

2019 NL1 WK Easter 2 Matthew 28
19-04-28 2nd Sunday of Easter

God's beloved people, grace and peace to you in the name of our crucified and risen Savior,
Jesus Christ.....Amen.....

After all the events of last week which I covered in the announcements (Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunrise in the cemetery and the Easter Festival worship services), we live in a resurrection world. Jesus' resurrection changed everything. He brought renewal and regeneration to all creation and ushered in the new age of salvation. You and I live in a resurrection world.

A world of hope..., and life..., and new beginnings..., and salvation..., and servanthood. Jesus stood on that mountain with his remaining disciples and he spoke to them what's called in the business, "The Great Commission."

We have disciples..., and Jesus..., and the commissioning to Go..., to all nations..., to baptize..., to teach and make disciples..., all with Jesus as our companion. This is the resurrection world.

And it all sounds so wonderful.... And it is.... to know that Jesus has given us a hope to sustain us now and into the world to come. AND to know that we are not alone, that we go about our daily lives with Jesus by our side.

But we also know that this world is a difficult and challenging place to live in..., sometimes more challenging than others.

Even as we were gathering for Easter worship and finalizing plans for Easter dinner last week, Christians in Sri Lanka were being targeted by bombers in their places of worship.... A month ago it was 2 Muslim mosques in New Zealand.... And, I was going to say "last fall it was a Jewish synagogue in Pittsburgh," but yesterday, just after I put the "amen" on this sermon, I read of another shooting in a synagogue, this time in San Diego..... Religious targeting and violence has no boundaries.

And maybe this cognitive dissonance around a redeemed and saved resurrection world still being a dangerous and violent place, is the reason why this year when reading of the Great Commission, I was struck by the opening words, "*Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee...*"

Eleven..... not twelve. "Eleven" reminds us that this reunion in Galilee was only possible at a serious cost.... 2 people from the group had died..., one had been resurrected..., but Judas was dead.

We don't often talk about Judas, even though Matthew includes his whole story. Matthew is the only gospel writer who gives us the story of Judas' repentance.

Judas returned to the religious officials and tried to give back the money as he repented.... But those leaders refused to absolve him.... They didn't give him the hand of forgiveness.__ The church failed Judas.__ And has continued to fail Judas and his people ever since.

We have a hard time talking about some things in the church. But this should be a place where no topic is off limits.

If we live our lives in Jesus..., and we do..., then there is nothing outside the realm of his care and redemption.... Jesus died for all people, and loves the world.... the tomb is empty.... Resurrection life is our reality.....

And if God is love..., and God is..., then true love isn't based on worthiness or proof or any criteria. God's love and grace aren't just for those who are worthy, (that's not grace – that's reward) God's love and grace are for everyone precisely *because* NONE of us... is worthy.

And Judas and people who have been overcome by despair to the point of taking their own lives in suicide – and their families – have been forced into a life-stealing silence that kills over and over.....when what we need is the hope of the resurrection world..... The tomb is empty!! And God's love has spilled out all over the place.

Eleven....eleven disciples were on that mountain-top because Judas was dead.... He was missing.... And that glorious reunion on that mountaintop was one that was won by blood, sweat and tears.... Many tears.... All those who were there had been through great suffering.... which deepened their great joy.

So there were eleven..... And the “eleven” cause us to ask in our age, “Who else is missing?” What other “nations” have been missing-out on the shared love of Jesus? To whom does Jesus send us in this day?

Every generation has its outcast “nations.” Matthew gave us a pretty good list throughout his gospel. In the Sermon on the Mount he recorded Jesus as having told us to love not only our neighbor but also our enemies.

I read a quote this week saying, “The Lord told me to love my enemy, so I looked in the mirror and loved myself.”

Jesus instructed us not to judge, but to forgive, and to love God, ourselves and our neighbor. In the great story of the sheep and goats, we learn that loving the neighbor IS loving Jesus. We learn that LOVE is the primary characteristic of the resurrection world.

But throughout the generations with this great trove of teaching from Jesus that he instructs the disciples to share with the nations, the church had whittled it down to rules and criteria for earning God's love, which is precisely what Jesus had said was NOT the point of his coming.

So Martin Luther and others challenged the church and almost lost their lives several times for their efforts, and some things changed very nicely.

But since then, people who profess to love Jesus have again set up barriers and challenges to following and sharing God's love... and there are still Nations that aren't welcomed for whatever false reason – usually based in ignorance and lack of understanding.

So who are the “Nations” to whom Jesus is imploring us to go today? Who lives with a socially enforced stigma in our world today?

How about those struggling with mental health issues? There are more people in the United States living with anxiety and stress than all other countries in the world except three – Greece, the Philippines, and Tanzania – and those places are dealing with economic, safety, and humanitarian crises. Maybe we are too?

We ought to be at the forefront of advocating for and supporting people to get the mental health care that they need..., and celebrating with them when they do. Because in all of these things, “them” is us!!

We, together, have collective experience with family and friends who, like Judas, suffer from deep despair..., and depression..., and bi-polar disorder..., and addiction..., and Alzheimer's..., and chronic pain..., and so many things that I can't list them all here.

We have those around us with gender and sexual attraction realities different than what society and the church for so long have labelled as “the norm.” LGBTQ by acronym: Lesbian,

Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning – people struggling with their primary identities and for so long church people have pushed them away and called them names.

We have the whole list of outcast nations/peoples.... that Jesus gave us in the story of the sheep and the goats: the hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick, and imprisoned.

Jesus commissions us to be present with people.... All Nations.... In this resurrection world.....

And we're not going to do it perfectly. In our earnest efforts to accompany and be welcoming and supportive, our privilege will be showing – especially when we don't recognize it. And we will step in messes of our own making and offend, but Jesus commissioned us to be out there.... To baptize and to teach...

Jesus stood on that mountain top speaking to his 11 remaining disciples and all subsequent disciples. And he said as the literal Greek puts it, "*As you are going from this place into the world and your daily lives...., disciple all nations – all people – by baptizing them and teaching them all that I have commanded – love God and neighbor. And lo, behold, perceive, that I am with you... all the days... always... to the end of all eons.*"

"*I am with you always*" – Emmanuel just as the angel promised at the beginning of Matthew, "Emmanuel." Jesus is with you, and Jesus loves you and everyone you meet.

This week, live with the words, "*I am with you always.*" Think on them..., meditate on this good news..., "*I am with you always.*" ... Say these words over and over..., if you like..., as a centering prayer. "*I am with you always.*" Speak them in the morning as you get ready for your day to live in this resurrection world.

Jesus is with you always – all the days – to the end of the age.
Amen.....