

WPC
Rev. Ken Sunoo
June 19, 2011 – Trinity Sunday/Father’s Day

Impacting the World
Psalm 8; Matthew 28:16-20

Show Jill Costello video:
(Wave and Wake: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hr_cFkC4vUM)

We’re in the midst of the summer movie season, which means: get ready for more sequels! Movie sequels have been the hot thing in Hollywood for awhile: Star Wars was followed by the Empire Strikes Back; Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl followed by Dead Man’s Chest; Raiders of the Lost Ark followed by Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom. This summer’s sequels include Pirates of the Caribbean, Transformers, and, of course, Harry Potter. Studios like sequels because audiences are already familiar with the characters and stories, and it’s often a surefire way to make money. But nowadays, movie prequels are all the rage: Star Wars Episodes I, II, & III; Batman Begins; X-Men First Class; the James Bond flick Casino Royale.

Prequels show us how things came to be. How did Anakin Skywalker become Darth Vader? Why does James Bond like his martini “shaken, not stirred?” Why does Batman wear a cape? When we watch prequels, we

know the end before we know the beginning. Fred Craddock believes that's the way the Bible is. We know the end before the beginning. "The resurrection shines back through every story, including the story of Jesus' birth. The light of the resurrection is on the manger."

You and I know the sequel to the Bible. You're sitting in one right now. This beautiful church is just one of many churches everywhere: grand cathedrals in Europe that take your breath away, as well as beautiful brick and stone and wood buildings in every town and city. "Everywhere in the world, somebody is reading the Bible and worshiping God and learning about Jesus. That's the sequel. But what's the prequel? Our text is the prequel. This is the way it started. The risen Christ on an unnamed mountain, an unlocated mountain in the north of Israel in Galilee, met with the eleven disciples."

It's significant that Jesus meets the disciples on a mountaintop. Mountains in the Gospel of Matthew have theological significance. The mountaintop brings to mind the temptation with Satan's offer of "all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor" (4:8), the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount (5:1), Jesus' retreat for prayer (14:23), his healing of the crowds and the Feeding of the Four Thousand (15:29), and his transfiguration (17:1).

When the disciples see Jesus, they worship him, but some doubted. This Greek word for doubt occurs only one other time in the New Testament, in Matthew 14:31, where it again appears alongside worship. There Peter, after having stepped out in faith to walk on the water with Jesus, becomes frightened by the wind and begins to sink. Jesus catches him and says, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” Jesus knows there’s a mixture of faith and doubt in most believers, so Peter’s doubt doesn’t remove him from his position as the rock on which the church is built. When Peter’s saved, the disciples worship Jesus. Matthew acknowledges there’s room for doubt alongside worship.

Tom Long believes “the disciples are the church in microcosm, worshiping and doubting, doubting and worshiping. ‘I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth,’ but some days we believe more than others.”

In contrast to the tentativeness of the disciples, the Great Commission that Jesus gives in v. 18-20 is solid as a rock, “with the fourfold repetition of the word “all” (pas) underscoring the complete fulfillment of God’s plans for the crucified, resurrected Messiah: all authority, all nations, all that Jesus has commanded, all the days (translated “always”).”

Long notes that this scene is one of near-comic irony. Jesus says, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me,” but nothing in the surroundings seems to support his claim. If Jesus had been speaking to a vast multitude of people, with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir humming the “Hallelujah Chorus” in the background, perhaps it would seem more plausible.

“However, Jesus is on an unnamed mountain in backwater Galilee with a congregation of eleven, down from twelve the week before, and even some of them are doubtful and not so sure why they have come to worship this day...Telling this little band of confused and disoriented disciples that they were to herd all the peoples of the earth toward Mount Zion in the name of Jesus would be like standing in front of most congregations today – many of them small and all of them of mixed motives and uncertain convictions – and telling them, ‘Go into all the world and cure cancer, clean up the environment, evangelize the unbelieving, and, while you are at it, establish world peace.’”

Impossible? Ridiculous? That’s the point. The very fact that the task is utterly impossible throws the disciples completely onto the mercy and strength of God. But in the presence of the resurrected Christ, the Jesus they knew who had died and who had risen from the dead, they were reminded

that with God all things are indeed possible. Indeed, there was only one word that could have prevented them from collapsing in laughter or running away in fear, only one word that sent them out to a hostile world carrying only the gospel, and that was the word Jesus spoke: “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

We’re to go out into the world and make disciples. Discipleship is the hard work of learning to follow Jesus. As his disciples, we’re to make an impact on the world. That’s why I shared with you the video of Jill Costello. I don’t know if Jill was a Christian, but I’m inspired by her life. Her story shows how a single person can impact the world, even someone who is attacked and weakened by cancer. Everyone who came into contact with Jill was impacted by her courage and indomitable spirit. One line from the video really touched me: “Lives end, but they also linger.” Jill Costello’s life lingers. She showed all of us that she didn’t need ideal conditions to make an impression on the people around her. Likewise, our faith works in less than ideal conditions. The question is – will our lives linger as well?

They will if we take our discipleship seriously. If we continue to grow in our faith day to day, then we can’t help but impact the world around us. In the area of discipleship, there’s an interesting article on the Mormons in this week’s issue of Newsweek. There are major differences between the

Mormon faith and our faith, but there is one element that we share: the article makes the point that the distinctiveness of the Mormons is actually the secret of their success. Similarly, our faith makes us distinct from the world. Our faith means we have different values, different priorities in our lives. And when we're on track with our own discipleship, then we're able to obey Jesus' command to go and make disciples of all nations.

The command to make disciples consists of two activities: baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything Jesus has commanded us.

The baptismal formula points back to the baptism of Jesus himself (in 3:13-17). There, the Spirit descended like a dove on Jesus, and God said, "This is my Son, the Beloved." Jesus tells his followers to reenact his story in the baptism of new disciples.

As I've noted before, the Great Commission also asks us to teach the nations "to obey everything that I have commanded you" – the task is staggering, but not impossible when we hang on to Jesus' words: "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

"As the church goes out with fear and joy, faith and doubt, devotion and dread to do the work of Christ, it is not promised success at every turn, a

glad welcome in every heart, or even freedom from persecution and suffering. What the church is promised is that God in Christ will not abandon us but is present in the midst of the faithful – loving, encouraging, guiding, and giving hope.”