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A Mission with Promise

Matthew 28:1-10, 16-20

It's your first day at a new job. You arrive at the office expecting to have some time to settle into your cubicle, learn your way around and meet your coworkers. No such luck. Your boss has already assigned you a major project. As you look over the expectations, your heart rate rises. Panic sets in. You have no idea how to do this job. You begin to wonder if they've made a terrible mistake hiring you. You momentarily consider packing it in and heading home in quiet defeat.

But suddenly one of your new colleagues pokes her head in your office. She introduces herself and explains that she's worked at the company for many years. Seeing the fear in your eyes, she assures you that she knows well the pressures of your job. In fact, she had even served in that position herself for the past few years before being promoted to her current role. Then, totally unexpectedly, she volunteers to work alongside you this week to help you through your project. Your joy and relief are incalculable. Rather than dreading the week, you now look forward to it. The promised presence of a caring and experienced mentor makes all the difference. In this study, we'll see how the risen Christ goes before us and with us in his mission to the world.

Group Discussion. Describe a time when a more experienced colleague, friend or mentor came alongside you to help you accomplish something. What did you learn from him or her?

personal reflection. Who are the people in your life that have gone

before you and walked alongside you? How has their guidance and presence made a difference?

Matthew's account of Jesus' crucifixion mentions the presence of many women who had followed Jesus from Galilee and provided for his needs in his most desperate hour (Mt 27:55). Among them were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph (v. 56), who stayed with Jesus until his body had been laid in the tomb. These two women returned to the tomb on Sunday morning and became the first of Jesus' followers to learn the incredible news. *Read Matthew 28:1-10.*

1. Notice how quickly this story progresses. In just the first six verses there is a rapid and radical change of circumstances. What unexpected events unfold before the eyes of the women in this opening scene (vv. 1-6)?

2. Why does the angel invite the women to "come and see the place where he lay" (v. 6)?

3. What message does the angel give the women to pass on to the rest of the disciples (v. 7)?

4. Why was it important for Jesus to go ahead of them to Galilee (v. 7)?

5. How has Jesus gone ahead of us as well?

6. What two ways do the women clearly demonstrate that they have believed the angel's message (vv. 8-9)?

7. Matthew doesn't actually give us a report of the women passing along the news of Jesus' resurrection to the other disciples, but this next scene implies that they did so. *Read Matthew 28:16-20*. Why is there a split reaction among the disciples when Jesus comes to them (v. 17)?

8. In what ways do you sometimes hesitate to respond to the risen Lord?

9. What threefold mission does Jesus give his disciples (vv. 19-20)?

10. How are you called to participate in this mission today?

11. What two promises does Jesus give his disciples as they carry out his mission (vv. 18, 20)?

12. What difference do these promises make as you take your place in Christ' s mission?

Give thanks and celebrate the Lord's promise to be with you until the end of the age. Ask that he reveal to you what role you can play in the work of speaking the good news of his resurrection and inviting others to follow him where he leads.

Now or Later

Matthew' s Gospel locates some of Jesus' most important moments on mountains. For instance, read and reflect on a few of these: the third temptation (Mt 4:8-10), the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5 - 7), Jesus' solitude (Mt 14:23), the transfiguration (Mt 17:1-6), and the final teaching on the Mount of Olives (Mt 24). How does Matthew 28:16-20 function as the grand finale to all of these mountain moments? How does each mountain moment find its fulfillment in this climatic interaction between the risen Lord and his followers? How do they make sense only in light of the resurrection? How do they help us understand what it means to participate in the mission of Christ?