

## **Matthew 28:16-20 Great Divides**

Friends, I have been praying for Minnesota as you have dealt with yet another senseless death of a person of color. I have felt many emotions simultaneously, as I am sure you have as well. Living afar in Pennsylvania, I have longed to join your marches and wept at the fear felt by so many. This time is key for us as children of God to remember who we are and what our role is in response. For many of us, that might mean some self-examination of our words and perhaps, even more importantly, the employment of listening skills. The words of Stephen Covey remind us that- for those of us who are white- now is the time to seek to understand as opposed to seeking to be understood. Much is being spoken of the great divides in our nation, and those divides cover a number of issues: income, opportunity, the quality of education depending on zip code, the racism of the legal system, the profiling and treatment of black and brown bodies by some members of law enforcement, the disproportionate mapping of polling places, and I could go on and on outlining the discrepancy for the lives of people of color.

If we had been alive in the Greco-Roman world that Jesus inhabited along with the Jewish disciples we know well from the Gospels, we would know that

division was the way of the world. Cultural divisions, religious divisions, socio-economic divisions, and especially political divisions ruled daily life as it was known. In Matthew's Gospel, we hear Jesus' final words and they fly in the face of all that division. He says to the disciples: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." We call it the Great Commission. The sending out of the disciples into the world.

I would be lying to you if I didn't tell you that I think the best thing that has happened to church is the temporarily closing of buildings. For too long we have acquainted our buildings with God and their tending as our commission. We sheltered in them and wait for the world to find us and stay. Our churches became places where everyone was like us- same jobs, same political views, same, same, same. It was comfortable. That is, until it isn't. We talk so much about the power in agreement and similarity, but truly it is our difference that can be our greatest ally. Last Sunday at Pentecost we celebrated the tongues as if of fire of the Spirit resting on the disciples and empowering them to speak in languages that they had never learned prior to that day. We get excited about it

because we recognize the power in inclusivity and seeking to understand.

Suddenly, what divides us is possible to unite us, all because of the God we serve.

The lesson for us in this text that book ends a week of anger, frustration and the desire to be heard through peaceful protest, is this: “make disciples of all nations and teach them to obey everything that I have commanded you.” What have we been commanded? What lessons is Jesus hoping we pass on? What did Jesus share that he is imploring us to carry in our everyday lives, so that the words of our mouths and the actions of our hearts are in alignment? What, possibly, could Jesus expect others would learn from the disciples?

I ask you these things because **we** are disciples of Christ. We profess to follow Jesus and love God and invoke the Holy Spirit as we gather, worship and pray. What commandments have you learned from Christ? What commandments will help us to move forward and heal divisions that led to 300 years of inequity, lost opportunity, and insurmountable death with little hope for justice? What words can bridge this chasm of a divide?

Here are a few of Jesus’ commandments from the Gospels: Treat others as you would want to be treated. Forgive, not seven times, but seven times seventy. Do not seat yourself at the best seat, lest there be someone there more

honorable than you. When you stand in prayer, if you hold anything against your neighbor, forgive them so your God may forgive you. Give more than is demanded. Settle matters quickly with your adversary. Give to please God, not men. Do not store up treasures on earth. Do not worry about your life. Do not judge. Lastly, Love your God with all your heart and soul and mind and Love your neighbor as yourself. And, lest we forget, our blessings: Blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the merciful, just to name a few.

Jesus reminds us that when we focus less on ourselves and our own favor, ideas and experiences and instead set our sights on lifting up those who have been denied, we get a little closer to a kingdom Jesus was trying to bring about on earth. No more talk about destruction. No more clucking our tongues about what material things are lost. Our words, our actions, our feet must be walking in the light of Christ, a light that loves diversity and honors the truth of the other. No more me, me, me. Jesus calls us- no, he commands us to WE. Remember his words, make disciples of all nations. As disciples, now is our time to listen. Now is our time to demand better for every person who lives their life under the oppressive weight of 300 years of being considered less than human. Let today be

the day you say no more. Let today be the day we want more for our neighbor than we demand for ourselves. Amen.