

Roots and Wings
Matthew 29:16-20
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October 4, 2009

What a disaster this past week has been! There was the tsunami that inundated the American Samoa Islands, killing hundreds, followed by a 5.9 earthquake that killed a couple of people in Peru. Then, there were the devastating earthquakes that slammed into Indonesia on Thursday and Friday, killing thousands more. The internet pictures brought the sadness almost instantly to our computer screens, as the television cameras began sending out incredible pictures of damage and destruction. It's important that compassionate people do what they can to help out, and each of us can do whatever we feel we should.

What I marveled at yet again is how small our world has become. No sooner does a wave smash into an island thousands of miles away, we know it. The dust has yet to clear, and we're already alerted to earthquake damage in places we can hardly pronounce. In some small way, I think that must be the way that God must feel- holding all the brokenness of the whole world in crucified hands; all told there have 77 earthquakes this past week over a magnitude 5.

Jesus had gathered his disciples in Galilee; already there were those who doubted what had happened. (show slide Mt. 28:17) The sad thing about those who doubted Jesus' resurrection is that they had no hope when death comes stalking... in tsunamis, in earthquakes, in heart attacks and cancer wards... nothing beyond what's immediate... beyond this life. Without Easter, life is little more than a box canyon from which there is

no escape, and sin leers over all our good deeds- rendering them into empty hypocritical gestures. (close slide) Not so, the risen Christ says: “All authority on heaven and earth has been given to me.”

(show slide Mt. 28:18b) What a remarkable statement that is, and I don't know of anyone else who has ever made the sort of claim. In looking at some Islamic comments on this verse... they don't dispute the authority of Jesus as much as they suggest that this is a statement refuting the Trinity Jesus spoke of just one verse later. Leaving that argument for another time... note that what we read is not “some,” but “ALL authority”... not just in heaven, or only on this earth... but “in heaven AND on earth” has been given to WHOM? **Jesus**; the Jesus who commands people to love one another as he has loved us... the one who was nailed to the cross for us... that's the one with all the authority in heaven and earth. So... if Jesus is the ultimate authority figure- what does he want us to do? (close slide)

(open slide- Mt. 28:19a) He sent his listeners out to all nations... the Greek word suggests all “ethnic groups.” Places like American Samoa, Indonesia and Peru were totally unknown by the 1st Century authors who wrote the Gospels- but they were not unknown to God. From the very beginning, Jesus was concerned about those who were not present on that Galilee mountain... the Samoans, those in Indonesia, the Peruvians, Americans, and you and me. If we could stand far enough back, we could trace a line of spiritual connection from your heart to whoever told you about Jesus; and from his/her heart to whoever told them, and back all the way to that Galilean mountain. The One with all authority had given a task to his followers, and they were faithful... and that's why you and I are here today.

That command- what we call the Great Commission- is still with us today. You and I are the ones of this generation to share the faith, hope and love of Easter with others. We're today's disciples charged by Jesus to go out... to be missional in what we do. The term mission- *missio*- means to be sent out; *com*- means with... you and I are asked to join with Jesus who was sent from the Father on a mission to reconcile a broken world to himself... American Samoa, Indonesia, Peru and West Chester... all of it. That's why we've spoken so often about missional living; you and I are on a mission- sent by God- to communicate Christ to those around us. Last weekend's Community Celebration was a wonderful effort on the part of this church to do that, and I'm excited to watch missional faithfulness begin to bear fruit. (close slide)

(show slide Mt. 28:19-20a) We're directed to invite people- whether unreached ethnic groups from around the world, or neighbors next door- into a spiritual relationship with God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit... or Creator, Redeemer Sustainer. But, that's not all; we're asked to "...teach them to obey all that I- Jesus- have commanded you."

Do you know what Jesus has commanded? Are you conversant in what the Bible tells us about Jesus and his directives? Are you active in Bible study, or in some discussion group that regularly discusses the implication of living out what Jesus commands us? Are you at least as smart as some of our Sunday school kids about the characters in biblical stories and what they mean to us today? (close slide)

Over the next five weeks, we're going to a little video that is a take-off on the hit TV show called, "Are You Smarter than a 5th Grader?" Each Sunday, we'll show a little five-minute clip that will serve as a count-down to worship; I'd like you to take a look at one now and play along... are you smarter than a Sunday School kid?

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Each Sunday, plan to come a few minutes early to play along and perhaps learn a few things. Better yet, why not plan to attend the Sunday night classes that begin tonight? One class will focus on communication between husband and wife, and be built on that movie announced as we began, called “Fireproof.” Another class will look at parenting, while yet another gathering will provide a weekly study of one of the Psalms. Pastor Denise will be investigating deepening your walk with Christ, and the first three weeks in November will look at some common end-of-life issues for ourselves or aging family members. Through it all... ask yourself that old cliché: “What would Jesus do?” What kind of Christian advice might you provide someone who asks you about one of these issues as you “teach others what Jesus has commanded us.”

There’s a last little comment- not insignificant- just a closing promise made by Jesus- the One with all authority. (show slide 28:20b) Jesus has given us some direction... but he’s also given us a promise that he would support us in our efforts, and that he will be present to us by the power of the Holy Spirit: “And surely I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Not just on Sundays, not just during the Christmas and Easter, not just during the 1st Century, not just when things are going well for you... “always, to the end of the age.” I can promise you that if you study that phrase- that last verse of Matthew- carefully, God will bless your faith in some unexpected ways... I found some amazing connections to this verse in Revelation, and would someday love to lead a Bible study on that, too. (close slide)

As we gather around this table- he is with us today; “always”- that’s his promise. As we eat bread and share the cup- this day especially, we do so together with Christians

around the world. Breathe a prayer for frightened believers in Indonesia who are worshipping outdoors next to a collapsed church, or for soggy Samoans looking for a chalice buried in the mud. Remember your children, or your parents in other places; pray for our troops in Afghanistan huddled around a chaplain in some forward post... pray to a God who hold you, and me, and all of us in the palms of his nail-scarred hands. Let's pray...