

Commissioning of the Disciples
Matthew 28:16-20

by

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Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. Jesus came near and spoke to them, "I've received all authority in heaven and on earth. 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, teaching them to obey everything that I've commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age."

Reflecting about the "Commissioning of the Disciples" gospel is reflecting about our UIW Mission and its impact in our community and beyond. Jesus chose his disciples and invited them to follow him, but not all the disciples followed — only eleven out of the twelve were with him after his resurrection. We are all offered the opportunity to join Jesus and serve him, listen to him and follow his teaching; however, not everybody responds. That should never stop us from following him and spreading his words and actions through us.

As part of the University of the Incarnate Word the urge is even greater to follow and serve. We can teach and serve all those who come to us in the classrooms and during our daily interactions, but we should also go out of our comfort zone, out of our city and even our country if necessary, to spread the word. Now more than ever, we need to get out of our comfort zone and reach out via technology to be closer to those that need us: friends, family, colleagues, teachers, students, staff.

Jesus asked us to GO and make disciples and "baptize," to reach out, but he is not leaving us alone with this challenging task. Do not let the uncertainty and unfamiliarity overwhelm you. Jesus will be with us every day; he is not dead, he has risen, and we should rise with him. We now face challenging times during this alarming COVID-19 pandemic, but we are not dead, we overcome our fear and difficulties through the days of social distance and adapt to newly evolving, unfamiliar situations.

As a teacher, I take this gospel commission very dearly. Every day I wake up with a prayer to take a day at a time and thrive against adversity. I take it as an opportunity to share with my students, and I try to reach out more to them or become more virtually available via online interactions. I feel the stress and uncertainty. During a regular semester, my door is always open, and I enjoy talking to the students, even if it is not about classroom themes or no appointment has been made. Now it is harder, you have to reach out on-line, fit it in to a busy schedule. You just don't have the luxury of casual passerby conversations and those conversations are missed.

But Jesus said "GO" and make disciples, so it is our obligation to do so, as teachers and as students, to go out of our way and reach out to help or be helped. A few weeks have already passed, Spring semester is over now, but as we transition into the Summer semester, we are all still here working day by day, adapting and succeeding step by step. We are all in this together.

We need you, your energy, your positivity but also your fears and uncertainty to find the ways to help you succeed.

As I reflect on previous challenging situations looking for some input to translate into this current situation, I place myself in the Mission trips I had the chance to participate with UIW. As an extension of our teaching role, we bring students to diverse Mission trips, to places with little resources, different languages and traditions from ours, away from the familiar faces, familiar buildings, technology, even familiar food and we prime them to learn. In particular, I would like to share my experiences from a Mission trip where surgical interventions were provided and I was not the surgeon, where eye exams were provided and I could not thoroughly perform one, and where people were blind and I could see. Everyone was helping using their skills, anyone could help. We did not stay sitting, waiting to see what happened next. We did not wait for patients to come to us, we were proactive and found ways to help. As students, as teachers, as support personnel we can all help. We could see in the faces of the students the uncertainty of performing a test without state-of-the-art equipment, but they learned how to use what was provided and succeeded. We saw the faculty overwhelmed with the number of patients, while working with the students, encouraging them, and having conversations that invited them to participate in their own learning.

Teaching is a very slow process. It requires, patience, commitment, and personal involvement on the part of the teacher and the student. We are doing our part and we must trust God will help us finish the teaching journey. The time passes without you even noticing it, suddenly it is getting dark and there are no more patients remaining until the following day arrives. The uncertainty is not only in the eyes of the students and teachers trying to do our best for the patients, but also in the patients. They trust us with their health but mostly they trust God.

This year, I experienced an overwhelming revelation when I was talking to an old man about how he could get to work with his blindness and I will never forget what he told me: I put my hands on the handlebars of my bicycle, bend my head over, and let God guide me to my destination. As this old man shows courage with one of the most debilitating situations — blindness — we should feel empowered by God as well, trust him as he leads us in the right path to our destination through these turbulent times of the COVID-19 pandemic. God, let us trust you in our journey, let us have faith in you like this old man did!