

“Investment Strategy”

Matthew 28:16-20

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This morning our attention is focused upon the final words of Matthew’s gospel. Jesus spoke these words to his disciples somewhere on a mountain in Galilee.

If you grew up in the Baptist tradition, you know this passage as the Great Commission. I would not be surprised if many of you could quote these verses from memory.

“All authority in heaven and 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.”

To understand the meaning and significance of this passage, you need to know when these words were spoken. It appears Jesus uttered them just before returning to his Father, bringing his earthly ministry to a close.

What was Jesus’ intent? What did Jesus want his followers to do? He wanted them to continue the work they began with him before his crucifixion and death.

Jesus’ earthly ministry was over, but their ministry was not. In many ways, it was just beginning. It was now their duty to proclaim the gospel, confront evil in the pursuit of justice and peace, speak truth to power, teach others what Jesus had taught them about life and faith, feed the hungry, heal the sick, comfort the grieving, empower the weak, encourage the discouraged, make hope visible and reflect God’s heart and nature in everything they did.

Why did Jesus feel the disciples he called at the outset of his ministry and others who followed along the way could do these things? Why did he have this much confidence in them?

Jesus believed in them. He spent anywhere from one to three years with his disciples giving them deep roots and strong wings so they would be prepared for this challenge.

He asked them questions and allowed them to ask him anything on their minds. He taught them how to arrange their values and priorities, how to handle adversity, how to take risks and manage fear, how to respond to temptations, how to overcome failure and work through disappointment, how to be a good neighbor, how to treat their enemies, how to ask for and grant forgiveness, how to use their resources, how to stay focused and how to persevere when they wanted to quit.

He told them how much God was relying upon them to be faithful, and how important it would be to the people they were called to serve. He let them know how grateful he was for their companionship and the sacrifices they made on his behalf. And then, Jesus left them with this promise.

“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

I am intrigued by what Jesus did not promise the disciples. He did not promise to remove all the difficulties, problems, barriers, detours or resistance they would encounter. He did not even promise them they would be hailed as liberators and appreciated for all their valiant efforts.

Instead, Jesus promised the disciples he would never abandon them as they did him during his arrest, trial and crucifixion. By God’s grace and through the gift of the Holy Spirit, he assured them he would always be with them encouraging and strengthening them for their own journey of faith and hope.

Jesus prepared his disciples for this grand opportunity and strategic task. This was his investment strategy. He gave them the deep roots and strong wings they would need for their

own public ministries after he was gone. It was now time for them to go back into a sinful world to offer hope to those seeking a better life and into a broken world to offer healing to those who were wounded.

Who needs you to do for them what Jesus did for his disciples? Who needs you to invest your time, talents and resources in them like Jesus did the disciples? Who needs you to teach them what you know about relationships and faith so they will be prepared to embrace God's dreams for them and meet life's many challenges?

Who needs you to show them how to arrange their values and priorities, how to handle adversity, how to take risks and manage fear, how to overcome failure, how to respond to temptations, how to be a good neighbor, how to treat their enemies, how to turn strangers into friends, how to ask for and grant forgiveness, how to use their resources, how to stay focused and persevere when they want to quit.

Who needs to know what plans did not work out the way you thought they would and how you handled the disappointment?

Who needs to know what you would do differently if you could recall time?

Who needs to know how you formulated and cultivated your faith?

Who needs to know how your faith has grown and changed down through the years?

Who needs to know who your role models have been, and how they have inspired you to be a better person?

Who needs you to provide a safe place for them to ask questions as they explore the mysteries of life and faith?

Who needs your help to "work out their own salvation," as Paul encouraged the early Christians to do?

Who needs to hear you say that you believe in them as they chart their own course and head in a new direction?

Who needs you to pledge your support as they embrace their dreams and accept their biggest challenges?

Perhaps the greatest gift you and I can give someone, young or old, is to invest our life in theirs and give them the gift of deep roots and strong wings. Evidently, Jesus felt this way and so did Matthew. Both of them used their “authority” to teach, train, encourage and send new disciples into the world. I hope all of us will, too.

What opportunity lies before you this week that God wants you to seize? Is it time for you to begin investing in someone’s life by giving them deep roots and strong wings? Is it time for you to spread your wings and fly?

Ask God to help you answer these questions. I assure you He is eager to guide you.