

Since finishing work last August, I have attempted to do some of the jobs that I never seemed to have time to do when I was working. Over the years, I have taken literally hundreds of photographs and slides, which are haphazardly stored in packets and drawers. I've made a start by sorting out prints of the family and, in so doing; I came across some photographs of our two children when they were very young. Some of the photographs show them with a small piece of yellow blanket which they used to carry around with them. Amazingly, this small piece of yellow blanket seemed to bring reassurance, security, peace and comfort to the children. When they were upset or afraid, it was there for them. In good times and in bad, but especially in bad, it was a great comfort to them. Nothing could take its place. Just washing the thing could be traumatic. I remember a particular incident when one of the children paced back and forth in front of the clothes dryer waiting for the piece of blanket to finish drying. Wouldn't it be great if there was something equivalent that could bring this kind of peace, comfort and reassurance to us adults?

Actually, for Christian people there is something that can bring reassurance, peace and comfort to our lives. This is especially so as we make the commitment to carry out the instructions that have been given to us by Jesus. I hope that our text for this morning will help illuminate this for you.

Our gospel reading, which Heather has just read to us, is taken from the last chapter of Matthew's Gospel, chapter 28. Earlier in this chapter, Matthew describes how Jesus 'rose' from the dead. Now, Matthew tells the story of how Jesus gathered all of his disciples together once more to speak these words of commissioning to them. But, there is actually much more than a 'commission' in these verses. They address the central issues of our faith and they answer two crucial questions: first, 'Who is Jesus Christ?' and, secondly 'What does He want us to do?' The last verse contains an incredible promise that will sustain and encourage us as long as we live! This passage gives us a 'Great Claim' and a 'Great Comfort' as well as a 'Great Commission.'

Let's start by having a look at the 'Great Claim'. In verse 18 of our reading, Jesus says, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me'. During the time Jesus exercised His ministry on earth, He taught with great authority and there was power in His healing touch, for example the healing of the ten lepers. But, that power and authority was always curtailed in some way. As we know, He submitted Himself to rejection, persecution, humiliation and death. After Jesus' death, there was a widespread feeling that His had been a lost cause. However, in our reading, we are told that Jesus stands, risen from the dead, in front of His disciples. Now everything has changed. Jesus was not simply a great leader who had a powerful ministry for a brief moment in time. Rather, He is the Great Saviour in whose hands lies all authority and power for all time and eternity!

There have been leaders throughout history who have inspired confidence in their followers for example, Gandhi and Nelson Mandela. It must be a wonderful thing to be involved with a charismatic person in persuing a great cause. Mother Theresa, for instance, inspired hundreds and thousands of people to make a difference in the lives of the poor. Her memory will undoubtedly inspire others to continue her work. Mother Theresa's memory will be with her followers. However, there is a huge difference with what takes place in our gospel reading. This is the risen Christ who says He has complete authority in heaven and on earth – Jesus' authority is God-given. He does not simply inspire by a great example, he empowers by great authority—God's authority. An amazing claim! It's a life-changing thing to be involved with this cause!

Based on his Great Claim to absolute authority, Jesus then gives his followers the most magnificent gift. He makes them and us a part of the greatest possible adventure life can offer. In verses 19 and 20, we read, 'Go therefore 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 that I have commanded you'. The commission we have been given calls us to look at our lives and to examine the mission and ministry of our church in light of these words. St Mark's Strategic Action Plan that contains, aims, objectives, activities and a budget must not only relate to our vision statement but also to these few words. 'Go therefore and make disciples.'

Let me be quite clear, I'm not saying that we should all rush out of here today with our bibles and briefcases and hit the roads of Biggin Hill trying to convert the lost. Also, I'm not saying we shouldn't have social gatherings like the Mad Hatter's Tea Party, fellowship events like the Parish Breakfasts or great times together. As individual Christians there is probably awareness that we are on this planet for purposes greater than having a career, paying the bills, loving our families, and fulfilling our roles as citizens. Even more than going to church and worshiping God - important as these are. Jesus tells us to 'make disciples'. This was and is a Christian's primary task. Jesus says, 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations... to the very end of the age'. All nations - We have a world-wide mandate. All time - We have a timeless mandate but we also have a strategic mandate - we start at home - in our own town before we attempt mission and outreach on a wider scale. Our mandate is to share the love of Jesus with those we live with, work with, are friendly with in our neighbourhood, those we know. By showing others around us how we live our lives as Christians, and by sharing with them what Jesus has done in our lives, when we are asked or an opportunity presents itself, we have a chance to bring others to Christ. Perhaps someone you know and love or come into contact with, needs to know the love and care of God. We don't do this alone, Jesus will help us. It's also a challenge to take a careful look at our life together as a church. There may be times in our life together when we do things that resemble a club or a school. But Christ has issued a blueprint that defines the heart of who we are and empowers us to do it. And that is 'The Great Commission.'

So, here at St Mark's we should be looking for ways of reaching out to our community and seeking ways to turn all we do toward the task we have been given. Our Ministry Leadership Team (MLT) and Parochial Church Council (PCC) reflect their deliberations and outcomes in each year's Strategic Action Plan to work towards this goal.

There is no question about the fact that the task we've been given is challenging. How can we go about making followers for Jesus Christ? Notice that Jesus didn't appoint a chair person for an evangelism committee or select two or three who were good at the task. He appointed them all. He appoints all of us. You are appointed and I am appointed to make followers for Jesus. There are times when this is frankly not at the top of my list. At other times it seems so difficult to reach the people I want to reach. But, Jesus says 'and remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age'. For this task we are given 'the Great Comfort'. The power and authority to do what Jesus has commanded are His, not ours. Christ's power, presence, and authority give us the courage and the right to go from place to place sharing the good news of salvation.

All of us need to know that our efforts to honour Jesus by obeying His call to 'make disciples of all nations' is something that we can all do. Do it where we are, with

those whom we meet. Be a witness for Jesus in our lives and when necessary, talk about Him, too.

Jesus wants us to finish what He began. He came to the disciples, taught them, and worked with them. He then died on the cross and rose from the dead. But, before He ascended into heaven, He gave them, and us, the commission to convert the world. He doesn't ask us to do the impossible. When seeking to accomplish God's will, He will bless our efforts because we're seeking to obey Him.

Amen

Trinity Sunday: 19th June 2011

Matthew 28 verses 16-20