



# Auburn Presbyterian Church

*Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to every individual*

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## **“Go! Meet God! Get to Work!” Matthew 28:1-10, 16-20**

When we read the Bible, it’s an amazing ride in some parts. We read accounts of dramatic change, of miracles, or people doing heroic things. In the New Testament Gospels and Acts, for example, there are wonders on almost every page. The early years of the young followers of Jesus were amazing!

But we don’t see such amazing things much today in our churches, do we? To tell the truth, we don’t really expect amazing things—miracles, changed lives, explosive growth—these days, do we? Why do you suppose that is?

Of course, we could point to the introduction of the Scientific Method and the age called “The Enlightenment” as responsible for pushing miracles off the scene. Many of us have been socialized in churches that did not expect much, and so we don’t, either. No one reported on miracles, on God showing up.

*But on the other hand. . .* people in this church DO report miracles. We have some in every Second-Sunday Healing Service we do. For example, here are cards from the “God In My Life Banner” at the back of the hall. These are in addition to the reports of healing that people have mailed back to the church office.

### **Here’s one card . . .**

Now, not every person experiences God showing up every day. Some people receive healing ministry, and they can’t tell (even after a while) that there has been any change. So, miracles happen today, but not all the time. This is a problem for the scientifically-minded. We want God regularized, predictable, dependable.

But I want to suggest there is a more fundamental reason we don’t see miracles today. People today—and this includes a lot of church-going folks—believe in God but don’t obey God. Let that sink in for a moment.

I want to begin at the end—with the last chapter of Matthew’s gospel, chapter 28. The angel in Matthew’s account first says, “Come” and “See”, then “Go and “Tell”. Jesus himself appears to these gals, and basically repeats the message, perhaps so they can really get it that this truly is about him. . . . . The first part of the chapter is a resurrection appearance and a command from Jesus. The last part of the chapter contains Jesus’ last words to those who followed him, betrayed him, doubted him, but in the end, had obeyed. Listen for God’s Word TO US TODAY, as I read these words aloud. *[text]*

The command the angel of God gave was to the women who had come to the tomb to add the oils and spices people in those days applied to the bodies of the dead. “Go, tell the guys to meet Jesus up in Galilee.” Two verbs—“Go”, and “tell”.

What would have happened if they women had failed to obey Jesus? After all, they could have been so fascinated with him there—alive after his torture and death—that they could have forgotten anything he said. Like Peter on the Transfiguration Mountain, they could have built a shrine, to memorialize the moment. But filled with fear and joy, they told “the guys” what the angel, and then Jesus, had said.

And so there *was* a glad reunion up in Galilee, up north, where the ministry had begun three long years before. It must have seemed like an eternity. It’s interesting to me that Jesus wanted to gather up there, and not in “the Holy City”. Did you ever wonder about that? Was he demonstrating the extraordinary ordinariness of our faithfully following our Lord, doing it on our home turf, like these men soon would do?

Once again, this is command language. Look at the verbs: “Go .” “Make disciples.” “Baptize.” “Teach people to obey my commands.” Four action verbs.

Now, once his guys got the word from the women witnesses back in Jerusalem, what if they had not obeyed? It’s easily 100 miles from Jerusalem to Capernaum. It’s not like all of them were excited about this. The text in verse 17 says plainly—even here looking at the Risen Lord back on their home turf—that “some doubted”. That astounds me. You would think they might have had doubts based solely on the women’s reports, not here with Jesus speaking to them, alive after three days in the grave. What if those doubts had prevented some or all of them from making the 100-plus-mile trip up to Galilee? You see, they may have doubted, but they obeyed, anyway.

And there’s one more point to make—the last verb, the “being” verb. Jesus said, “I am with you always.” Obeying Jesus is not just carrying out what he tells us to do—it’s about meeting with Jesus. John’s gospel uses words like, “remaining” or “dwelling together”. So it’s with Jesus that we do what Jesus said. Often I will end my prayers, as I get ready to start my day, with these words: “In Jesus, for Jesus, with Jesus.” This helps me remember where the power comes from, and how I depend upon Jesus’ “with-ness” if I am going to do what Jesus tells me to do.

If church people knew Jesus—experienced him in their lives—they would still have the obstacle of obeying him when they don’t see him. Prayer is what keeps us connected to Jesus. We listen to his Word in Scripture, to the messages the Holy Spirit gives us through emotions, memory, Christian conversation with other saints, intuition, imagination—all those channels God has given us. Then we still have the choice—will we obey?

Now, for almost all my life, I have disliked that word, “obey”. I don’t know your experience with that word, but mine has not been positive.

Every parent has the responsibility of raising a child, and children arrive are pretty blank slates, though we are finding out more about the “hard-wiring” of humans in recent years. Parents have to teach, have to install boundaries of what’s “safe” and what’s “dangerous”. We care about our kids; we want them to thrive. We’ve learned by the time we’re parents a lot of

what it takes to survive and succeed. We need to pass that on to our kids, and we want to see our children adopt these ways of life.

How do we get them to follow? Ah, there's the challenge. When there is danger at hand, like the threat of being hit by a car if a child runs into the street, the parents added fear at the risk involved usually makes us revert to the way we were instructed in such things—with a swat, stern words, or even “the board of education”. There's a move in the California Legislature to ban spanking children. But without teaching parents equally-effective ways of making a lasting impression on a child for lessons that have such fearsome consequences, our representatives in Sacramento must become parenting instructors and show us equally-effective ways to raise kids, or they set us up for child neglect and endangerment. Until I see otherwise, I'll stick with spanking for some lessons in basic safety, for children don't understand consequences they can't foresee.

But, there's a down side to punishment that is not clearly tied to consequences, as in our “street-kid” example. The word “obey” comes to be associated with arbitrary authority that does not seem to have our best interests at heart (in the short run, at least, and maybe in the long run, too). So with “obedience” we have the response of “resentment”. This is what I discovered about my response to “obey”. In the armed services, in conflict, obedience is often the difference between life and death. But not many of us choose to make a career of military life. And as we see with our returning veterans, the transition to civilian life is difficult for so many reasons. Different responses to “obedience” is one of those difficulties, it seems to me.

Obedience is about someone else's ‘power’ and ‘authority’. Most of us resent obligatory service. We'll put up with it for a while, but not for long, unless there's some clear benefit.

Is that the way you feel about “obeying”, too? Then no wonder we apply that response to the call of Jesus to “obey”. Jesus said, “My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice.” (NIV Luke 8:21) And more pointedly, he said, “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.” (Luke 6:46-49, NIV)

What's the difference between obeying Jesus and obeying other authorities? Obeying Jesus is voluntary. But even more importantly, we have become convinced that Jesus DOES have our best interests at heart, and that he knows things about life we do not know. In his role as Prophet, he speaks for our Heavenly Father. Following Jesus is powered by LOVE, and LOVE is powered by the experience of being loved. Being loved is powered by the experience of being deeply attended to.

That's why I talk so much about “prayer”, and “experiencing God”. Without that, obedience is obligation, with resentment always lurking just around the corner. With experiencing God's love, we respond with love, and imitation. We WANT to be like Jesus. We WANT to love as Jesus loved and God loves us (in ways we experience by the Holy Spirit). We WANT Jesus to be Lord—which means, “absolute ruler of our lives”, or “supreme commander”.

Yes, some Christians obey for other reasons, and God uses that obedience. But only through the experience of God's love does obedience last, and love grows. Even the doubting disciples made the trip up to Galilee on the chance they would meet with Jesus. Seeing him alive after his terrible death was more than they could take in—they still doubted. But they obeyed, because they knew from their own experience that Jesus loved them, that Jesus knew important things about life they did not know, that following him gave them a purpose and power they could not obtain or employ on their own, for the purposes of making a difference in the lives of others, as God would do.

So, how do you hear Jesus' commands to "Go", "make disciples", "baptize", "teach to obey"? Do you draw back? Do you not hear what Master Jesus says? Do you make excuses? Are you afraid?

Do you not love him, because you have not experienced his love?

Until you do "know" God through experience, these commands are not for you. Skip them. You wouldn't have the power to do these things, anyway.

Instead, seek him. Put aside other things, and ask, seek, knock. God loves to answer THOSE prayers!

Robert Farrar Capon, in his book, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, wrote: "And faith is something that, throughout this book, I shall resolutely refuse to let mean anything other than trusting Jesus. It is simply saying yes to Him rather than no. It is, at its root, a mere 'uh-huh' to Him personally. It does not necessarily involve any particular theological structure or formulation; it does not entail any particular degree of emotional fervor; and above all, it does not depend on any specific repertoire of good works -- physical, mental, or moral. It's just, 'Yes, Jesus,' till we die -- just letting the power of his resurrection do . . . what it has already done in His. (Zondervan, 1985, p. 29)

A part of the act of baptism in the Church of India is for the candidate to place his own hand on his head and say, "Woe is me if I [do not] preach the gospel." This is part of the baptismal service of new members, not the ordination of ministers! (Paul Hovey, *Inspiring Quotations Contemporary and Classical*, ed. Albert M. Wells, Jr. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988.) In India, of course, it's no easy thing to be a Christian. For people like that, they know the truth of Paul's confession in Second Corinthians 5:14, "The love of Christ compels us."

How about you?

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California on April 20, 2008, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]