

Sunday Service 7th June 2020

MP 643 Light to the world

We are thinking today about Jesus' command to his disciples to pass on all that he had taught them about God's love. Imagine holding a ball of wool and, at the beginning of the ball of wool, there is a piece of paper with the words of Mathew 28 verse 19 attached to it. This, the word of God, that has been handed down from the disciples to us. It is now our task to pass this message on. Now, I want you to think you are at church altogether and read the verse and pass along the wool to each other as a commitment to sharing our faith with others. As the wool unwinds and if the wool gets in a tangle, then think, we sometimes unravel on our way but we know that God is with us through the rough times and we need to help others to know that even through bad patches we still have God and each other. We are not alone, but bound together in love. We need to take the ball outside as a sign of spreading the good news.

MP 624 Take my life, and let it be

Now, we might just have noticed that many people do not like taking orders and that some will often do whatever is necessary to avoid obedience.

I found this story from a minister to his congregation when looking for inspiration. "I recall reading of a water shortage a few years ago in a town in Alaska. An order came from the commanding general there that passes and liberty would be cancelled until the water supply was back to normal. All the armed forces complied except a small outpost of Seabees, about 30 in number, under the command of a rough-and-ready warrant officer. Saturday evening came and the Seabees stormed the nearly abandoned city only to be rounded up by the MP's and returned to their base. The chief warrant officer was brought before the Provost Marshall and asked if he had received the general's order. "Yes, sir." "Then why didn't you comply?" he roared. "Well, sir, I didn't think it applied to us." "And why not?" "Because, sir, when my men go to town, they don't drink water."

Fortunately, those men who first heard the Lord's orders did not look for ways to get around them, but did what they were told. There is comfort in that. After all, these disciples were not super-human in their capacity for faithfulness. Just a few days ago, they had seen their master dragged before the court of Pontius Pilate, condemned to death and crucified outside the walls of Jerusalem on a hill. They felt, in their disappointment, that they had been separated from the very person who had led them. To be with him (Jesus) now, even though Jesus had returned from the grave and they were seeing him in the flesh once again, as the reading says, "...but some doubted." We today are a bit like the disciples worried about what is happening in our world and certainly missing church as it was. But we have the comfort of knowing that we will be together again at some point. It has been great to know that many more people have been picking up on services on the television and on the media stations. So we have the comfort of knowing we are in good company. Yet, we still ask questions when the world is dark just like the hill on Calvary. Have you ever had doubts about your relationship to Jesus Christ? I have. Have those doubts bothered you? They have bothered me. Do those doubts at times make you feel guilty? They do me, but as I read these words, "...but some doubted," and realize that the "some" are some of Jesus'

most intimate friends who had some doubts about what was going on. What made them special was that they did not let their doubts keep them from following orders. If we can go along with that, we are doing as we should. Think of the orders those disciples got that day in Galilee. Jesus was obviously the main person. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." It is good to know that if you are about to get some orders to follow that they come from someone who has the power to give them. Jesus certainly made sure the disciples knew that there was no greater power in the entire universe to give orders. This was enough of a reason to ensure the orders are followed to the letter. "Then he says, "Go therefore...". Have you ever been given orders to do something just because you were told to? I suspect that we all, at some time, were told by parents or teachers to do something; and we asked, "Why?" and got the response, "Because I said so, that's why." We followed those orders because we had no choice in the matter – the one who gave them had the power to back them up. But we probably did not carry them out as we might have, had we understood why they were being given. As we grew older, others gave us orders...orders that were not to be questioned. At least Jesus gave his disciples a reason before he told them what they were to do. The first instruction he gave was to go... get up and go. It might only be down the street or it might be halfway round the world, but nothing is accomplished if we just sit tight in our own little bubble. Sad to say, the commitment to go has dropped greatly in recent years. There is far less desire for world mission than there once was. There is less desire for mission down the street than there once was. Evangelism is something that a few preachers do, but not all of us can. Why? Is it because our orders have been changed? Hardly! We have sometimes found it just a bit harder to evangelise. It is a good thing that Christians have a merciful leader. The next thing Jesus said was to "make disciples of all nations." In the King James version of this passage with which many of us grew up, is "Teach all nations." The most important part of this instruction involves helping the world to learn... about Jesus and Christ believes this is an important part of being a Christian. Making learners takes more than one hour a week on Sunday morning. What about this phrase, "all nations?" For modern Christians, we have no problem understanding that; it means missionaries are to be sent around the world. It means something even more striking than that when we consider those men of Galilee who were the first to hear these words. To those men, all Jews, it meant that there were some people whom they would never have considered as likely recipients of the good news of Jesus Christ. Our gospel is not just for people who are just like you and me. The good news Jesus Christ is for all. What is good is that first century disciples followed the orders. They did take the message to all. The message to modern Christians is clear. Yes, send missionaries all around the world, but do not forget the ones right in our own area. Jesus died for them as well as for you and me. The next instruction...baptizing. Did that mean Jesus wanted his disciples to make sure to do all their teaching near some water so these new learners could understand baptism? Did he mean that learning would not be sufficient without this ritual? Not at all. If baptism is rightly understood, it is seen as being brought into Christ's church. It is symbolic of the beginning of a new relationship that finds its fullest expression in the life of the fellowship.

Why would Jesus include this as a part of the orders for his disciples? Simply because all the learning in the world about what God has done for us in Jesus Christ and what God continues to do through the Holy Spirit only really makes an impact on us within community. Without the support of other believers, without someone around to help fan the flame that is within us, we soon die down to nothing more than Christian "embers". How often has it happened that someone has made a profession of faith, become active in the work of the

church, lived a life of positive witness to the power of the gospel and then, for some reason, ceased to give any evidence of their faith at all. It happens...and it happens when people begin to think that they no longer need the church. If you take a coal from a furnace, it will remain hot and glowing for a while, but eventually it will die out. The same thing happens to Christian disciples who are removed from the fellowship of the church. No wonder Jesus gave this instruction to baptize. What about this final instruction, "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you?" There are standards. Being a follower of Christ should make a difference in the way we live. After all, the same bible that says believe also says behave! There are standards that we are called to uphold...not to earn our salvation because that would be impossible. No, we live lives that are pleasing to our heavenly Father in gratitude for his rich grace. Notice something here: the instruction concerning teaching obedience comes after people have been made disciples, after they have made a commitment of faith, after they have become a part of Christ's church. The way Jesus describes it, obedience is a response to something that has already taken place. Christians are expected to maintain certain standards, certain discipline. Christians do it out of love, but they need to be taught what that discipline involves to manage it effectively, and that is why the Lord included it as a part of his orders. Tradition tells us that of those eleven who gathered there on that Galilean hillside, only one ever died a natural death; all the rest were martyred in the course of their following orders. For us in 20th century the sacrifice is rarely that dramatic. It might involve some ridicule or some abuse; it might require the expenditure of time or effort or money...rarely much more than that. But if we realize that of the almost one billion people in the world who call themselves "Christian," two-thirds of them live in nations where Christianity is a persecuted faith. We know that sacrifice is still the order of the day. Fortunately, we have one tremendous piece of assurance about our task. We have a promise from God, "...and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age," The abiding presence of a commander-in-chief who has promised he will never leave us nor forsake us. Because of that, we can follow his marching orders with the full confidence of every bit of support we need and, all the while, realize that we are not alone as we carry those orders out. Amen!

MP 501 O Jesus , I have promised to serve thee to the end.

MP 954 We are marching in the light of God.

Benediction

God has made us, God has shaped us, God has chosen us, God has sent us. May we go now to be makers of God's peace, shapers of God's love, choosers of God's way and senders on the journey. And may God be ever with us, ever creating us, ever moulding us, ever calling us and ever leading us.