

Go

It has been a week for us, but we do not really know how long it has been for the eleven. They head to Galilee as instructed, but it is a ninety mile walk between the two sites so it would take a while to get where they are going. I wonder if they would have headed there without the women's testimony. I wonder if they would have kept their date with Jesus if all they had to go on was a promise he uttered on that horrible Thursday night in the garden. But thanks to the women, the eleven have hope and make their way to that mountain in Galilee. And there they meet Jesus and are given the Great Commission.

This is one of the most familiar passages in Matthew's gospel. Apparently, Andy and I both learned the same anthem based on this text in youth choir just a few years back. It's often understood as what some might call a "rah-rah" verse, a "go team" passage. The commission says, "Go" after all, an encouragement, a rallying cry, a cheer urging the disciples to get out there and share the good news to the ends of the earth. And I start to sing to myself, "Go ye into all the world..."

This verse doesn't always make me want to sing, however, because while I can sing it, I'm not all that sure I'm all that good at doing what Jesus tells his disciples and us to do. I'm not sure I measure up really, and on my most floundering days, I feel a bit like an imposter. Perhaps you have heard discussions about something known as "imposter syndrome." This phenomenon—which is not new—is defined as "a psychological pattern in which an individual doubts his or her accomplishments and has a persistent internalized fear of being exposed as a 'fraud.'"¹ Even when a person has a certain measure of success, she worries that at some point someone will notice that she has no clue what she is doing and that she is not all she claims to be. I think sometimes this passage makes us feel like we are imposter disciples because we haven't gone into all the world, because we haven't baptized and taught countless numbers of people, because we don't live the perfect disciple

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impostor_syndrome

life. If people only knew... It is hard to sing and smile during the big finale when we feel like we haven't played our parts all that well in the earlier acts.

But there is much more to this text than the finale, and jumping to the end too quickly misses something and risks glossing over all that has come before. If we imagine Matthew's telling as a play, then the garden, the cross, and the tomb would still be part of the set. Yes, they would all now be off to the side and no longer center stage, but they would still be very much a part of the picture. Since we do not have a stage in front of us, Matthew paints a picture with his words, "Now the eleven..." The eleven. You remember why there are eleven and not twelve, right? Judas. Judas is the missing disciple, and his absence whisks us back to all that brought us here—fear, betrayal, heartbreak, and death. There are eleven now, not twelve. Twelve is one of those very holy biblical numbers. It points to wholeness, redemption, and history. There were twelve tribes in Israel when all was well. There were twelve baskets of leftovers at that pop-up feast on another mountain earlier in Matthew. And now there are eleven. The once perfect is broken and incomplete. But they were never perfect, really. They got confused and panicked. Two of them had a mother who lobbied for her boys to have privileged positions in the kingdom. They ran off and abandoned Jesus entirely when things got scary. But at least on paper they were a complete set, a hopeful reminder of days gone by, days when Israel was great and grand. Their being twelve was a hint that that grandeur might return. But it has not and it will not, not in a good ole' days kind of way anyway, because the twelve were never perfect to begin with.

And then there is the response of the eleven to Jesus when they see him. Most English translations tell us, "When they saw him, they worshiped him, but some doubted." I can't help wondering what that looks like. Do some hold back? Do some rub their eyes?² And why only some? When I read this I want to know what keeps others from doubting, because I am fairly certain I'd be in the doubting crowd, no matter how much I longed to be in the other. I think we all like to hope that seeing the risen Christ would be all we would need to feel rah-rah about the discipleship thing. That seeing him in the flesh on that mountainside would end any doubt and give us all the confidence in the world. But I have to confess I suspect I would be in that other group, the group that holds back, the group that cannot quite trust what or who is standing right in front of them. And that

² As suggested in this painting of Thomas <https://www.instagram.com/p/BwqL4LQIFh/>

makes me feel like an imposter. Sure Matthew tells us that “some” doubted, but doesn’t that make them sound like second-rate disciples? I mean after all, Jesus is standing. Right. There. Isn’t that enough? I preach and teach for a living. If seeing Jesus standing right in front of me does not erase all my doubts, does that make me an imposter?

But this week, I was reminded by several scholars that the Greek text says nothing about “some.” There is no “some” here. The some we hear in many translations has something to do with a nuance in the text, one little word that can be translated multiple ways, but in other parts of Matthew’s gospel it is left alone. I can go down a rabbit trail speculating why the tradition has been so intent on saying that only some doubted in the presence of the risen Christ, but I find more power in the revelation that the Greek text reads: “When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted.”³ They worshiped. They doubted. There is no division in the ranks. This broken and baffled group of eleven worshiped *and* doubted at the same time, with Jesus standing right there. And Jesus commissions them—all of them—to go into all the world to preach his gospel.

I think it matters what exactly he commissions them—and us—to do. “Go and teach all that I have commanded you,” he says. Love neighbors. Live generously. Welcome strangers. Tell neighbors and friends that death and sin do not have the last word, that in this Jesus the Kingdom of God has come near, that there is a different way to live, that the powers of greed and envy and shame and fear are not the only powers. This going and telling does not hinge on my goodness, my faithfulness, or my getting everything 100% right 100% of the time. It depends on him; it always has; and it always will. But that is not easy, is it? Especially not when we have our own doubts, our own days when we’re not so sure.

So what would it look like for us to go and share that? What would it look like for us to go into all the world and point to a savior who shows up and stays with us in the midst of our doubts and our bluster, in the midst of our bumbling and our blowing it? Jan Edmiston, a colleague in North Carolina shared some wonderings this week about what the world we are sent out into is looking for. You and I know that not as many people come to church on Sundays anymore. Sometimes we worry that we are not snazzy enough or flashy

³ Matthew 28:17, New American Bible, Revised Edition

enough or hip enough, but my colleague Jan insists those things are not the things most people are looking for.

She insists that they are looking for:

- Honesty. *Are people pretending to be something they aren't?*
- Community. *Do we learn from each other and care for each other?*
- Refuge. *Are we safe here?*
- Hope. *Will I find meaning and encouragement?*
- Support. *Will they love me when they realize I'm a hot mess?*
- Something holy and eternal. *Is this about supporting an institution or something bigger?*⁴

So if we understand Jesus' commission to include us, what exactly do we go and tell and teach? Too many of our friends and neighbors think that they need to be perfectly faithful and have their acts together to darken those doors, that their Sunday best is the only acceptable way to show up. But thanks be to God, you and I know that just is not true, that is not the full story. Yes, we come when all is well, but we also come when all is decidedly not well, when the ground beneath our feet is shifting and broken, when the road ahead seems to hold nothing but dead ends, when we're not really sure Good Friday and Holy Saturday will ever end with resurrection. What if we shared that?

I think maybe we are called to share the whole gospel, the truth about Jesus *and* the truth about those he commissions. I take great comfort in the disciples' worshiping and doubting at the same time. I think there are others out in the world who would find comfort in that news, too. We are not imposters. We are full-fledged disciples when we worship and when we doubt, when we sing and when we slip, when we cheer at the top of our lungs and when we can't even find our way onto the field. So go and tell the full story, the one where you scratch your head, catch your breath, find your footing, and stumble along. Go and preach. Go and welcome. Go and encourage. Go and invite others to meet this one who promises to be with all of us always, doubting worshipers and worshiping doubters alike.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

⁴ <https://achurchforstarvingartists.blog/2019/04/24/what-are-they-looking-for/>