

**Encounters with Christ**  
**Part 4: The Great Commission**  
*Matthew 28:16-20*

1. Encounter his power.

2. Encounter a command.  
- Acts 1:8; 1 Peter 2:9

3. Encounter a promise.  
- Matthew 28:20; Acts 1:8; 2 Peter 1:5

4. Make the enCOUNTER count.

West Valley Church  
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April Manning

## **Encounters with Christ**

### **Part 4: The Great Commission**

***Matthew 28: 16-20***

Greetings! My name is April, and I'm one of our pastors here at West Valley Church. I do many different things, but generally I have the honor of serving as our Guest Services and Young Adult Pastor on staff. Pastor Mike is out of town on vacation, so today I get the honor of coming before you and continuing to lead us through the sermon series Pastor Mike has been leading us through after Easter – the Encounters with Christ series – journeying with the disciples and looking at the encounters they had with Jesus after the resurrection. Today we'll be looking at one of the last things Jesus said to his disciples before ascending into heaven.

As I was thinking about this topic of last things Jesus said, I started thinking about last things people have said to me before departing. One of the last things Pastor Mike said to me before leaving was a word of encouragement for preaching; but thanks to our handy dandy phones, I've still heard from him since he's been gone. Actually, if you want to know the last thing he said to our pastors, it was, "made a Costco run. Thought about picking these up [dried octopus] but then decided not to. Yeah...good call, Pastor Mike.

Maybe you have something you always say to your loved ones or friends before departing for work in the morning or before taking off on a trip. I always make it a point to say, "I love you," because if something were ever to happen as I was out, I would want them to know the last thing I said was, "I love you." As a mom now, I've learned if you make it a point to say goodbye to your infant child, then that helps them learn you're leaving. This is to help them not meltdown when you leave their sight at other times throughout the day. If they know there's a special goodbye, then they'll know you're going to be away for a while, but if you don't, then they should hopefully learn/understand that you'll be back and haven't left them and thus no breakdown each time you leave their sight. So the theory goes.

When we look at the last encounter Jesus had with his disciples, we see that it's something pretty memorable, and something Christ wants us to remember, especially as it is more of a charge, a command, a sending, and not solely a statement or sentiment, though that is included.

The last words we hear from Jesus to his disciples is recorded in Matthew 28: 16-20. For those Bible quizzers out there or those who are good at remembering verses, you probably have this verse memorized, but I want to encourage you and those of you who know this passage to keep your ears alert and hearts open and receptive to what God has to speak to you through these verses, through the *living* word of God.

Before we turn to that passage and I ask you to stand for the reading of the word, let me first offer this prayer to help us prepare to receive what God has to speak to us today.

*Pray*

Now would you please stand in honor of the reading of the word?

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."  
Matthew 28: 16- 20

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

**In this passage, we see the disciples encounter Christ in 3 ways:**

1. *they encounter his power*
2. *they encounter a command*
3. *they encounter a promise*

***First, we're going to see the disciples...***

### **1. Encounter his power.**

The first thing Christ speaks to the disciples after their arrival to the mountain was, "All authority on heaven and earth has been given to me." It was important for Christ to explain his power, his authority, because in the scripture we see some doubted. Even though the disciples were followers of Jesus, the belief in the resurrection wasn't instantaneous for them. We have to remember that their experience was first-hand, eye-witness experience of Jesus being fully human as well as divine AND being crucified on the cross. They saw him beaten. They saw him tortured. They saw him die. All that the disciples had ever known and experienced was a final death from a crucifixion. Though they had seen Jesus heal and bring people back to life, the reason they were healed was because of Jesus. Now that Jesus was gone, how was Jesus going to be healed? Who would save Jesus? Even though Jesus told the disciples before he died that he would die and three days later be raised to life, I think it was hard for them to comprehend all that he was saying until it actually happened, and I think we can relate to their encounter with him here. Think back to when you first encountered Christ. It may have taken some time for you to process and comprehend everything. Whether you grew up learning about Jesus or not, there comes a point in time when we have to accept all that Jesus did and believe in it. While our heads know and understand all that God has done for us it can be hard to accept that and to truly believe in

that, and it can also be hard to understand how to respond to that – how do we approach Jesus? How do we worship Jesus? These are also viable doubts the disciples and we experience.

I know some Christians today that when they came to understand who God was for the first time, they were like, “I don’t know how to connect, or pray, or worship or start this relationship with God.” It can be too good to fathom how good and awesome our God is, and as a pastor, one of my favorite things I get to do is remind people of just how much God loves them, despite what they have done or been through. So while our heads may know something is true, it can take time for us to process this, as it did some of the disciples, so we can understand that some do doubt and are questioning, “How do we/can we approach this risen Christ?” and, “Can we be sure this is our Jesus?”, because we once wondered the same things too.

But we can be sure, and this is the exciting part. Jesus did rise again, and God raised him from the dead through the power of the Holy Spirit. The disciples didn’t just get to encounter Christ, they got to encounter the fullness of the Trinity – of God three in one – the Father, Son, and Spirit. The disciples got to encounter the power of the interworking of the Trinity and got to encounter Christ’s power, his authority over both heaven and earth, so for them to have doubted, feared, questioned, stood in awe is quite an appropriate response and we can see ourselves in their revelation of Christ and his power.

It was also important for Christ to explain his power, his authority, as he would next give the disciples a command that involved both the heavenly and earthly realms. As an authority figure of heaven, Jesus had the capability to charge the disciples to bring a piece of that to the earth. If we look back to the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, the first thing he does is go around preaching, “Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.” Fast-forward to where we’re at in the passage today, Jesus is preparing to depart from the disciples, commissions them to continue the work he started and invites them to participate in the inbreaking of the kingdom of heaven on earth. And we today, are invited to participate in that too. While we still wait for Christ’s return, we still have work to do. Our work is not finished until Christ says once again, it is finished.

Secondly, we see in this encounter with Christ, the disciples...

## **2. Encounter a command.**

***Christ commissions the disciples to “Go, Make, Baptize, Teach.”***

A few questions pop up. Where are the disciples to go? When are they to go? Why are they to go?

Jesus says the disciples are to go to all nations, not just stay in their little corner of the world, but they are to go to all nations, and the command, “Go,” appears in the present

tense – meaning it’s meant to be a present, continuous action that takes place without an end in sight. This command is also an inclusive charge Jesus commands the disciples. They aren’t to just keep this good news they have experienced and witnessed for themselves or for the nation of Israel. Jesus is commanding the disciples to take the gospel message concerning salvation, redemption, and restoration to both Jews and Gentiles. To every corner of the world. It is Jesus’ mission for everyone to experience and accept his lordship and authority, and it is through the disciples, these doubtful, fearful, confused people that that is to happen.

In the book of Acts, we also see a similar reference to Jesus’s commission recorded in chapter one verse 8. There we see Jesus says to the disciples...

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.  
Acts 1:8

Here Jesus is a bit more specific in scope mentioning that the disciples are to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, but then widens it at the end by saying, “to the ends of the earth.” Again, we see this language of inclusivity. Where the disciples are to go are not places that are comfortable and known to these disciples. The places Jesus calls these people to go are to places that are pagan cities, cities of outsiders, which furthers Jesus’ mission to seek and save the lost. Jesus came to befriend the sinners, to eat with tax collectors, to heal the sick, to tend to the poor, lonely and lost, and we find these people in every corner of the earth – to the ends of the earth.

Are there places you’d rather not go? Are there people you’d rather not befriend or hang around? We’re called not to be comfortable. We’re called to be disciples, people who bring light and life to dark corners of the world, and as we see with the disciples, all wrapped up into that is fear, doubt, wonder, awe, confusion, displacement. Being a disciple is hard. But good news is coming.

Appearing next after the command to go, we find the command to make. Make what? Make disciples. Coming off of what we’ve witnessed and read about the disciples, it’s funny that Jesus commands these fearful, doubtful, confused, weak disciples to make more of them. But it’s not that the disciples are going to be making more fearful, doubtful, confused, and weak people, they are to be making people who are followers of Jesus, pointing others to Jesus, and showing them what it looks like to live a life under the rule and reign of Christ so that they too can join this community of God’s holy people seeking to redeem and restore creation.

It’s an encouragement to us that Jesus uses these men to continue his ministry. Jesus uses all sorts of people to draw us to himself, and he is able if we allow him to work in us and through us through his Holy Spirit. I think that’s what makes Jesus so appealing and welcoming. Jesus isn’t afraid to work in those of us who are broken, or lost, or weak, but he does want to work in us to transform us more and more into his likeness and image, and one of the ways that he continues to work in us and transform us is through baptism.

The emphasis of Jesus' command to baptize is on who the new disciples are being baptized into and the importance of being baptized. The act of baptism was and is a way of identifying ourselves with Christ and signifying that we have died to our old self as we go under the water, and we rise to new life with Christ as we come out of the water. But more than that, this baptismal participation is another encounter with the Trinity and an inclusion into the kingdom of God.

The command to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Spirit reminds us of the interworking of the Trinity within the story of redemption and signifies the interworking of the Trinity in the event of baptism itself. In the Greco-Roman world, the phrase, "in the name of" appeared in legal documents to identify the owner or possessor of what was named.<sup>1</sup> So when we are baptized into the name of the Father, Son and Spirit, we essentially are taking on a new name and identity – one that is of the Father, Son and Spirit, and we are brought into this covenantal relationship with the Trinity.

If you haven't been baptized and are interested in either learning more or being baptized, we will be hosting a Baptism Class on June 5<sup>th</sup> during the 9am class hour in the Conference Room, and we'll be having a Baptism Service the next Sunday on June 12<sup>th</sup>. You can either let us know by signing up on our website ([westvalleychurch.com](http://westvalleychurch.com)) or filling out a connect card and marking baptism as an interest. But if you haven't been baptized, let me use Jesus' words and remind you that this is what we're called to do.

For us who have been baptized, what does this information mean for us? What did it mean for the disciples? It means that as we go and make disciples, we are to lead them to the next step of being baptized. We are to lead them to being included into the kingdom of God through baptism where they can also encounter the fullness and power of the Trinity at work through this very symbolic and transformational event.

Finally, the last part of the command is that we are to teach. This includes all the teachings of Christ (what's found in the book of Matthew + the other gospels), and teaching them to obey everything Christ commanded the disciples – to go, make disciples, to baptize and teach. This infers also that baptism comes before even making disciples and assumes that baptism is an entry-point for being a disciple, as it would be contrary to teach others to be baptized when one hasn't even been baptized. This again communicates to us the importance and role that baptism has in the life of a disciple.

These teachings are also small encounters that we can have with Christ each and every day. We're very blessed and fortunate to have the word of God written down for us and available to us in so many ways – on our phones, in hand, and translated in different languages. It's cool to see how Jesus' command was so inclusive and to see how that inclusivity has been played out even to this day through all the different avenues we have of encountering Christ and the gospel. We have it so readily available and literally at our

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<sup>1</sup> *NBBC, Matthew, 2019.*

fingertips, but are we listening? Are we living by it? Are we looking to encounter Christ each day?

We've been called to go, make, baptize, and teach. What is getting in the way of you being able to do this?

Peter, an apostle and disciple of Christ who received this commission from Jesus, reminds us in his letter to that we are...

*"A royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." 1 Peter 2: 9*

We all are called, and we all are sent to go forth and do as Christ commanded. And we are to teach and declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness and into his wonderful light.

*And we can do what Jesus commanded because Jesus gives us a promise. In the very last encounter with Jesus, the disciples...*

### **3. Encounter a promise.**

Jesus says to his disciples...

*"And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age." Matthew 28: 20*

*This is the good news I talked about earlier. Remember I said being a disciple is hard but good news is to come. This is the good news I was talking about.*

Being a disciple IS hard, but Christ has promised that he is to be with us always to the very end of the age, and he does that through the Holy Spirit.

*In Acts 1:8, Jesus says:*

*"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."  
Acts 1:8*

What comforting words – when the Holy Spirit comes on you. At this point of our sermon series, we're not to the point of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit comes on the disciples, but for us today, as we live centuries past, we can experience Jesus with us through the Holy Spirit, and that makes this promise Jesus gives at the end of his commission even more powerful as we today can speak into this age-old promise given almost two thousand years ago.

And what's even greater is that we can experience and encounter Christ and his promise today – through each other. I like how Peter conveys this in 1 Peter 2:5. He says:

“You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house [temple] to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”  
1 Peter 2:5

The term spiritual house, or temple, is referring to us being a spiritual house/temple where the spirit resides, and us collectively making up a holy priesthood, but I love that he notes we are *being built* into a spiritual house/temple, noting that this journey we are on is a process.

Brick by brick we are being built and becoming who God has created us to be. And it starts with us first hearing the message from those who have gone before us, preaching the good news so we may accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, and then choosing to live under his commands, going and making disciples, being baptized and teaching others to do and live likewise. As we continue to build this spiritual temple, we become stronger, not weaker. We become faithful and less doubtful. We become empowered and less weary. And although we'll most likely experience a crack or a chip here or there, the foundation will be the same, as we will have been built on a strong and firm foundation of Christ who has all authority on heaven and earth. And as we are being built, the whole community and the kingdom of God is being built into something beautiful and magnificent and strong and mighty. And through this community, through one another, Christ is present and with us.

As the disciples encountered Christ and made it count, evident in the way that is the year 2022 and we're still in the process of making disciples who make disciples, baptizing people and teaching all that Jesus commanded, may we encounter Christ and...

#### **4. Make the enCOUNTER count.**

Whether we've had an encounter with Christ through the gift of Christ's prevenient grace, the grace that goes before us, stirring in us, prompting us, leading us to Christ, or whether we've had an encounter through others, through picking up a Bible and reading it, through church or sermons, Bible studies and classes, groups, and community events, may we do something with our encounter with the risen Christ.

We're all called, commissioned, and sent to do what Jesus has commanded the disciples to do. To go, make, baptize, and teach. And what that looks like for each and every one of us is different, but the same. We all have the same mission and purpose, but how we go about it will differ. I stand before you as someone who has been called by God to make this my life's vocation, and last Sunday marked 10 years since I received my call to ministry; ironically, it was the same date and holiday – May 8, 2012 – Mother's Day, but essentially it was also the day I decided I was all in for doing as Jesus commanded – to go and teach and preach, and



let me tell you, it was scary. I relate wholeheartedly to what the disciples experienced. Fear, faith, hope, doubt.

But I always heard God saying, yes, I am with you always to the end of the age, always with you and never forsaking you.

Your encounter with Jesus and his commission probably doesn't look or sound like mine, and that's okay, that's good, because we need people in all corners of the world being sent, making disciples, leading to baptism, and teaching. We're all called to do and be used in different things. While we have different skills and giftings, we all have the same purpose and mission that God is using you or wants to use you in to fulfill his mission through your work, through your hobby, through your family, through your friends. So I encourage you, I charge you, to make the encounter count and to know that through Christ, you are empowered to go out and do what Jesus has commanded.

Would you pray with me?

The worship team is going to come now and help us respond to this message we've heard this morning. As they lead us, I encourage you to commit the words of the song to the Lord. To make this song an affirmation of what you have heard this morning. To tell God that you are ready to receive the command, to go and do what has been commanded of us and to continue the work and ministry and mission of the Lord.

Jesus says, "All authority on heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciple 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 end of the age." May we go from this place, sent with Jesus's command and authority to go, and do. Go in peace.