns out to be life in the Father and in the Spirit. He calls us to participate in his life with the Father, and to participate in his life with the Holy Spirit. Imagine that! Which is why He tells us to make disciples by baptizing. “baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”(28:19) To be baptized means more than getting wet. To be baptized means entering into the reality signifies by going into the water. The incredible privilege of being a disciple of Jesus is entering into the Life of the Triune God. When we are immersed into water it is a sign that we have been immersed into the name, into God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Being baptized means being immersed into the love and life of God the Father, into the grace and truth of God the Son, into the purity and power of God the Holy Spirit. Jesus calls us to participate in the life of the trinity! Whose disciple would anyone rather be?

And to participate in the work of the Trinity in the world. To join the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in their work in the city. To join in the Trinity, creating in the city: building, healing, doing justice, extending mercy.

Disciple. Everyone in our city is a disciple of someone or something. The question never is “will I be a disciple?” The question is always, “whose disciple will I be?” “Go, make disciples of all nations.”

Help the nations enter into the new reality in which Jesus is CEO. Help the nations understand the new space: Help the nations live the new space. By baptizing them into the fullness of life in God and by teaching them everything Jesus commands.

The Man Who gives His life for the life of the world is on the throne! The risen Man is at the helm of the universe. Go, disciple the nations into this wonderful new reality. What a privilege.

And they did it. Those who met Jesus on the mountain after His resurrection . . . left the mountain after His resurrection . . . returned to the city. . . and did it. I can imagine them at first saying to one another: “we? We mere eleven? We? Disciple? Nations? Who does Jesus think we are? But they did it. They just started serving whoever Jesus brought their way. And we are here because they did.

That is what being a community following Jesus is all about. Finding creative ways to obey. His great commission. We are to ask of all we do here: “How does this help make disciples? How does this help disciple the city and nation?” We are to ask of all our progress and activities: “How does this help keep us on task? How does this help the city come into the new reality, the new space?”

Great Claim. Great Commission.

And great Comfort. Being church in all context learning to trust Jesus’ great comfort. “Look! I am with you always even to the end of the age” (28:20) All authority All the nations. All I have commanded. And all the days.

He does not leave us to do the great commission alone. The risen and ascended Jesus is with us. How? We will unpack that next Sunday.

In the meantime, let me leave you with an observation philosopher Dallas Willard has made about what we have talked about today.

He writes: “Multitudes are now turning to Christ in all parts of the world. How unbearably tragic it would be, though, if the millions in Asia, South America and Africa were led to believe that the best we can hope for from the Way of Christ is the level of Christianity visible in Europe and (North) America today, a level that has left us tottering on the edge of destruction, the world can no longer be left to mere diplomats, to (mere) politicians, to (mere) business leaders. They have done the best they could. No doubt. But this is an age for spiritual heroes – a time for men and women to be the heroic in faith and in spiritual character and power.” Then Willard says this: “The greatest danger to the Christian church today is that of pitching its message too low.” (The Spirit of the Disciplines, xii)