

Matthew 28:16-20

¹⁶Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Sing into our ears, O Spirit, the holy word of life. Tell us who we are and to whom we belong, so that we may live with gratitude for all that you have done. Speak to us, O Spirit of life. Amen.

The mention of 11 disciples at the beginning of our passage today is acknowledgement of a missing disciple; indeed, one disciple, Judas, betrayed Jesus. This also might remind us that **all** the disciples abandoned Jesus in his hour of need. And although Peter followed Jesus to the high priest’s house that fateful night – albeit at a distance – there he publically denied that he ever knew Jesus – 3 times – before also running away.

This is a very human story; we might even say a disturbingly human story about fallible human beings. And because the disciples were hiding for fear, it was the women who first saw the risen Lord, and who passed on Jesus’ instructions to them. The human challenge and struggle to be faithful is no small thing, and yet it is a universal human experience.

This is surely us. We are not perfect; fear gets in our way; we fall short; we make mistakes; we forget; we do things that just don’t make sense sometimes; and that’s the reality of our humanity. It should not be too much of a surprise, then, when we read: *When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.*

Greek scholar, D. Mark Davis, translates that same verse this way: *“and having seen him they worshiped him, yet they doubted.”* He gives kudos to the New American Bible which renders the verse: *“When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted.”* Davis emphatically comments: **“Worship and doubt** are coexistent in this verse.”

Personally, I believe this is a better translation, because Matthew has detailed the fallible nature of Jesus’ disciples all through the Gospel, so why should doubt in this particular case suddenly pertain to only *some of them*? Once more, worship and doubt are not mutually exclusive! Is not worship an expression of our faith? And where is the need for faith if there is no doubt?

For me, doubt is an integral element of my journey into ever deepening faith. Doubt challenges my faith, thus I can say doubt is the *leaven* of my faith. When I choose to walk by faith I am empowered to move forward even when I am not sure where the Spirit is leading me. I trust, by faith, that God is in the lead, and God only desires the best for me. Do I have my doubts? Of course I do; I’m only human! But when I choose faith over doubt I draw closer to God!

That’s why I think doubt gets a bad rap. In our culture doubt carries a negative connotation much of the time. Admitting to our doubt is akin to admitting that we are weak, or wishy-washy, or just not with it. Heaven forbid that we should have to admit we don’t know something!

And isn’t it true that we like to be sure of things? When I was in high school I got into a great argument with a friend over the model year of a car we saw on the way to school. I couldn’t confess my doubt, so I clung to my position for dear life.

I was wrong! In hind sight I realize that it would have been much, much better for our friendship if I could have said, “I think that car’s a ’65, but it could be a ’66; I’m not sure.” That kind of honesty could have opened our conversation about the car in question, and I would, **no doubt**, have learned something (pun intended).

So it is my experience that doubt is the leaven of faith. For example, my faith has grown because I have taken opportunities to serve within the church *even though* I had doubts about my ability. And doubt was justified; there were plenty of rough spots, but those were, and continue to be, rich learning experiences; I would do it all over again.

So here's where I believe the rubber hits the road: How will our children learn faith? Or how will our children learn how to walk their faith? I think you'll agree that children learn by example. "Do as I say," has to be backed up by our lived example, otherwise we might as well be talking to the wind.

Also, children need to see that we have doubts, and that we are not always sure about what choices to make, or what actions to take. But when they see us move forward in faith, in spite of the presence of doubt, they will see what faith in action looks like, and thus have a model to emulate. They will also – sooner or later – appreciate and learn from our honesty.

One more thing: Matthew uses the verbal form of "disciple." Thus we are charged with the task of *discipling* as we go. Jesus calls us to be about the work of *discipling*. What this suggests to me is that we are not called to go out and deliver rhetorical arguments in an attempt to win disciples for Christ. *Verbal* persuasion is not what I see being required here.

Discipling suggests to me that we are called to *live* the life of a disciple, trusting that our example will be attractive and inspire others to be at least curious. And let's remember that living the Gospel faithfully means trusting in God to be working through us to guide us and bring our labors to fruition. It's a partnership!

Perhaps we all learn best by example; both young and old. And doesn't it make sense that the God of the living would be manifest to the world through us? So *discipling* is a sleeves-rolled-up kind of thing, and it is exactly what St. Frances suggested: "Preach the Gospel at all times; but only as a last resort use words."

For this is true: our children hear much better with their eyes, than with their ears. Amen.