

The Work of Creating
5/31/26 Teaching at New Covenant Fellowship
by Associate Pastor Melissa Logsdon
1st Sunday after Pentecost
Passages: Genesis 1:1-2:4a, Matthew 28:16-20

Intro

Today's teaching is entitled "The Work of Creating". My hope is that we will come away from today's teaching with a deeper understanding of the nearness of Jesus, even amidst our doubts, and the progressive creative work of God's Holy Spirit in and through our lives. My name is Melissa Logsdon and I serve as Associate Pastor at NCF.

Gathering together, waiting on the Holy Spirit

Recently, I had the chance to gather with friends in prayer. I went with a few close friends on a 24 hour spiritual retreat at the same convent I stayed at in February. This retreat was advertised to be a time of silence, alone with God. My mom asked me if my friends and I would be taking a vow of silence. My husband, Steve, knowing how my friends and I chat so, doubted that we would be able to keep quiet! The nuns, in their wisdom/mercy, put the 3 of us in an apartment together that had 3 bedrooms with a common area. So we COULD have quiet in our own rooms AND we COULD chat together when we wanted (without disturbing the other retreat participants!) :) It really was the best of both worlds! During our 24 hours, we each took turns quietly doing the dishes or going on solo walks, and getting good sleep (including NOT staying up till all hours of the night talking, but rather all sound asleep by about 8:30!). We gathered at meal times and shared what we were experiencing and prayed for each other. We felt God's presence strongly among us. At one point we just stopped talking and sat in silence as we were experiencing a strong sense of the Holy Spirit among us. It was beautiful and soothing.

Last Sunday, we celebrated Pentecost: The day when God's Holy Spirit came to all of Jesus' disciples and empowered them to do the work God had for them to do: telling the world about God's way of life.

Jesus' disciples gathered together, similar to my friends and me, spending at least part of their time in prayer together. I wonder what all they talked about? Acts 1 records that they did talk about leadership needs. I wonder if they also had time to reflect on some of Jesus' final words to them, as we have recorded in Matthew 28 (today's scripture focus).

BEFORE PENTECOST: They Worshiped, but they doubted

Today's scripture reading (Matthew 28:16-20) was part of the assigned passages from the Revised Common Lectionary. Interestingly, it goes back to an exchange the disciples had with Jesus BEFORE Pentecost.

I'm curious WHY. Maybe it's because it's human nature to go back and try to process what just happened after something BIG happens in life—to unpack what just took place and what it all means and how to move forward from it. So, that is what I hope we accomplish during this time of reflection.

At my retreat, I learned that in the Catholic Church this same passage is part of the reading for May 14th, for the Ascension of Jesus. So at the retreat we had a time of group discussion on this passage through the process of lectio divina . (If you aren't familiar with this practice, it's about going to the scriptures and reading over the passage several times to look for key phrases that stand out to the reader/hearer and then taking time to consider why that part of scripture stood out, and reflecting on if there is anything that God may want to be saying through the passage.)

Today, I invite you to join with me in this process as I re-read today's passage. Feel free to close your eyes or jot down thoughts. See if you notice a word or phrase that stands out to you.

Matthew 28:16-20 (NRSVue)

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

When they saw him, they worshiped him, but they doubted.

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

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

and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Did any phrase stand out to you in particular?

For me, "I am with you always" stood out when we went through this passage at the retreat. Many in my group shared the phrase "they worshiped, but they doubted".

I'm going to read the passage again, this time from The Inclusive Bible. Sometimes I find it helpful to read the same passage from another translation. As I read, I invite you to continue to ponder the scripture.

"The Eleven made their way to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had summoned them.

At the sight of the risen Christ they fell down in homage, though some doubted what they were seeing.

Jesus came forward and addressed them in these words: "All authority has been given me both in heaven and on earth; go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations. Baptize them in the

name of Abba God, and of the Only Begotten, and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you.

And know that I am with you always, even until the end of the world!"

In the second round of lectio divina, I invite you to consider why the phrase you selected stood out to you. Or if a different phrase, why?

At the retreat we spent a lot of time talking about the phrase "they worshiped, but they doubted." Thoughts included how surprised they were that Jesus' closest followers—that had been with him watching his miracles, listening to him talk about the kingdom of God, saw Jesus raise others back to life—that they could have doubted when they saw Jesus?

So the question around the circle was why did they doubt. And what did they doubt? Was it just that Jesus was resurrected, was it what Jesus went on to say— that he had all power. That he told them they were going to be going everywhere and doing what Jesus had done. Telling people about the kingdom of God, helping others come back into relationship with God? Living the way God has for them to live? Was it Jesus saying he will somehow be with them even though he was about to return to God?

It's interesting thinking about being in the disciples' shoes at that moment and all that they were seeing, feeling, and thinking. We, on the other hand, have the distinct advantage of being on THIS side of Pentecost with God's ever present Spirit with us AND we still have doubt at times.

Going back to the group discussion on this passage: On the third (and final) round of lectio divina, we moved into open discussion. At that time a thought came up that maybe we can have things we don't understand...that maybe we can continue to live with things we may never understand, but that doesn't stop us from worship. That doesn't stop us from obedience.

This is the eleven disciples' first time seeing Jesus after rising from the grave. (At least how Matthew records it). Several women had told them they had seen Jesus and he had instructed them to tell the disciples to meet up with Jesus in Galilee...they obviously believed enough to show up at the mountain in Galilee, but at least some, if not all of them also doubted how Jesus could be alive after dying. Maybe seeing Jesus raise people from death and bring them back to life was enough to spur them to hope, at least a bit? But, knowing the brutality of Jesus' execution may have just been too much to believe in Jesus standing there before them now.

Interestingly, the phrase in Matthew says "they worshiped, but they doubted". Not just "they doubted." But that they also worshiped! I like that image of the both/and. Doubting and worshiping. In the same breath. That somehow we can genuinely worship (even with our doubts). And that it's not being hypocritical, but rather honest in our humanity. (which is how most translations put it...some say, they worshiped, but some doubted. I'm not sure if that's because the translators didn't know how to hold the tension and admit that the disciples had doubts at the same time as they worshiped OR if it was indeed only part of the group that

doubted. Either way, this mix of worship and doubt was the state of the group at seeing Jesus right after his resurrection.

In our fellowship, we have been having our own conversation about doubt. Ron has been encouraging us in the pastor notes that asking good questions, even bringing our doubts TO God, doesn't have to be an illustration of our lack of faith, but rather, an example of our trust in God to be big enough to handle our questions and that by bringing our doubts TO God, we can actually grow in our faith, in our relationship WITH God. And in a recent teaching, Pastor Renee shared how doubt can be a doorway to God's love. How we can feel God's love for us as we come WITH our doubts.

Which is how in this encounter Jesus chose to respond to his disciples' mix of worship and doubt. With Love.

JESUS' RESPONSE

The scriptures record: "And Jesus came to them"

Other translation put it this way:

"Jesus, undeterred" (MSG)

"Jesus came near" (CEB) (CSB) (HCSB)

"Then Jesus came to them" (NCV) (NRSVUE) (NKJV) (ESV)

"And Jesus came up" (NASB2020)

"Then Jesus came close to them" (TPT)

I've never noticed this coming near in a relational way from Jesus in this moment. I've always pictured Jesus with a booming voice above them giving "the great commission" before his "beam me up, Scotty, moment" of ascension.

But that's not what we see here. We see Jesus responding to their doubt by drawing close to them. Being relationally close as he shares the truth— the promised provision, the plan of action. Jesus wants to make sure they "see", really "see" him. And really hear what he's about to tell them. I love this compassionate response of Jesus.

THE PROMISE FOR THE PROGRESSIVE WORK

Which makes sense, because Jesus really wants them to be able to understand what he is trying to say to them.

"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 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you."

I'm sure they were like, Go and say what? do what? It's like, wait a minute all the things that you told us weren't just great sermons, weren't just fantastical miracles for the show of it? Wasn't just you, Jesus, being awesome?

So wait, what? What is this way of life we are to train and instruct people in? A summary at this point would be nice.

Well, at least that was my thoughts earlier this year when I read through Matthew and got to this part. There was SO much that happened, that was recorded. SO much that Jesus said.

So, here's my attempt at a summary, in case you too are like, ok, am I/are we doing what Jesus asked of us? And what exactly was that again?

To teach people God's way of living that sets the world aright:

- to love and care for others by living a servant life and living generously
- keeping our promises, forgiving and let people know God has forgiven them, sharing our possession, healing
- Who are those we are to care for with this selfless instead of selfish way of living?
 - the poor, hungry, imprisoned
 - those responsible for: our marriage partner, our parents, our children
 - Being a friend to misfits
- To say/do:
 - Believing and telling others that God will help us with whatever is before us, faith in God's help
 - To know that God is on their side
 - To know we can be well/healed/whole
 - Taking time to be with God in prayer to align our heart with God's way
 - having a flexible heart over an inflexible ritual

And then Jesus wraps it up by promising: "I am **with you** always"

HOW DO WE RESPOND? AFTER PENTECOST (The INVITATION)

So, how does looking back at this passage inform our way forward? How does it answer our doubts?

How does what Jesus says help us to move forward in the midst of our doubts? Our fears? Our felt inadequacies?

The following excerpts are from Christine Valters Paintner from her May 24, 2026 blog entitled On Pentecost:

"If we have stayed committed to our pilgrimage this far then we may still wonder why we have journeyed so long and still are full of fear and unknowing.

It says that those who witnessed this event were “amazed and perplexed.” Some were confused, others cynical. The story of Pentecost asks us a question: How do I let my expectations and cynicism close my heart to the new voice rising like a fierce wind?

Pentecost demands that we listen with a willing heart, and that we open ourselves to ongoing radical transformation. We discover that the Easter pilgrimage does not end here, instead we are called to a new one of sharing our gifts with the world. Soul work is always challenging and calls us beyond our comfort zone. Prayer isn't about baptizing the status quo, but entering into dynamic relationship with the God who always makes things new.”

(Christine Valters Paintner, May 24, 2026 blog, On Pentecost)

The Work of Creating

Which brings me to another passage that was part of today's readings in the Revised Lectionary—the Genesis account of creation. I'm not going to read this now, but I do invite you to read it this week, and if you like to use the guided reflection I wrote in this week's blog (available on our website, and copies at the welcome center).

What I felt God inviting me to see in this passage was the work of God's Holy Spirit. Yes, in the creation of the earth, but as a model of HOW the Holy Spirit works. What God's spirit does...progressive creating/forming in our world, in our lives. It is the work that Jesus was inviting the disciples into...invites us into...and us to invite others into.

It's the HOW of the WHAT that Jesus is trying to explain to the disciples. That the WHAT won't happen all at once, but that Jesus will be with them through the process as we live out God's way of living that sets the world aright.

As an artist myself, I was drawn to the artistic process of God's Holy Spirit in the creation of our world, in the imagining of how God works in our lives both as a fellowship and individually. It is why I invited Roberto, an artist, to share in today's welcome of his process of becoming the artist he is today.

We have a new painting hanging in our lobby, donated by Kirk Hauser (Valerie Hoffman's husband who passed away last May). We appreciate and honor him for this beautiful contribution to our fellowship. It is a print of one of Rembrandt's works: The Return of the Prodigal Son. When I looked for a date I found 1661-1669—a range of time. Reminding me yet again that creating is a process, time is involved to create a finished piece of work. A truth that many of you as writers, poets, artists, musicians, experience.

May this painting serve as a reminder to God's love for us and the ongoing creative work of God's Spirit in our world and in our lives. And may we be reminded to continue on in the creative work of extending into our world God's way of living with mercy, love, and justice.

Communion (Video of Clay on a potter's wheel...illustration of the progressive work of creating)