



## **“Always?”**

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### **Scripture (NRSV):**

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

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

### **Sermon:**

What is it that Jesus has taught? What is it that he has commanded? Will he really be with them always?

Will he be with Stephen when he is stoned to death?

Will he be with Peter when he is crucified, upside down?

When bad, really really bad things happen, then we often wonder, “Where is God in this?”

Where is the miracle of deliverance? Where is the miracle of healing? Where is the justice when rampant injustice abounds?

Where is God when the wicked prosper, and the righteous are tortured and killed?

It's never been an easy question, though it has been asked, and shouted and wept down through the endless ages.

And oftentimes, the answers are variations of "don't ask that question."

It is a theological form of "shut up, now".

This non-answer is one of the reasons people give up on faith, and give up on God.

Let's not do that!

We can, like the psalmist, like the disciples of the risen Christ, look around and realize, God is not absent.

There is no time, no century, no single moment when God has not been present. God keeps everything and everyone.

God is both Creator, and Sustainer. The breath that blew into the lungs of the first human, in the creation story in Genesis, that breath is blowing in each of us, and in all creation.

I believe, all things exist, because God wills it so. And that will, that design of Creator of creation, sustains all.

So, when the risen Christ says to the disciples, "I am with you always, to the end of the age" we have the reassurance of the Risen Lord, Son of the Creator of all creation, that God is with us.

And we have a vocation, too. We are called to be disciples of the Lord of Creation.

One definition I found for disciple is "convinced adherent".

We are convinced that the message of Jesus, our Messiah, our Christ, is worthy of our attention and our action.

We are followers of Jesus, who healed and comforted, feasted and celebrated, and restored right relationships of generous community; Jesus, who broke down walls of separation and divisions of worthiness/unworthiness and power/powerless, pure/impure, accepted/rejected.

We are convinced adherents of Jesus, who showed us, through his life, teaching, death and resurrection...something crucial, something irreducible and true about the Lord of all Creation...

That God is present always. That God loves God's creation, at all times.

The ultimate design of God our Creator, Jesus told us, is not suffering or subservience, but loving relationship, communion and joy.

God loves us and asks us to be "devoted adherents" to the vision of a world of peace, joy, justice and community restored...the witness of Jesus, and our calling as his disciples!

For us, that means Black Lives Matter. And refugee lives matter, and undocumented residents' lives matter. Our homeless neighbors matter. Police lives matter. The lives of our enemies' matter: white supremacist lives matter. This president's life matters.

This is what it means to follow Jesus, our Christ, when he says he is with us always. Always pushing us deeper into the work of restoring the creation, healing the people, connecting to one another as children of God...even the most broken of the children.

Yes, we have to stand up to every form of oppression, demand justice, strive for peace, reform the corrupted, rebuild the broken.

But we cannot do it with hate in our hearts.

We will not succeed if we are cruel and cold.

Jesus is with us always, and with us right now in this intense time in our nation, he reminds us again and again; "not that way my dears, not that way"...when we want to "burn it all down". When we want to "lock em up and throw away the key", when we wish "they would all just die".

The risen Christ says, I am with you always.

So we have to try, daily, again and again, to find the courage to be loving as he was loving, healing and generous as he was healing and generous, forgiving and merciful, compassionate and just...as he has been to us, again and again.

We are not alone.

Never alone, in the hard work of following the risen Christ. Let us show forth Christ to everyone, “all nations”, all peoples, and restore God’s world to beauty, to community, to justice and to peace.

And in the face of another protester, or the face of a cop...in a quiet moment of meditation for the happiness of all beings, or the moment you are captured by the sweet sound of a bird song...we know...

God is here, with us, always.