

15th June, 2014.

Reading: Psalm 8

Matthew 28: 16 -20

Sermon: Who me?

If only God would perform some miracle, I'd believe. That used to be the kind of thing which people said when there was a discussion about the existence of God. I'm not sure people say that kind of thing any longer, possibly because they don't have any really desire to believe in God or to worship God or serve God. But there was a time, not so very long ago, when people said a miracle would convince them that God existed. I'm not so sure. Even back then, we used to say that people would find a way of explaining away whatever happened.

That's what came to mind as I read our Scripture reading for today and glanced at the comments on the Church of Scotland website.

It came to mind because of one phrase in our reading. In our Scripture reading from Matthew's gospel, it said that the disciples went to the mountain in Galilee which Jesus had told them to go to. It's implied in the next verse that Jesus was there waiting for them but what struck me was the wording. **When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted.**

Those were the men who had witnessed the risen Christ. Those were the men who were together in the Upper Room when Jesus came and stood among them, twice, the second time for Thomas' sake because he was missing and didn't believe what the others told him, that Jesus was alive.

So now we have the eleven disciples – Judas being the one who is missing - and some are doubting. What does God need to do to convince them? The crucified and risen Jesus was standing among the disciples and even although they worshipped him, some still doubted. What difference does a miracle make? Very little it would seem.

Let's think though about those doubts. What were those doubts? I'm beginning to wonder if their doubts had more to do with themselves than with Jesus. In all honesty, they couldn't possibly doubt who He was or that He was alive – not with Him standing there among them after his death. However, it is perfectly possible that because of the fact they had abandoned him at the lowest point in His life; it is perfectly possible that they doubted their acceptability. How could Jesus still love them? How could Jesus still trust them? And yet he did.

In this incredible meeting with His disciples, He leaves mission in their hands. He has no plan B. This is it. He says to them: **Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising 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.

It was make or break time. It still is. That mission has been handed on down through the generations to the present generations and there is still no plan B. This is God's plan, that we will make disciples, we who worship Him.

Even although they worshipped Him, some still doubted. Could that be said of us this morning? Are we really all that different from the disciples? I doubt it very much. How many of us feel that we have let God down at some stage in life, if not on a regular basis? How many of us feel like the disciples, if not all the time, at least part of the time? Do we question how God can possibly love us? Do we question how God can possibly trust us? Do we think He means someone else when He says: Go and make disciples? It couldn't possibly be me. What would I say? No one would listen to me.

Isn't that what Moses said when God sent Him to Pharaoh? Not me. Send someone else. I couldn't possibly do that. How many of us question our acceptability to God and our ability to serve God despite what Jesus says.

Have you and I really grasped that people's futures lie in our hands? I sometimes wonder, not just about you but even more about myself. Have we really grasped what we are called to do and why we are called to do it?

I have said it before and I'll say it again. Faith matters. It matters more than anything else in creation and we are entrusted with nurturing faith in others. Jesus didn't say 'Go and tiptoe round people in case you offend them with your message'. Jesus didn't say 'Watch when you say: I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but by me – watch that you don't tread on anyone's toes. He said: **Go and make disciples.** He said that because He loves His people and He wants His people to love Him back.

I saw a story on the Church's website which I need to tell you. The Very Rev. Dr. Finlay MacDonald provided the anecdote. He recalled a summer holiday in Devon several years ago. A copy of the local Church newsletter was in their rented cottage when they arrived and he read it with interest. It appeared that the vicar had been coming in for some criticism – nothing unusual in that – but he had come in for some criticism as people found his services rather dull. He responded in the newsletter by reminding his flock that his task was to feed the sheep, not amuse the goats!

I love that story but as Finlay MacDonald said, he suspected that didn't do much to improve his standing. When I say that Jesus doesn't say: tiptoe around people, I'm not suggesting that we ride roughshod over people. There is nothing loving in that approach. Love for God and for our neighbour has got to be the basis for what we say and do.

We have to bear in mind that the story from Finlay MacDonald is out of context. In using it, I'm not actually judging the vicar. His services may have been seen as boring because he was trying to maintain a dignity in worship. It may also be that he had a congregation who wouldn't have been happy even if Peter or Jesus himself was in the pulpit.

Go and make disciples, baptise them and teach them to observe all that I have commanded you.

This is as always an amazing challenge and the greatest challenge is working out how we do that. The challenge to teach is mind blowing. How do we teach nowadays because younger generations learn in different ways? Everything is interactive. They Google things to find the answers. They are not spoon-fed as we were. How do we tap into that way of learning to make disciples? We probably need a couple of teenagers to teach us but maybe that's a cop out or maybe it's the way forward, to use the young, to use those who can communicate with younger generations, to make disciples. If it's not about using the young to communicate the message, maybe it's about listening to the young, learning from the young who, in this instance, maybe do know it all, or at least a great deal more than the rest of us who are getting on in years.

However we do it, the challenge is ours. The commission is ours, to Go and make disciples and to share the Good News that Jesus is indeed risen and alive and that God loves each one of us. How much, we cannot begin to imagine.