



GPS GUIDE: SEPTEMBER 5, 2021

Grow. Pray. Study

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon: Go into the World

Matthew 28:16-20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. Jesus came near and spoke to them, "I've received all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I've commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age."

Monday: Read Isaiah 8:16-18

A disciple is a follower, one who trusts and believes in a teacher and follows that teacher's words and example. The Greek word for disciple is *mathetes*. The word is used for a person who submits to someone in order to be their student. In this case, the submission is to intentionally follow Christ to become like him. The idea of *mathetes* was deeply rooted in Jesus' time, not only in the Jewish culture but in the Mediterranean as a whole. For example, a devout Jew would apprentice to a respected rabbi — living with him, sharing life with him, learning his teachings, imitating his way of life. A young Greek sculptor would rigorously follow a master artist in every aspect of his art and craft, from marble block to monument. An apprentice fisherman would study and imitate the ways of mending nets, finding, and catching fish, and bringing them to market. To be a disciple is to be in a relationship. It is having an intimate, instructive, and imitative relationship with the teacher. Isaiah's disciples learned from him to be faithful to God, to follow the teachings of the Torah. Consequently, being a disciple of Jesus Christ is being in relationship with Jesus—it is seeking to be like Jesus. In other words, we follow Christ to be like Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). What are the qualities of a disciple of Christ? What are the traits of those who follow and are called disciples of Christ? How can you more faithfully follow Christ in your own life?

Prayer: Jesus, may I follow you so closely, that my life becomes a reflection of yours. Amen.

Tuesday: Read Mark 16: after verse 8 (or shorter ending) and Mark 16:9-20

The Shorter Ending of Mark*

[[And all that had been commanded them they told briefly to those around Peter. And afterward Jesus himself sent out through them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.]]

The Longer Ending of Mark*

⁹[[Now after he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. ¹⁰She went out and told those who had been with him, while they were mourning and weeping. ¹¹But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it. ¹²After this he appeared in another form to

two of them, as they were walking into the country. ¹³ And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them. ¹⁴ Later he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were sitting at the table; and he upbraided them for their lack of faith and stubbornness, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. ¹⁵ And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. ¹⁶ The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned. ¹⁷ And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; ¹⁸ they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.” ¹⁹ So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. ²⁰ And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it.]]

The ending of Mark’s Gospel has confounded Biblical scholars and theologians for centuries. Most English translations of the Bible have a note saying that these verses are not found in the earliest and most reliable manuscripts. Further, the earliest commentators on Scripture, like Origen and Clement of Alexandria seem to know nothing of the existence of these verses. But some early and admittedly reliable manuscripts have the shorter ending and some the longer ending, and some of the Church Mothers and Fathers knew of them. And so, we find ourselves in a weird tension: it seems *very* clear that whoever wrote the book of Mark did *not* write these verses and they were not included in the original finished product. And yet, there is a long history of these verses being accepted. And as I was reading these verses once again, I was struck by what these verses might say about the early church—the ones who probably penned these final words. These verses testify to the things that the *earliest* Church found as *most* important to remember. Those words are found in the shorter ending as well as in verses 14-15 of the longer ending. Go, be sent out, move from the east to the west, the whole world, to proclaim, to testify, to share the good news of eternal salvation with the whole creation. Maybe those early followers of Jesus recognized something important. We cannot stay where we are. This message of love and grace must be shared and that means we too must go. Where is God calling you to go and share? What will you say? How might you testify to the things God has done?

Prayer: Holy One, may we follow in the footsteps of those first followers, carrying the good news wherever we go, sharing your message of grace with a world in need. Amen.

*An Important Note about the Ending of Mark’s Gospel.

Your Bible may have a note at the end of Mark’s Gospel about later endings. Some Bibles (like the NRSV or NLT) note this section of text with headings: “The Shorter Ending of Mark” and “The Longer Ending of Mark,” or some Bibles will have a heading “Endings Added Later” (like the CEB or NASB). These final verses of Mark are almost always separated by brackets (except in KJV or NKJV where there is no notation). Your Bible might not have both endings, some only include the longer ending (like NIV and The Message). I included the text from the NRSV in case your Bible doesn’t have this information.

Wednesday: Read Romans 10:8-15

The way of following Jesus is about following, just that and nothing more. So, the way of Jesus is about knowing Jesus. Loving Jesus who loves us. It’s about taking up residence in God’s world, and believing that we live where God reigns, and because of this, we live in a way that doesn’t always make sense to those who don’t know. We begin to experience and enter into God’s means of transforming the world and we allow ourselves to be incorporated

into God’s plans, into God’s reality. In one sense this passage reminds us that all of Christian life is a conversation. Christian spirituality is all about talking to God, meditating on the words of scripture, listening in order to hear God’s voice. It’s learning how our questions of God become questions of ourselves. About how we are already in the midst of answering those questions through our beliefs and actions and then changing these if God’s shows us better answers. But it’s also about our conversations with those around us. It’s about joining Jesus in ways that bring life to those around us with concrete demonstrations of love. The way of Jesus invites our participation in a community gathered and multiplied by God’s infinite love and care. In what ways do your conversations with God shape your beliefs and actions? How are you “bringing life” to those around you—both those you know and those you don’t? How might your conversations with others invite their participation in the redeeming work of God?

Prayer: Lord, may the word be near to me, in my mouth and in my heart—the message of faith you proclaim. Amen.

Thursday: Read Psalm 78:1-4

The author of Psalm 78 understands the power of story and the absolute necessity of it. Understands that we cannot know God without stories; that we cannot know ourselves without them. The psalmist knows that we cannot be the people of God without telling the story of God, passing the story on to each generation. *Things that we have heard and known, that our ancestors have told us*, the psalmist writes. Where does the power of a story lie? What is it about a story that so compels us? *Once upon a time. Long ago and far away. In the beginning.* We speak of getting lost in a story, but part of what draws us to a story is the promise of finding: finding a different world, finding another time, finding ourselves. There is something in us that hungers for a story, an empty space that is shaped precisely to its contours. We reach for the threads that a story offers, we enter the rooms it opens to us, we inhabit the skin of another and somehow, in the hands of a good story, we are returned to ourselves. And we are perhaps holding the threads of our own stories a bit differently, or entering a new space within ourselves, or finding ourselves able to inhabit our own skin more completely. When Christ came (*in the fullness of time*, the story goes), he came as the Word made flesh. A story in motion. And he went into the world with stories on his lips, weaving them everywhere he went. *A sower went out to sow. A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers. There was a man who had two sons.* Jesus understood that in a world where it can be so difficult to know God, to know others, to know even ourselves, a story can offer a language, a doorway, a point of entry. He knew how a story can take us a little deeper into knowing, a little farther down the road in our journey of return. *We will not hide them from their children*, the psalmist writes in Psalm 78. And perhaps that’s where the true power of a good story lies: that it unhides something, reveals something—and someone—we need to know. What stories are you listening to? What stories are you telling? How do you attend to your own story? Where have you experienced being lost in a story, and being found? How might God be inviting you to look at your story with new eyes?

Prayer: O God, help me to tell the story of grace that is woven through the threads of my life that others might discover their own story of faith. Amen.

Friday: Read John 15:1-5, 9-17

Jesus commands his disciples to remain and abide in him and his love for them. But he also just plain loves them...enough to give his life for them (and us!). Moreover, he is pretty clear that, whatever they may have thought, they didn’t actually choose him, or decide to follow him, or consciously become his disciples. Rather, he chose them. *He chose them.* Which will be

critically important to the disciples in the hours to come. Keep in mind that this conversation takes place on the eve of Jesus' crucifixion. In just a few hours he will be arrested, tried, convicted, and executed as an enemy of the state. He endures all of this in order to demonstrate the love he has for his disciples and, indeed, the profound love God has for the whole world. That action will not only witness to Jesus' love for the disciples, but it will also leave them feeling bereft, alone, and frightened. Which is why Jesus urges them to abide in him and reminds them that what is more important is that they know he will abide in them. And so, he tells them that they did not choose him; rather, he chose them. This matters, I think, because if it's finally up to us—to choose Jesus, to remain in him, to obey his commandments, to pursue happiness, or to choose joy—then we are lost. We simply don't do it. Maybe we can't. We can try, and there is something valiant and noble and important about trying. But when push comes to shove, whether you're telling someone to "accept Jesus" or "choose joy," you may be giving good advice, but you're not proclaiming the Gospel. The good news IS that God chose us. That God loves us. That God plans to use us to make this world God loves a better place. What would you do if you knew today was your last day on earth? How might you make the world a better place today? What if we lived this way every day?

Prayer: God of life, you chose us, and you love us. Let us live in ways that make this world you love a better place. Amen.

Saturday: Read Acts 1:6-8

The disciples ask the risen Jesus: "Will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" Here they identify the very heart of their concern. We frequently skip over their question and hurry over to Acts 1:8 where Jesus declares that they shall be witnesses to the uttermost ends of the earth. But let us hear their question: "Will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" It is not a stupid question or an irrelevant one. Over 500 hundred years earlier the prophet had spoken of God's people Israel, broken in spirit, living in poverty and hunger, captive in a foreign land, in exile, and had promised liberation. They would return home to their own land, to worship God in freedom and peace, and all the nations would rejoice in Jerusalem as a center of peace and justice. God's reign would be restored to Israel. The vision of this kingdom is one Jesus proclaimed and one to which the disciples held fast. Surely this was it? But once again we see God's vision is so much more than we can imagine. Jerusalem? Yes, but not just Jerusalem. Judea? Yes, but not only Judea. Samaria? Yes, but not only Samaria. To the ends of the earth? Yes. That will be far enough. In what ways have you placed limits on God's vision? What might be keeping you from dreaming bigger dreams with God? Where might your "ends of the earth" be this week?

Prayer: God of all, show us where you would have us go, empower us to do what you would have us to do, shape us to be the church you need us to be. Amen.