

Scripture: Matthew 28:16-20

The Great Commission

16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 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, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Sermon: What Would Jesus Say Now that He is still Lord, but Circumstances Change.

I'm a list person. I always have been. When I was younger I remember making lists where I ranked my favorite stuffed toys and records, I had in my collection.

But then life circumstances changed and so did my lists to which boys did I have a crush on, which homework assignment I needed to do first, to what career did I want to pursue.

And then life circumstances changed again, and my list became what is my true calling, how do I see God leading me, what gifts has God given me to be in ministry.

My current life circumstances have led to lists of: what books I want to read, what dinners I am going to make, and what is my next sermon series?

As I was working on that latest list of sermon ideas, I realized the Lent/Easter list was complete, but not the Eastertide season. So, while we looked at some Defining Moments of our Faith during Lent to the first Sunday of Easter studying Thomas, the question is what is next? And my list took me to this book, *NT Wright's Simple Jesus*, that led me to the idea of "**What Would Jesus Say Now...**".

Many of you are familiar with the question, What Would Jesus Do, which comes from Charles Sheldon's **1896 book, In His Steps, that was subtitled "What Would Jesus Do?"**.

Sheldon's novel grew out of a series of sermons he delivered in his Congregationalist church in Topeka, Kansas, when he **was trying to shape his congregation to a commitment to Christian discipleship.**

The challenge given was to consider what was going on in their daily lives and then ask themselves, "What Would Jesus Do", with **Jesus being a moral example.**

In Sheldon's words, **"This has the effect of making one embrace Christianity more seriously and to focus on what we see as its core — the life of Christ."**

Following along those lines, in this series we will consider what would Jesus *say* rather than do about some of the things we find ourselves wrestling with. I chose to say because I believe some of the words Jesus offers in Scripture will inspire us and the language we should be using as Christians today.

Further, we can consider this part of the teaching moments for us all in this season of Eastertide, before Pentecost. Jesus has risen from the grave, now what?

This first week we will consider **What would Jesus say now that he is still Lord but circumstances change.**

Meaning, we claim Jesus as Lord, but what does that mean in today's world, because today's world is not the same as the world of Ancient Israel, however we may find, the focus will be the same.

To begin, we need to understand that in Jesus' world Lord was the one you served. Roman Emperors were Lords over their people, all those within their Empire served them. So, when Thomas says to the risen Jesus, **My Lord and my God, (John 20:28)** when he realized Jesus was the risen Christ, he pledged his loyalty to Jesus Christ. Meaning, he understood that **God's work through Jesus is the rescue and renewal of God's creation, with Jesus joining together heaven and earth.** All death and sorrow have been overcome through the resurrection, and Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth.

Like Thomas, we pledge our loyalty to Jesus as Lord as well. In our vows at baptism and membership, we are asked, **Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, & promise to serve him as your Lord, in union with the church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races? (I do.)**

First, we are asked to confess Jesus as our Savior, meaning we believe he is the one to save us from our problems, our struggles, save us from death, and more importantly save *us for God.*

Then it asks if we put our whole trust in his grace. Meaning do we trust his unconditional love for us.

And so, by confessing Jesus as the one to save us for God with grace, we then promise to serve him as Lord. *To follow and learn from him, to honor him with our life.* Because **it is from him, that life's meaning comes for us.**

That's what is going on in our scripture lesson today. Listen to Jesus' words again. **"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."**¹⁹ *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,*²⁰ *and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'*

Jesus is sending his followers on their way, and commissions them to live and share their faith, all that Jesus taught and showed them, they are the continuation of this divine way of living on earth, as God intended.

In the past months I have met with various groups in the church and shared that scripture, asking them what they thought Jesus commanded them to? And the answers they listed: **to share and live ways of truth, justice, mercy, love.** And I tend to agree with that list.

In fact, if we study the New Testament, we will see that for the early Christians to claim Jesus as Lord was **To allow God in Jesus to order their lives in ways of truth, justice, mercy, and love, as Christ commanded.**

For example, to order one's life with truth consider John 21 when Peter has his come to Jesus' conversation, with Jesus. Remember this is after the resurrection and Peter, as you can imagine is embarrassed for denying Jesus at his trial. **But Jesus doesn't want that to be the forefront of their relationships. Jesus wants Peter to let it go.**

So, he says to Peter, **"Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."** Jesus said, **"Feed my lambs."**

And he asks this question, not once, but how many times? 3, to cover the 3 times Peter denied him.

The truth of this matter is, *Jesus forgave Peter and wants Peter to forgive himself, by feeding and caring for Jesus' Church.* And Peter will go on to order his life with that **truth**, taught and shown by his Lord.

Do we order our lives with such truth and grace? Do we have those lists of ones we should offer pardon to? And those we have received? For to do so, is to honor our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Consider another example of ordering one's life by reading **St Paul's letter to Philemon** to end slavery for Onesimus. **Onesimus was an escaped slave that helped Paul in his work for the Lord and now Paul wants to send him back so that Philemon, his owner will release him.** Paul writes, ¹⁵ **Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever—** ¹⁶ **no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord....** ¹⁷ **So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.** ¹⁸ **If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me.** ¹⁹ **I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self.** ²⁰ **I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.**

To order one's life with justice is to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, and care for them, assist them, to get on their own. Be it **those who are vulnerable, refugees, or those caught in trafficking to name a few.** Do we order our lives with such acts of justice and mercy? For to do so is to follow our Lord, Jesus Christ.

And how about ordering one's life with the teaching of the Lord's love? One of my favorite passages in the Bible regarding that comes from Acts 2:44, **44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.**

To order one's life with the love of the Lord is offer that all that we have and all that we can, in order to help those in need. That's love for one another. Do we order our lives with such acts of love? If so, we serve the Lord, Jesus Christ.

There is no doubt that as life goes on, circumstances change in our lives, as do the lists we may keep. However, in Hebrews 13 we read: **be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."** **6 So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid."** ... **8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.**

That **means the grace of Jesus is the same for us yesterday, today, and tomorrow.** His justice is the same for us, yesterday, today, and tomorrow. And **his love for us is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.**

So, in answer to the question of **What would Jesus say now that he is still Lord, but circumstances change?**

I believe **Jesus would say '...remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'**

And in that memory, we find our inspiration, our order, or rather our list of a blessed life.

Let us pray:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek

to be consoled as to console;

to be understood as to understand;

to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Amen. — *St. Francis of Assisi*