

Matthew 28:16-20

In March 2020, as Covid spread across the globe and the world began shutting down, I found myself feeling spiritually vacant and hollow. The craving for connection and community, and the longing to physically be in a sacred space with others seemed to intensify as each week passed.

I attended Holy Week and Easter services online that year at Washington National Cathedral in DC and began - as part of my spiritual practice - to listen to the sermons at the Cathedral on my walks or in the car.

One of the sermons that has stuck with me was given by the Right Rev. Mariann Edgar Budde, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington DC, and my former bishop when I was serving at the National Cathedral School for Girls. It's titled, *Discovering the Gospel of Your Life*.<sup>1</sup>

In it, Bishop Budde asks a series of questions that she says we must explore if we want to live an abundant and meaningful life - questions, she says, that we must answer, questions that:

- that inform and sustain us through life;
- and even have the power to determine the kind of people we will wake up to be tomorrow.

These are some of the questions she shared.

First, as you think about the arc of your life, "where might you put yourself on that arc?"

"Are you at the beginning, in the middle, or coming to the end of your life?"

"Where have you been, and where are you going?"

And "how aware are you - every morning when you wake up - that you don't have a lot of time to waste?"

Then, another series of questions:

- "What do you love most about your life?"
- "What do you love best about being you?"

- "What are the things you love to do that make you lose track of time?"
- Who are the people that make your heart sing?"
- "What things in your life give you a deep sense of purpose - that feeling of satisfaction, that feeling you have when the gifts you have been given are being put to good use?"
- "What do you hope for and dream of for yourself and those you love?"

And, finally, turning to the title of her sermon, she invites the congregation to consider the central word of her sermon title, "Gospel."

Noting that the word gospel - derived from the Olde English word *goodspell* meaning "good story" - and from the Greek, *evangelion*, meaning "Good News" - she poses these final questions:

- "What is your "good story"?"
- "What is the Good News you have to share - the Good News you bring to others simply by being you?"

The Gospel reading for today includes Jesus's final instructions to his disciples. It is known as the Great Commission:

"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" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Matthew tells us that - when the disciples first see Jesus in this final post-resurrection appearance - they worship him but some doubt (Matthew 28:17).

Biblical scholars note that the Greek word here for doubt appears in the New Testament along with the word worship only one other time - in the 14th chapter Matthew - when Peter steps out onto the water and - frightened by the wind - begins to sink.<sup>2</sup>

Peter cries out, "Lord, save me" and Jesus - reaching out his hand and catching him - scolds Peter, saying: "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://edow.org/2021/08/29/discovering-the-gospel-of-your-life/>

<sup>2</sup> Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 3.

Then the other disciples - watching all of this from the safety of the boat - proclaim: "Truly, you are the Son of God."

In chapter 14, it is clear that the disciples are not yet ready to be on their own.

Their faith in Jesus is still flimsy, and it is clear that Jesus had more teaching, preaching and healing, and encouraging and empowering, to do - to prepare them for their greatest mission in life.

Fourteen chapters later, in today's Gospel, we see that the disciples are as ready as they'll ever be.

Sure, some of them doubted - but we all know from experience that navigating any new frontier or path in life - always comes with many emotions - from excitement, anticipation and hope to fear, uncertainty, trepidation, and even doubt.

I can imagine the questions forming in their minds:

- Who am I to baptize and teach?
- What message do I have to share?
- Why would anyone listen to me?

I don't know about you but - when I think about the Great Commission in my own life - doubts, questions, fears and insecurities have a way of creeping in - calling into question my worthiness, and threatening my courage.

On the eve of my ordination to the priesthood, I went to see my Bishop at the time.

"Are you sure you want to ordain me?" I asked my Bishop. "I have so many questions, doubts and insecurities."

His response was compassionate, liberating, empowering, and totally unexpected:

"You are exactly the kind of priest I want to ordain."

He went on to say something about how the life of faith is about asking the hard questions, searching for answers - rarely finding them - and continuing on the journey even when we can only see a few steps ahead of us.

Knowing I didn't have to have it all figured out was a tremendous relief.

And here's the thing I've learned in my nearly 20 years as priest.

When Jesus invites us to join in the Great Commission, he isn't asking us to do anything more than two things:

First, to show up in the world as our most authentic selves and as Bishop Budde says, to share the Good News we each have to bring to others simply by being who God created us to be.

Second, to bear witness to the continued revelation of God's love and grace in our own lives.

First - living as our most authentic selves . . .

Many of you know that I serve as the Chaplain at The Bishop's School, an Episcopal School here in La Jolla for grades 6-12.

Every year, we choose one of our four Episcopal values to frame the year, and to give shape to our thinking, living and praying together in community.

This year, we focused on our core value of integrity, and for our opening chapel, I shared Bishop Budde's questions with the students because I think that somewhere - in the asking and answering of those questions - in the quest for our own "good story" - we discover what it means to live a life of integrity.

From the Latin *integer*, integrity - in its purest sense - means whole or undivided, and it has to do with living a whole and undivided life.

Parker Palmer - in his book, *Let Your Life Speak* - says that "our deepest calling is to grow into our own authentic selfhood, whether or not it conforms to some image of who we ought to be."

He says "we each arrive in this world with gifts and as a gift. We do not show up as raw material waiting to be shaped into whatever image the world might want us to take. We each arrive with our own gifted form, with the shape of our own sacred soul."<sup>3</sup>

The Christian faith, he says, calls this the image of God in which we are created.

In the Episcopal tradition, we speak of the spark of the Divine, and we listen for the still, small voice - the whisper

---

<sup>3</sup> Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening to the Voice of Vocation*.

of God - that reminds us who we really are, who we are meant to become, and to whom we belong.

And yet it's all too easy to forget the gift that we are.

That's why Bishop Budde says it's important "to have people in our lives who can see the things in us - the beauty, the goodness, the uniqueness in us - that we can't see ourselves, or that we tend to minimize."<sup>4</sup>

And, one of the easiest ways Bishop Budde says we can bless the people around us is by "taking the time to point out the goodness we see in them because when we do this we give them a most profound gift - the chance to live more deeply from that good part of who they are."<sup>5</sup>

So, I wonder:

- Who - in your life - reminds you of your own goodness, your worthiness, your gifts?
- And who in your life could use a reminder of their own goodness?

And what about Jesus's second invitation - to bear witness to the Good News of God's love in our own lives?

As Christians, we know that the Good News of Jesus didn't end with these concluding verses of Matthew's Gospel but rather it continues to be written and revealed today.

Jesus is a living text. He is not a thing of the past - a memory, an event, a figure in history, or a few epic stories written on first century papyrus.

Jesus - as promised - is alive today - with us always, even to the end of the ages, and he continues to reveal himself to us in our everyday lives and relationships.

Perhaps Jesus has shown up for you in the grace and forgiveness that has been extended to you when you least deserved it.

Perhaps he has shown up for you in a moment of anxiety or fear or worry, and for no explainable reason you've felt a deep peace - a "knowing" that no matter what happens you will find shelter and rest beneath God's mighty wings of love.

Perhaps Jesus has been present to you in the loving and reassuring words of a friend who celebrates, honors and affirms all of who you are - even those parts of yourself

that you're most ashamed of or that others reject as different or bad.

Perhaps Jesus has been present to you in those moments of joy and celebration, in the love you share with those you are privileged to make this journey of life with.

Jesus is alive - in you, in me, in us. He isn't above us or behind us or beyond us - but within us and among us.

In this season after Pentecost, I pray you will discover anew and know the gift that you are and the gifts that you bring. Amen.

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://edow.org/2021/08/29/discovering-the-gospel-of-your-life/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://edow.org/2021/08/29/discovering-the-gospel-of-your-life/>