

The amazing commission: Matthew 28:16-20; 2 Corinthians 13:11-13

by [Tom McGrath](#) in the [May 6, 2008](#) issue

There were only 11 disciples on the mountain. The group was incomplete because one had betrayed Jesus and given in to despair. The others hadn't acquitted themselves much better during the time of trial. The impetuous one had denied Jesus three times. Some had scattered and hid. Together or on their own, it just didn't seem they were enough.

So they went back to Galilee. Jerusalem hadn't turned out as they had expected. Galilee was safe. They could lie low, like a light under a bushel basket. Maybe they could get their old jobs back. Their old lives too.

But then Jesus appeared. He had messages for them, and now it seemed he had plans for them too. He said to meet him on the mountain and gave them directions. When they saw Jesus, some of them worshiped him. Some of them doubted. Was it Jesus they doubted or themselves? Maybe both. They'd been to the mountaintop with him before. What was it that they'd seen? Could they even believe their eyes? Their hearts?

Jesus spoke to them, saying, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." He was getting their attention. The sound of authority came through, stirring their faith, which began to drive out their fear—demons of fear driven out like all those other demons that had fled before him in towns and villages.

"Go!" he told them. "Go."

They wanted to stay.

"Make disciples of all nations," he told them.

"Wasn't that *our* birthright?" they wondered. "Weren't *we* the ones he came for?" With the gift seeming to be in peril, they tried to grip it more tightly. It began to slip from their fingers.

"Baptize them," he told them.

“How?” they wondered. “Shall we baptize like John at the Jordan? Shall we tell these latecomers the axe is already at the root?”

“Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” he told them.

“What?” they asked. “Who?” they wondered. “In whose name?” the 11 disciples pondered. “Do they even deserve it?” was the question they thought but didn’t dare say.

“Teach them to obey everything that I commanded you,” he told them.

“We can’t remember everything you told us,” they worried.

“Remember,” he told them. “Remember.”

So they stopped and remembered. They came to their senses.

“I am with you always,” he told them.

“We remember,” they said.

And then they went.

Many people complain that the pace of change today is disorienting. While that’s certainly true, I suspect that the profound rate of change we experience in 2008 is something the apostles could have related to nearly 2000 years ago.

Try to imagine the radically altered worldview these disciples experienced. From the first day they met their itinerant preacher, through the time of his healing and demon expelling and miracle working, through his clashes with Jewish leaders and his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, through his arrest, torture and death, and then his resurrection and startling appearances, following Jesus was never predictable or dull.

What a challenge these experiences must have been to the disciples’ understanding of the nature of God and to their expectations of how they ought to relate to this God! At each step of the way, the disciples’ interaction with Jesus stretched their limits and pushed their boundaries beyond the comfort zone. Perhaps the biggest stretch for this group of committed monotheists was the dawning revelation of the triune nature of God. After all, every day of their lives they had prayed, “Hear, O

Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.” Now Jesus was introducing the notion that there was more going on within this God than they previously suspected.

We too live in a time of disorientation and disruption. We gather to worship the Lord, but parts of us are plagued with doubts. We are told to “Go” and we want to stay. But there is no idyllic place to return to. We can only be right here, right now. Thankfully, that is the place and time to encounter God—in fact the only place and time we humans can experience the divine—right here, right now.

With the help of the Holy Spirit, the disciples took up their commission by beginning right where they were. They preached in Galilee. They moved on to preach in Jerusalem. Knowing that the message was not to be kept under wraps, they found ways and means to spread the Good News far and wide. We are to start where we are too. St. Paul offers the Corinthians—and us—a practical formula for how to be disciples: “Mend your ways, heed my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace.” When we freely offer the world the good news that we have received, we will emulate the Trinity. We will be participating in the very life of God.