

Colossians 1:11-20

Matthew 28:16-20

## Introduction

Neil Marten, a Member of Parliament, was once giving a group of his constituents a guided tour of the Houses of Parliament. During the course of the visit, the group happened to meet Lord Hailsham, then Lord Chancellor, wearing all the regalia of his office. Hailsham recognized Marten among the group and cried, "Neil!" Not daring to question or disobey the "command," the entire band of visitors promptly fell to their knees!

I have often wondered what it must have been like to have encountered the risen Lord Jesus face to face. In both places in Matthew's Gospel where he describes a meeting with the risen Lord the response of the disciples is to worship him. This Jesus, who had died and risen, was changed in a way that meant that they were uncertain and slightly fearful as well as deeply joyful when they encountered him. Their response was to worship because that, really is the only fitting response.

It is a response that is underlined by Jesus' words to them "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me!" In the face of their wonder at seeing him in his risen glory he assures them of his power. Nothing is outside the power of him who had died and conquered death. As they worshipped before him he reminded them that they were servants of a master whose authority upon earth and in heaven was beyond question, a master who deserved their homage and obedience.

Two battleships assigned to the training squadron had been at sea on maneuvers in heavy weather for several days. A sailor on the lead battleship tells the story of how he was on watch on the bridge as night fell. The visibility was poor with patchy fog, so the captain remained on the bridge keeping an eye on all activities.

Shortly after dark, the lookout on the wing reported, "Light, bearing on the starboard bow."

"Is it steady or moving astern?" the captain called out.

The lookout replied, "Steady, Captain," which meant we were on a dangerous collision course with that ship.

The captain then called to the signalman, "Signal that ship: 'We are

on a collision course, advise you change course twenty degrees." Back came the signal, "Advisable for you to change course twenty degrees."

The captain said, "Send: 'I'm a captain, change course twenty degrees.'"

"I'm a seaman second-class," came the reply. "You had better change course twenty degrees."

By that time the captain was furious. He spat out, "Send: 'I'm a battleship. Change course twenty degrees.'"

Back came the flashing light, "I'm a lighthouse."

We changed course.

Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and earth. His authority is final. We remember how when the devil tempted Jesus that was one of the things he tempted him with. He offered him all authority in heaven and on earth, but without exacting the price that he has now paid for it. If Jesus had accepted power then it would have been a hollow triumph leading to the worst tyranny imaginable. Jesus' authority as the risen one is the authority of the one who has defeated tyranny itself, the ultimate tyranny of death. His is the authority under which life, God's new life, can begin to flourish.

The tasks Jesus leaves his followers, tasks that will bring his sovereign authority to bear on the world, are straightforward enough to outline, though daunting and demanding to put into practice.

### The first is to **make disciples**

As Jesus called the fishermen by the sea of Galilee, and trained them up as 'learners' imitating his way of life (which is what disciple means) and coming little by little to understand his kingdom message, so his followers ever since have the responsibility of calling men and women and children to follow him and training them to understand and follow his message and his way. Evangelism – announcing God's news focused on Jesus, to bring people to faith and obedience, remains central to the way in which Jesus' authority is brought to bear on the world.

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However, it seems to me that often the church has lost the urgency needed to proclaim the Good News. The late Sam Shoemaker, an Episcopalian bishop, summed up the situation this way: "In the Great Commission the Lord has called us to be - like Peter - fishers of men. We've turned the commission around so that we have become merely keepers of the aquarium. Occasionally I take some fish out of your fishbowl and put them into mine, and you do the same with my bowl. But we're all tending the same fish."

Our commission is to go out and find new fish and show them the transforming power of Jesus. Sometimes telling a story has as much effect on the teller as it does the listeners. When we tell the story of our Master, we too experience His power.

The second task Jesus gave to his followers is **to baptize those they bring to faith**. Baptism is not an optional extra for followers of Jesus. Jesus himself linked baptism to his own death; part of the meaning of baptism is to commit us, through plunging into water, to dying with Jesus and coming to share his new life. Baptism is the public, physical and visible way in which someone is marked out, 'branded' almost, with the holy 'name'. As Jesus was given, by the angel, the name 'Jesus' signifying his real identity and the task that lay before him, so now, with his work complete, we suddenly discover that the 'name' which we are to all share is the new 'name' of 'the living God' – the father, Son and holy Spirit.

The third thing that disciples are commanded to do is **to teach**. The gospel of Jesus generates a lifestyle that is quite different from the way the world lives. As we read Matthew's Gospel we see that Jesus has already highlighted that at various levels; from the personal morality outlined in the sermon on the mount to the high demand for forgiveness in chapter 18 and not least in the overturning of the

normal way that rulers behave in Chapter 20. All this, as well as the five great blocks of teaching recorded in Matthew's gospel, is the basis of what the church must teach the new disciples.

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Life is a matter of building. Each of us has the opportunity to build something - a secure family, a good reputation, a career, a relationship to God. But some of those things can disappear almost overnight due to financial losses, natural disasters and other unforeseen difficulties.

What are we to do? Daniel Webster offers excellent advice, saying, "If we work on marble it will perish. If we work on brass, time will efface it. If we rear temples, they will crumble to dust. But if we work on men's immortal minds, if we imbue them with high principles, with just fear of God and love of their fellow-men, we engrave on those tablets something which time cannot efface, and which will brighten and brighten to all eternity.

This is the basis of the first lever for change in our diocesan vision that states that we aspire to build a confident people of God. I long to see each and every person who worships with us build their lives on a clear, burning and confident faith; to see people confident of God's love for them and who they are before him; to see people growing in faith and showing real change in their lives. This is why in the spring we will be running a discipleship course here in the benefice to give each of us an opportunity to explore what we believe and to allow God to challenge us and enable us to grow in faith

When the disciples heard the commission that Jesus gave to them their hearts must have sunk to the toes of their thonged sandals. It was a staggering challenge..... not simply to tell their friends about Jesus but to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth and make disciples of all nations. But no sooner was the command given than the promise followed. Jesus said "Surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age". Emmanuel... God with us, equipping and empowering for the task ahead. This promise was no cosy reassurance but a very necessary equipping for mission. An equipping that we need, and in the same way that Moses said to God ", We will not go forth from this place unless you go with us".

We could say "we cannot stay in this place and proclaim your name unless you are here with us". We all have times when we wonder where God is and what he is doing in our lives and in our churches.

**Readings      Christ the King – authority and power      Foxton/Fowlmere**

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I am certain that we can confidently trust Christ's promise. He is with us, he will equip us, he has the power and the authority and He gives it to us. Our part is to worship him .....and to obey his command.