

## Magdalen

### **Matt 28. V16-**

*Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him **they worshipped him but some doubted**. Then Jesus came to them and said: '**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 the son and 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.**'*

### **The Great Commission**

I take my cue from the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading. Matt 28. V16-.

The passage describes an event now known as the Great Commission.

At first sight the gathering looks like a fairly ordinary religious service:

Everyone has met at appointed time and place. It starts with worship.

There isn't a temple but this is temperate climate.

There are only 11 in attendance. 12 but there has been an issue with the treasurer.

The recorder is honest enough to note that although they worshipped, some doubted.

Unusually it's the announcements that provide the most interesting bit.

For this al fresco gathering is arguably one of the most significant events in history.

Significant for what is said and who is saying it – as well as what comes next.

The gathered have heard Jesus say many wonderful things, but that was before he died.

You could say this is the first assembly of the post resurrection church. (Explains worship).

Jesus gives an explicit instruction to go out and make disciples of all people.

With the promise that He will be with them wherever they go – and at all times.

Underwritten with the claim that 'all authority and power' has been given to Him.

What happens next – the response to that commission – becomes history.

A history that is still, sometimes noisily, sometimes quietly in the making.

We feel rippling ramifications of this announcement here.

There is a direct line between what was said there then and what is happening here now.

Had the disciples not responded as they did the 12 might never have multiplied to millions.

This temple not built, story, music never composed to the One who gave the message.

We'd never have heard of the God who came for us in Jesus. We'd be somewhere else.

### **(So how do we make disciples?)**

For all that, Jesus offers no particular plan or programme for making disciples.

Other than baptising people (in name of FSHS – a first) and teaching them to obey his ways.

He makes a promise that he will be with us – by his spirit - when we go.

But the how is up to us.

I was once asked to preach. Evangelism. Week before: (on a tube)

I felt depressed by encounters. 'This is not how tell people about Jesus.'

'How would you go about it?' A rebuke and a challenge.

(Don't try this!) I took tube. (The three sermons) 90 seconds!

I stepped off train. Exhausted. Humiliated. There has to be another way.  
This isn't what Jesus meant at the Great Commission.

### **(Disciples not converts)**

OC *'There's a passion for souls that doesn't spring from God but from a desire to make converts to our POV.'*

J could have said: 'Go make converts. Start a religion. Win people to your way of thinking.'  
But he uses a word that appears (269) times (someone counted!). Christian only 3.

### **What is a disciple?**

A disciple is someone who follows someone, learns from them, observes, is engaged in imitation, the study of a subject. The subject being in this case – Jesus and all his ways –  
The word is problematic. It has the implication of hierarchy. Of qualification and graduation.  
'Being a disciple and making disciples is a job for the 'especially called' ones.'

The de luxe Christians. But miracle and surprise of the great Commission is that people – all people – are to be involved in this great process.

A disciple doesn't have to be top of the range. A disciple is the basic transportation for the Kingdom of God. We are it – people!

Learning to live as Jesus lived requires very few qualifications.

There is no correspondence course. No degree or thesis required.

All that is required is dedication and devotion to Him.

Faith He really does have all authority and power

That He has the very best information about life and how to live it.

That He really is the One 'in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.'

And, crucially, that He is here! By his spirit. Present to be our teacher.

If we believe this, then we can (qualify) go!

### **My 'conversion'**

I came to faith in my 20's.

Apparently the Jesus I'd heard about was alive and could be encountered in spirit.

And I had an encounter that changed me. My whole world view turned upside down.

I speak of it as a conversion. But I was really beginning my apprenticeship as a disciple.

I quickly saw I couldn't be a disciple on my own.

I needed to be around others who believed in the One I now believed in (not that many!)

I found them in a church (Clapham) - people trying to cultivate the life of Jesus.

People who expected Him to guide and speak and heal and teach.

I also saw this was not a hobby. That to follow Christ I might have to rearrange my affairs.

I had to check I didn't have more important things to do –

Things on the dreary checklist of security, reputation, wealth, power.

I had to trust that this was the better choice for living.

25 years later that process is still going.

This education is always in session. You are a perpetual student.

### **Be a disciple to make disciples.**

But a disciple is both an apprentice and a practitioner. Learning on the job.  
As you get on with the business of being a disciple you make disciples.  
Indeed, you can't make them without being one. (You can't serve what you ain't cooking)  
I used to assume a disciple was someone who had to travel along way to do their job  
It turned out the mission is as much to corners of human existence as to corners of globe.  
It doesn't necessarily involve doing anything strange. Or exotic. It can...  
But there are different ways to do it. This is one!  
Being part of a church is key. But it doesn't have to look like this.  
You can gather in ordinary life situations (under presence of Christ). Anywhere (mountain)  
You can call it a church if you want. Etymology is on your side.  
(The word church comes from the word ecclesia 'called out ones'  
The ones who are taught and teach others how to observe the things that Jesus taught.  
You might do it badly. You might fail. But you do it together and you do it with Him.

### **MIAP**

I was involved in a 'programme of discipleship' known as the Alpha course.  
A couple of friends concluded that Jesus was not the author of life but he maybe had some vital information about how to live.  
They wanted to keep the conversation going. But were not going to 'come to church'.  
I started a meeting in a pub.  
The format was simple. Meet. Beer. Read. No prep. No exposition exegesis. A little faith.  
20 years on we still meet. Sometimes we are 11.  
We've learned and travelled far in that pub. Got to know scripture, each other and crucially got to know the One we're talking about .  
Believing – although some doubt - that the spirit of Christ is present at these meetings  
That he's with us – in the pub – teaching us, guiding us, encouraging us.  
I'm convinced, from my own experience, that it's not possible even to cross the road to make a disciple without faith that the one giving this commission is with us when we go.

### **Summary**

We see in history the consequences of a small number of disciples simply doing what J said.  
The great commission is, I believe, a commission for all.  
There's great freedom in how we going about it being and making disciples  
We are free to find our own way to demonstrate His way.  
For above all, The Great commission was not a law to obey. It is a life to embrace.

In the Name of the Father, the Son and The Holy Spirit. Amen.

