THEREFORE MAKE DISCIPLES

Matthew 27:62-28:20

Key Verse: 19-20

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing 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.”

We thank and praise God for the crucifixion and death of Jesus. We remember Jesus’ cry on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” In this cry of Jesus, the Son of God, those who repent and believe are accepted, welcomed and embraced into the open arms of God our heavenly Father, being saved from eternal abandonment in hell. May we dwell in this grace through a life of repentance and faith and draw near to God through the new and living way widely opened to us. And may we boldly proclaim the message of the cross, Christ crucified in this cross-despising world. Today’s passage is finally the resurrection of Jesus. Matthew stresses the truthfulness of the resurrection of Jesus Christ that overrides the lies and deception of the world. Christ Jesus’ resurrection makes the whole world turn upside down as well as each and everyone’s life. With the resurrection, Christianity stands firm; without the resurrection it crumbles. Christ crucified and dead is risen! This is the very message of the Christian faith. What a message! And the risen Christ commands, “Therefore make disciples of all nations” with the promise, “I am with you.” Through this study, may our faith in Jesus’ resurrection be firm and solid, unshaken in this world and, as a result, may we deeply obey the command of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter 27 verses 62-66 is a very interesting passage uniquely written in Matthew’s gospel. It is about guarding Jesus’ tomb. Have you ever heard about guarding someone’s tomb unless something valuable is buried there together with the corpse? But Jesus’ tomb was sealed and guarded, though nothing valuable was there. Verses 62-66 read, “The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. ‘Sir,’ they said, ‘we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.’ ‘Take a guard,’ Pilate answered. ‘Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.’ So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal and posting the guard.” At this point we are to know the disciples’ condition. They were hiding themselves out of fear of the Jews. The words of Jesus concerning the resurrection not only did they not believe but the words were out of their minds. They did not grasp even a hint of the idea of Jesus rising from the dead. But the religious leaders remembered the words of Jesus, “After three days I will rise again” (Mt 12:40; 16:21; 17:23; 20:19) and made it an issue. The chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate, defiling themselves by entering a Gentile area, which they did not mind at this time, and made the request of guarding Jesus’ tomb. Pilate agreed to this and they worked together although they were enemies. Here the word “secure” is written 3 times: “for the tomb to be made secure,” “make the tomb secure as you know how,” and “made the tomb secure.” They made a complete strategy to guard the body of Jesus from anyone’s stealing and even preventing Jesus from coming out of the tomb even if he rose from the dead. So there was no human way for the dead body of Jesus to be brought out of the tomb. The only way would be the resurrection. So what a preparation was made for the resurrection of Jesus along with his burial!

Then 28:1 says, “After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalen and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.” These two Marys had been there sitting opposite the tomb. So they knew the place and went there again to look at the tomb and anoint Jesus’ body before it would decay (Jn 11:39). This was their last hope in him. Then what happened? In verses 2-4, it says, “There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.” It is God who raised Jesus from the dead. Apostle Peter said in Acts 2:32, “God has raised this Jesus to life,” and in 2:36, “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” An angel came down from heaven to deliver the message of Jesus’ resurrection to the women. God’s raising Jesus was invisible. But here Matthew described visible things: a violent earthquake, angel’s coming down from heaven, rolling the stone back and sitting on it, his appearance/countenance like lightning, his clothes white as snow. These are all supernatural. We are to know that history consists of both natural and supernatural things. At this appearing of the angel of the Lord, which was the radiant presence of God, the guards were so afraid him that they shook and became like dead men. They went into temporary coma. They were knocked literally unconscious out of terror. Fear will cause people to be paralyzed to the point where they go unconscious, and that’s precisely what happened. They were knocked cold out of fear. They were victims of divine power. Roman soldiers had been known undefeatable as most courageous and powerful army. But they shook and became like dead men captured by fear. It was like the finger of God defeating the whole Roman empire.

The appearance of the angel made the solders deadened and he had nothing to say to them. But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.” What a glorious message unheard of in human history! He is not here; he has risen just as he said. See the empty tomb. Death has died and been conquered. This was the message mortal ears had never heard. Truly this is the greatest message mortal human beings can hear. An old-aged question is, “If a man dies, will he live again?” (Job 14:14) Without Jesus the answer is “No. Absolutely not.” But with Jesus the answer is, “Yes. Absolutely yes.” What a hope to all mankind! In this world, the lives of all people end in death. To those who do not know the resurrection of Christ Jesus, the world is everything. But sadly there is no hope in this world. All human hopes end in death. Without the resurrection of Jesus human life is really sorrowful and pitiful. But praise God for the message: “He is not here; he has risen.” So Apostle Peter said in 1 Peter 1:3-4, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you.” Praise God for the resurrection of Christ Jesus and the living hope of the kingdom of God.

This message of the resurrection had to be delivered as quickly as possible to the disciples who were like the living dead, spiritually deadened after Jesus’ death on the cross. The message the women had to deliver was, “he has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.” We know that on that evening the risen Jesus appeared to his disciples in Jerusalem. But here the promise was “he is going ahead of you into Galilee.” Galilee was the place where Jesus had called them and so they began their lives with Jesus. After the Last Supper, Jesus predicted that all his disciples would fall away, but promised, “After I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.” (Mt 26:32). In Galilee, the risen Jesus would reveal his grand plan for them in the second part of their lives as disciples of Jesus.

Then in verses 8-10 it says, “So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. ‘Greetings,’ he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.’” What a grace to the women! They came to the tomb full of sorrow and out of sympathy for Jesus. Hearing the message of Jesus’ resurrection, they were assured that he was alive, and without delay they were carrying out their mission of delivering the message to the disciples. They ran to them, afraid yet filled with joy. What a change of their emotion, from sorrow to bliss.

Then while they were on their way, Suddenly Jesus met them. Or “behold Jesus met them” (KJV, NASB). “Greetings,” he said. The word, “Greetings” in Greek, *chairó*, was the ordinary salutation of the marketplace. That was the ordinary greeting that everybody used as they passed on the roads. Here is Christ in resurrection glory. He is the Son of God in his kingly majesty having conquered death. But in a very natural, warm, and human way he simply stops some women that he loves and says, “Greeting”, which is like “Good morning. Hi.” What an ordinary greeting from the risen Jesus! Probably a solemn dignified greeting was expected! We see that even though Jesus Christ is glorified, he has not lost his human sensitivity. He has not lost his human tenderness. He is heavenly but also earthly. He can commune with the holy angels and the Trinity, but he can also commune with men who walk the dusty roads of life. We are reminded of the words in a Hymn Song, “He Lives”, “He walks with me and talks with me a long life narrow way. He lives, He lives—salvation to impart! You ask me how I know He lives? He lives with in my heart!”

Then the women came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him. We also see that the risen Jesus is the object of our worship and devotion. Later on, the disciples would worship him. And another surprising thing is that Jesus called his disciples his brothers. Now we have Jesus as our big brother and have the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as our God and Father. How can we fathom all these blessings in Christ Jesus who rose again from the dead! And the risen Jesus was sure that he would go to Galilee and see his disciples there.

Now in verses 11-15, something unthinkable is written. It says, “While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. When the chief priests had met the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, ‘You are to say, “His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.” If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.’ So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.” The world despises and hates the cross of Jesus. Now the world fabricates the truth of Jesus’ resurrection into a lie. This lie is full of deficiencies. If they were asleep, how could they see the disciples coming and stealing the dead body? It would take quite some time to roll the stone away and remove the body out of the tomb. Still, were all of them sleeping as Roman soldiers? In fact, the guarding soldiers were taking turns every two or three hours. It was unthinkable that the guarding and watching soldiers were asleep in just doing one night job, not one week or a month. Moreover, as we thought of in the previous part, the disciples were in a different world, out of great fear. They were overwhelmed with their own life problems. The story they fabricated does not make any sense even to human reasoning. It is absurd, and totally non-sense even to little children. It's a lie for which bribery was necessary. Yet, surprisingly this fabricated story had been spreading among the Jews for the past over 30 years and at the time of Matthew’s writing this gospel it became the dominant theory widely circulating that the disciples stole the body. Here we see that many people believe what is beneficial and convenient to them without sound reasoning of whether something is true and truthful. Matthew’s point of writing this story is that what the enemies of Jesus intended to hide the truth is a monumental and convincing proof of the reality of the resurrection. This evidence of Jesus’ resurrection was provided not by his friends but by his enemies. What a strong finale to the description of Jesus’ resurrection!

Then in verses 16-20 it says, “Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing 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.” The meeting with the risen Jesus seemed too grandiose. It is most likely that not only the eleven but also many other believers gathered, definitely including the women who delivered the resurrection message to the disciples. Probably more than 500 people assembled, for according to 1 Corinthians 15:6 the risen Jesus appeared to more than 500 brothers at the same time. Verse 17 says, “When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted.” It is unlikely that some of the Eleven doubted him, for Jesus had appeared to them at least two times. Maybe some among the larger group of people doubted without seeing the risen Jesus closely. Then the risen Christ Jesus came to them and spoke to them, and at this, their doubt must have disappeared. Interestingly, doubting the Son of God and worshiping him is written in Matthew 14:31-33. When Peter was sinking in the water after walking on the water for a while with faith, Jesus said, “Why did you doubt?” Jesus climbed into the boat and the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.” Anyway, it is clear that those gathered there were all assured of Jesus’ resurrection. They were not the greatest people in the world. They were not the most capable, or the most brilliant. They were not most experienced, but they were sure of Christ Jesus’ resurrection. The’ risen Jesus gave them the great commission.

We have seen Jesus’ authority in his earthly messianic ministry, his authority over all kinds of diseases, over demonic power, over natural world, calming the storm and waling in the water and even fish moving according to his command, over any human authority, even over death, etc. When Jesus cleared the corrupted temple, the religious leaders asked, “By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority?” Surely his authority was from heaven given by God. Now through his resurrection it was confirmed that all authority had been given to him, the Son of God. This authority of Jesus is also written in Daniel 7:14, “He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.” Paul also wrote in Philippians 2:9-11, “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

With all authority, Jesus gave a Great Commission to the people assembled there – to make disciples of all nation. In Greek, the main verb is “disciple,”, “make disciples.” The three participles are going, baptizing, teaching. We see the importance of discipling. First of all, this is what Jesus did while serving his earthly ministry. He gave his whole life to raising disciples from the outset of his ministry. In this commission of the risen Christ, first of all we ourselves are to be disciples of Jesus learning of him and resembling him in loving God and loving our neighbours. We can say that Christian faith could continue generation after generation through disciples. It is true that we can raise disciples as much as we are made disciples of Jesus. This can be a natural process. Still, the risen Christ has given this command to all Christians. In making disciples, three things are involved: going, baptizing and teaching obedience to the word of God. Going or staying is according to God’s calling. Baptizing is helping God’s flock of sheep to make a public confession of their faith and identity before anyone in the world. Baptism was the outward sign of an inward act of faith in Christ, and it is related to submission. And obedience to the words of Jesus is a key character of disciples of Jesus. Paul said in Romans 1:5, “Through him and for his name’s sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.” His aim and prayer was that all nations might believe and obey him (Ro 16:26).

Many say that discipleship starts from a home. When we raise our children in the direction of making them disciples of Jesus, God will surely bless them through the disciple-making parenting. In our campus mission, it is our reality that even getting and serving one Bible student is not easy. However, when we keep this direction of making disciples among U of T students according to this Great Commission, God will bless our hand of work in the end. Finally, the Lord Jesus wants us to believe his promise, “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” It means “I’m with you all the days until I come again.”

We again thank and praise God for the resurrection of Christ Jesus. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. The truth of Jesus’ resurrection overrides any deception. He is tender and kind and is the very object of our worship and devotion. With faith in this risen Jesus who has all authority and promises to be with us, may we have a clear direction to make disciples of Jesus, one by one, in obedience to his Great Commission.