

Matthew 28:1-10

April 12, 2020 Easter

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

Last summer, our annual family vacation took us northwest to the state of Montana and the majestic settings of Glacier National Park, which is known for many things such as its twisty, turvy Going to the Sun Road, 762 lakes that glisten with crystal clear water, its many glaciers, grizzly bears, mountain goats and other creatures. It's also known around the globe for its hiking opportunities having over 700 miles of trails. Many, of which, are quite narrow in places with only a foot or two at most on either side of you. In some spots it feels as if you are quite literally hugging the rocky face of the mountain in order to not drop off the edge to whatever lies several hundred feet below. Some trails have small glacial runoff streaming through you must hop over or traverse methodically selecting each step, so you don't turn an ankle or slip and fall on jagged and slippery rocks. Most of the trails are uneven covered with ruts, rocks, tree roots and in some cases small mounds of grizzly bear scat, which left us zig zagging around or hopping over.

Probably 90% of the trails we hiked required us to be in a single-file line one behind the other. At times I was out front leading the way, calling out a deep rut, jagged rock, large step, or another mound of scat on the trail. While at other times, I was following, keeping an eye on and a listening ear for whomever was leading.

To follow is essential in Matthew's gospel. In fact, the word or some derivative of it is found 28 times. The first time used, it is Jesus who issues the invitation, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people" to Simon (Peter) and his brother Andrew casting their nets upon the sea. And again, "Follow me" to Matthew sitting at the tax booth. Repeatedly, we hear of crowds following Jesus. Or as Jesus foretells his death and resurrection he says [to his disciples], "If any want to

become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” And as Jesus calms the seas battering the boat he and the disciples were in, Matthew, unlike Mark and Luke specifically states, “And when he [Jesus] got into the boat, his disciples followed him.”

To follow is an important aspect of discipleship. But to follow, you must be going somewhere. There must be someone ahead and we have both of those in Matthew’s resurrection account. The two women at the tomb barely have a moment to let their nerves settle and take a few deep breaths after the earth shook and an angel descended, rolled back the stone, and says, “Go quickly and tell his disciples.” And where is the risen Jesus? Not in the tomb for it is empty; but rather, he is already ahead of them onto Galilee. There was work yet to do prior to ascending to be with his Father in heaven. Couldn’t the angel have at least let the women rejoice for a while at the impossible which has just happened? Let them sing, dance, and shout for joy! Give them time for a “Hallelujah” or two or three.

But no, “Go quickly and tell his disciples, He has been raised from the dead.” In the blink of an eye, the angel sends them off and commissions them to be agents of the resurrection. A daunting task so it would seem. Yet, they have been given instructions on where to go. The risen Christ is leading the way for them to follow. They have been equipped with words to speak, “He has been raised from the dead.” And they are not alone as Jesus meets them on the road and into their state of fear and joy speaks words of greeting and peace, comfort and command. “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

There is no time to waste. In the words of a classic Van Halen song, “Right now. It means everything,” the good news of the resurrection is to be proclaimed, Indeed, it does. Right now, as humanity groans. Right now, as we suffer and struggle. Right now, as one more innocent soul succumbs to this beast of sickness and death unleashed upon the world. Right now, as we hunker down in our homes. Right now, as fear threatens to overtake the joy of this morning. Right now, as we

wrestle with how we, too, can be agents of the resurrection. Because that is what we are as Will Willimon states, “To be a follower of the resurrected Christ is to be an agent of the resurrection.” Right now, we are called, and we are sent to proclaim this good news. It means everything! We, too, have been equipped with the words to say, “He has been raised from the dead.”

Yet, how are we to do this? In a context in which “to love our neighbor” means to distance ourselves from our neighbor. How are we to follow Jesus to Galilee when we are told to stay put? Jesus commissions and sends us just he does with the two women and as he will do with the disciples upon their arrival in Galilee stating: Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

If the time is right now and it does mean everything how are we to do it? How can we be agents of the resurrection proclaiming life in the face of death? For many, there is no time to waste. They are going into hospital rooms at times without the needed supplies to protect themselves. They are the presence of Christ to those who have no one else by their bedside. They are the healing hands of God. They are the ones cleaning the rooms for the next weary soul who enters. They are the ones stocking the shelves, scanning the food at the register, and delivering morsels of life to those sheltered in place. They are first responders. They are truck drivers getting desperately needed supplies to their destination. They are mail carriers bringing words of hope from a friend. They are leaders working to find any means possible to bring relief to all. They are farmers preparing the fields to feed the hungry. They are volunteers serving meals so children in this time away from school continue to have a warm meal to eat. They are laborers building makeshift emergency rooms, ventilators, masks and sanitizers. But they are also those of us sheltered in our homes. Making a phone call. Sending an email. Picking up a prescription for a neighbor. Donating food to the pantry. Offering a prayer for the world. Making homemade masks. Being a calming presence to our frightened children wondering when in the world will things be

normal again. Where is the risen Jesus you might ask? He is in all those places and in all those people. He is at work continually overcoming illness and death and bringing beauty, life and light out of chaos and darkness.

People of God, you are agents of the resurrection. You are followers of the risen Lord. You are his sent ones. You have a mission and its to share in the mission of the one who leads us over the ruts and rocks strewn along our path, the slippery slopes we traverse, and daunting mountains we climb. That mission is to proclaim the kingdom of God has come near. That mission is to bring joy into the midst of fear. Easter joy! We have the words, "He has been raised from the dead." We have assurance of the promise found in the last sentence of Matthew's gospel, "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Jesus is risen. Alleluia! Right now. It means everything! The world needs to hear it. Jesus is alive. He is our hope! We are agents of that good news and that hope. Followers of the one who always goes ahead of us while at the same time is always with us!