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**Matthew 28:16-20**

<sup>16</sup> Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. <sup>17</sup> When they saw him, they worshiped him—but some of them doubted!

<sup>18</sup> Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

<sup>20</sup> Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

**Luke 24:49-53**

<sup>49</sup> “And now I will send the Holy Spirit, just as my Father promised. But stay here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power from heaven.”

<sup>50</sup> ...and lifting his hands to heaven, he blessed them. <sup>51</sup> While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up to heaven. <sup>52</sup> So they worshiped him and then returned to Jerusalem filled with great joy. <sup>53</sup> And they spent all of their time in the Temple, praising God.

**Mark 16:20**

<sup>20</sup> The disciples went everywhere and preached, and the Lord worked through them, confirming what they said by many miraculous signs.

**John 21:25**

<sup>25</sup> Jesus also did many other things. If they were all written down, I suppose the whole world could not contain the books that would be written.

**Acts 28:25-31**

<sup>25</sup> And after they had argued back and forth among themselves, they left with this final word from Paul: “The Holy Spirit was right when he said to your ancestors through Isaiah the prophet,

<sup>26</sup> ‘Go and say to this people:

When you hear what I say,

you will not understand.

When you see what I do,

you will not comprehend.

<sup>27</sup> For the hearts of these people are hardened,

and their ears cannot hear,

and they have closed their eyes—

so their eyes cannot see,

and their ears cannot hear,

and their hearts cannot understand,

and they cannot turn to me

and let me heal them.’

<sup>28</sup> So I want you to know that this salvation from God has also been offered to the Gentiles, and they will accept it.”

<sup>30</sup> For the next two years, Paul lived in Rome at his own expense. He welcomed all who visited him, <sup>31</sup> boldly proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. And no one tried to stop him.

Neil Finn was, or is, the lead-singer of the band Crowded House that rose to some prominence in the music world in the mid-80s with the song, *Don't Dream It's Over*. Finn explained in an interview that the title of the song could be intentionally read two ways: *don't dream, it's over* or *don't dream it's over*. He said that the song is ultimately about not giving up hope, but also addressing the seemingly ever-present tendency toward resignation when, as the lyrics say, “the world comes in.”

I think we can all agree that there are times, present times, past times, and will certainly be future times, when it feels as though the world is coming in *on* us or *at* us. There are times when disaster seems imminent. There are times when chaos reigns. There are times when we are at a loss. There are times when we're up against a decision that appears to have no good outcome. There are times when despair wins the day. There are times when the events of yesterday cause us to want to give up on tomorrow; times when we're confused, hurt, broken, directionless, floundering, grieving, imprisoned, overwhelmed, dejected, rejected, or just worn out. There are times when we want to throw in the towel, times when we say, “I've done all I can do.” There are times when we feel that pessimistic slant on the song title, “Don't dream, it's over.” But the response that the gospels (and Crowded House) give us is, “Hey now, hey now, don't dream it's over. They come to build a wall between us, [but] we know they won't win.”

We've got a bunch of youth here, and probably hundreds of thousands around the country, who are graduating from high school with some very mixed emotions on the matter. On the one hand, they've finally finished their secondary education – which is no doubt a HUGE relief – and they're looking ahead excitedly to what comes next. On the other hand, there's probably an equal measure of absolute terror, because so many have no idea what comes next. I don't want to contribute to that, but here they are having wrapped up a season of life where they've spent the vast majority of their lives in a classroom of some sort, many of their decisions have been made for them, they've succeeded some, they've failed some, they've endured the trials and tribulations of teen angst and social miscues and broken relationships and broken trust, they've navigated the maze of the parent/child dynamic, some have developed an identity, while others are still wondering who they are... And now there's this sense that they're on their own. For many, this doesn't seem like a wonderful new beginning, rather it feels like an end to security. When they look out on the horizon, at the cost of education or the difficulties of finding a job or the prospect of having to earn a living and pay bills and determine their place, a new beginning seems daunting. Plus, people have been telling them these are the best days of their lives!

And I bet there are others in this room who are saying to themselves, “I'm way past that season of life, and I *still* feel that way.

Friends, this is not the end of the line, this is not as good as it gets, this is not the end of hope.

Jesus Christ came speaking hope, speaking life in the fullest, speaking love and victory, and he convinced a whole lotta people he was the Messiah, the Savior. He gathered a loyal group of followers who were queued up and ready for that win...and then he died. Talk about a buzzkill. But then he came back! And then he left AGAIN. *Don't dream, it's over*. But when he left again, he told his disciples, he told those gathered around him that this wasn't the end; this was the beginning. And regardless of how the world would come in, they were there for a purpose. Regardless of how the world would come in, he would be there with them, he would give them power through the Holy Spirit, he left them with miraculous signs, he did many other things that couldn't even be written down because they were so many, and he told them, he told us that we would do the same and even greater things in his name. *Don't dream it's over*. Don't you dare dream it's over.

The Apostle Paul traveled thousands of miles with this message of hope. He took it to the Gentiles, the ones who had no faith, the ones who had faith in false gods, the ones who were on the fringes, who didn't belong. And here he's bringing it to the people who *did* know God, the people who should know hope, the people who were waiting for the Messiah, people who shared the faith of *his* birth, but they're not buying it. This was, in many theologians' minds, his ultimate goal – to reach the Jews with the hope of this truth *in the hopes* that they would hear and believe. And while he was imprisoned, while he was facing judgment, while he was, I'm sure, considering whether or not his earthly life was coming near an end, despite his frustrations that although some believed, there were still those who rejected that hope and walked away angry, he did not stop. He continued receiving people, continued welcoming visitors, continued sharing the good news, continued sharing the truth. This view of a possible end just caused him to begin ministering in a new way. And he'd been there before – after his encounter with Christ on the Damascus road, he did not stop working for God, he just began to work in a new way with a new truth.

Some things end only to begin again with new direction and purpose. Some things die so they can be reborn into something else, something better. Sometimes it seems like life is just reinventing ourselves with new and better information. Sometimes we have to let old ideas pass away in order for truth to spill into new lives and new seasons. And some things shouldn't end, even when it looks like it's all over. The world hasn't gone to pot, and the responsibility to live and love and hope and embrace and serve and worship doesn't have an expiration date. Even the end of days, the Apocalypse, the Reckoning, the return of Christ isn't solely an ending; it is an ushering in of a new beginning, something better, something bigger, something more beautiful, something heavenly. And we have an eternal call to usher that in and celebrate it's coming, maybe even to celebrate the parts of it that are already among us.

There's another song that y'all might be more familiar with called *Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus*:

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus  
Look full in His wonderful face  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim  
In the light of His glory and grace.*

Some things *are* meant to end, the things of this world, but we refuse to let them go:

- Glory days
- Bad habits
- Misguided ideas and ideology
- Narrow views and borrowed theology
- Harmful traditions of bygone eras
- Tainted love

Sometimes we cling so desperately to these things that new beginnings never...begin. Sometimes we cling so desperately to these things that they cause death and despair, they stunt our spiritual growth, they cause divisions and wars and hate and fear to begin or to continue. But these are the things of earth, this is world coming in, these are the things we need to let *grow strangely dim*.

Jesus did not come to begin a new religion. He didn't charge the disciples to go out and start a new religion. He didn't ask them to travel around the world planting denominations. He said go and teach and preach and baptize in the name of the Creator and the Christ and the Holy Spirit. He said, "tell the children the good news of the

gospel, help them know all that I command, and by your fellowship, strengthen their family ties with the household of God?" Paul didn't want start a new religion. In fact, as he met with these Roman Jews, he told them, "Hey, I'm not your enemy. I haven't done or said anything contrary to the tenants of our father Moses. I just want you to have the hope of a new beginning in the Messiah, the Christ, Jesus." And yet, a couple thousand years later we have thousands of different religions and tens of thousands of different *Christian* denominations.

So instead of letting the things of earth grow strangely dim, instead of letting *what we think we know* about truth be examined, instead of moving from a season of hard hearts and deaf ears and closed eyes into a season of wonder and healing and continued growth and new beginnings ushering in the *best* new beginning that will ever be, we've let fear and discomfort and disenchantment end our participation in one church and *begin* another.

Theologian Willie James Jennings writes: "The struggle that attends life with Jesus is to yield to the Spirit and enter God's own desire to join us together. This has been the perennial problem the church has faced from the first moment desperate crowds pressed together not out of any desire for each other but only in want of help from Jesus. To get to Jesus they had to touch one another. The Spirit has instigated such complicated spaces where people are drawn, sometimes in surprise and sometimes in protest, toward each other in a divine hope that they will touch God's love for them by loving one another... We are the inheritors of God's own communal dream, one that would bind us together in the body of Jesus and overcome a world captive to a false vision of possession and fragmentation. Yet God's communal dream is not guided by the logistics of possession and sharing but by the desire for love to be made real among those born anew of the Spirit. It is love for one another that guides the giving and sharing and in this way presents the most radical option for communal life that we might envision – what if we lived as though the well-being of those around us, including our surroundings, was as important to us as our own lives? What if for the first time I felt the absolute depths of God's love and concern not only for the one who God has drawn into my life and me into theirs but also for the place I inhabit, the streets I traverse, the animals I see, and the plants I touch with all my senses every day? For those disciples so willing to be led by the Spirit into radical love, God will create a communal reality that answers back the groaning of the creation with a word of great hope: the children of God are now visible."

Whew! Talk about crowded house! Talk about a dream that isn't over. Talk about purpose. Talk about God doing a new thing. Am I advocating for one church, one denomination? I'm advocating for one Body. We are One Body. And that Body is Christ's. And that Body cannot be defeated by death. That Body will never end, because that hope will never end, because that love will never end.

Our motivation, regardless of age or race or ability or socio-economic status or gender or orientation does not need to be about "saving people" or convincing someone they're wrong and we're right or having it all figured out by the time we're 18 years old. Rather, it should be to continue practicing and participating in our faith and in life as both people *with* faith in Christ AND people still figuring out what that means and looks like...together. It's A LOT, but don't dream it's over.

*There is freedom within, there is freedom without  
Try to catch the deluge in a paper cup?  
There's a battle ahead, many battles are lost  
But you'll never see the end of the road  
While you're traveling with me.*

Jesus said, "I'm traveling with you always, even to the end of the age." We're not done beginning, so let's do it together.