**Family Service Talk 15th November 2020**

**Matthew 28:16-20**

***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.”*

Finally, we move into the last week of our Family Service series on God’s promises and we finish with Jesus’ final statement to his disciples…. “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” What a promise!

One of the things that we have seen as we have looked at some of the promises God has made to his people, is that they are very clear but basic promises. There is no detail or explanation to encourage us to trust the promise and rarely any form of time frame. And I suppose that is one of the things about promises …. When one is made to us, we are left with the decision as to whether to believe the promise or not. That decision is usually influenced by the track record of the person making the promise. (The recent American election is perhaps an example of this!)

As we have gone through the Bible starting with Abraham, (born 2000+ years before Jesus), we have heard God making promises to his people and we have seen their response. In every case the person to whom God spoke, trusted God and followed his command, albeit somewhat hesitantly of even fearfully at times. In every situation we have looked at, God asked something of the person and then reassured them with a promise.

God told Abraham to leave his country, people and home and go the land that God would show him. That’s a huge thing to ask of someone and the promises that went with it must have seemed crazy at the time – a nation, a land, a blessing? But with no explanation or detail given, Abraham went …. He trusted God’s promises, obeyed his commands and, in time, saw God’s faithfulness.

With Moses, God told him to go to Pharaoh and then bring God’s people out of Egypt. Again, a huge thing to ask but this time the promises were more specific – God would be with Moses and they would end up in the promised land. Maybe God knew Moses needed that extra reassurance, and eventually, after a little more ‘discussion’ with God, Moses set off accompanied by his brother Aaron to see Pharaoh …. He trusted God’s promises, obeyed his commands and, in time, saw God’s faithfulness.

The message God gave Jeremiah to send to his people in exile must have seemed very strange indeed – instead of doing everything they could to return to the land God had given them, they were to relax, marry, have families and settle down in Babylon and even pray for the Babylonians – their enemies! This was not what they expected at all but again the command came with God’s promises – in 70 years He would bring them back to the promised land and give them a hope and a future, they would seek God and find him. And many of God’s people did settle down in Babylon …. They trusted God’s promises, obeyed his commands and, in time, saw God’s faithfulness.

Probably the most extraordinary message of all from God was the one delivered by the angel Gabriel to a young, unmarried girl called Mary – she was to have a baby and was to call him Jesus. That was astounding enough but the promise that came with it was even more incredible – the baby was God’s Son; he was a King who would reign for ever; it would all happen through God’s power. Mary’s response was instant – ‘I am the Lord’s servant; may it be to me as you have said’ …. She trusted God’s promises, obeyed his commands and, in time, saw God’s faithfulness.

Through all these people, we see God working his purposes out. His promise to enable his people to come back into a relationship with him and live with him forever was reaching fulfilment. The baby born to Mary, God’s own Son, had come to die to take the punishment that sinful humans deserved. The sin that separates us from God has to be paid for and that is what Jesus’ death achieved. In God’s infinite mercy, Jesus’ death on the cross paid the price of sin for all those who believe and trust in him. Once that debt was paid, the relationship with God was restored for all believers and that promise of a hope and a future with him was assured.

And so, we see, as we have moved through the Bible, that God’s track record of promises kept is without blemish … if God promises, it will happen, he can be trusted.

But, what of our passage today? It comes right at the end of Matthew’s gospel, Jesus has grown up; spent 3 years preaching, healing and preparing his disciples; he has suffered terribly and died on a cross; 3 days later he has risen again and spent time meeting with many people so that the fact of his resurrection is beyond dispute. And now, finally, he is ready to return to his father in heaven leaving his disciples then, (and indeed those who follow him today), to continue his work on earth. And he leaves them (and us) with that wonderful promise …. to be with them always!

But, as with the other passages that we have looked at, this promise comes with a command – go and make disciples of all nations … baptise them … teach them to obey Jesus’ teaching. This feels a huge thing to ask of anyone. But …. is there a danger that that we are quick to bask in the joy of God’s promises, but not so quick to obey his commands?

When we read it, perhaps we are tempted to look around and see who Jesus is actually speaking to – it can’t be us. It must be the elderly vicar who has so much experience … or the much-travelled missionary … or that young curate who has so much energy and knowledge. They would all be really good at doing what Jesus wants. But no, Jesus is speaking to his disciples – literally, the people who follow him. Well, that is us … isn’t it?

This is the moment, as we read these words, that Jesus speaks into our hearts just like he did with Abraham, Moses, Jeremiah and Mary. He says to each one of us who believes in him … go and tell people about me. And with that command comes the promise, ‘I am with you always’. We don’t understand why he has asked us; we certainly don’t know how we are supposed to do it; we definitely don’t know all that we should about Jesus and what he taught; and we may have many prayerful ‘discussions’ with God about it. But … we have God’s wonderful promise to be with us always; we believe that Jesus died for us; we know ourselves to be totally loved by God … we know beyond doubt that we can trust him.

Let us, like all those believers who have gone before us …. Trust in God’s promises, obey his commands and we **will** see his faithfulness. Amen