

Good morning, everyone. I always consider it a great honor to be able to share this time together. And today, we have a particularly rich and interesting passage of Scripture to explore! So I'm looking forward to it. Once again, too, you all know my Japanese is still not very good, so please bear with me again today...

Well, before we look at today's scripture, I have a question for you. Have you ever experienced a time in your life when you felt completely confused? Or maybe *overwhelmed*? Have you ever felt overwhelmed with busy-ness, but at the same time, like you were not really getting anything *done*? Like nothing *significant* was actually being accomplished?

I think I know that feeling fairly well. There have been many times in my life when I've felt harried and frustrated—when I've felt very busy, but also felt that nothing was actually being accomplished.

Our son Adam has recently become interested in building a tree house—it's up in the big tree at the back of the Mission House. Watching him build this tree house has caused me to remember the first “clubhouse” a friend and I tried to build back when *we* were both 10 years old. My friend and I lived in a fairly new housing development—new houses were being built around us all the time. For that reason, there were always big piles of extra lumber lying around our neighborhood. There were extra 2x4s, oddly shaped pieces of plywood, and lots of bent nails! It was a young boy's paradise...

I can remember very clearly trying to build our “clubhouse.” My friend and I found four or five strangely-shaped pieces of plywood, and we tried to “stitch” them together with bent nails and scrap 2x4s. Of course, we didn't use a saw—we didn't *have* a saw! We didn't even think about *cutting* any of that wood. As I recall, I think the only tool we had was a hammer. We didn't have a tape measure. And we certainly didn't use anything as precise as a level or a square!

I remember that when we finally managed to get our “clubhouse” to stand up straight, it was so wobbly that, if either of us leaned against any of the walls, it would immediately come crashing down! It was a real *disappointment*. I remember getting so angry at that clubhouse one day that I reared back, and kicked it to the ground! I'm sure I also shouted some unkind words at it! I remember feeling quite upset and confused—we'd worked on that clubhouse for a

number of days, but it just wasn't standing up right. It was very frustrating for a 10 year old! I had the sense that all of our work had been a total waste of time—like nothing had been accomplished.

Well, today we read a text from the end of the gospel of Matthew. If you take a moment to put yourselves in the disciples' shoes, you might be able to imagine how they might have been feeling after Jesus' crucifixion. Maybe these disciples—the eleven, the women—maybe they were feeling frustrated, or dejected, or just overwhelmed. These people had been following Jesus for quite a long time—possibly years. They had spent their lives working with him as he proclaimed the news of “God's coming kingdom.” And yet the kingdom they had hoped for *had not* come. The person they had thought would be the “King of the Jews” was, in fact, dead. Maybe they had spend their last years in vain? Maybe they had spent all that time—and all that energy—for nothing. Maybe it had all been a waste.

But in Matthew 28, we come to the story of Jesus' resurrection. Today, let's focus our attention on one short word in Matthew's resurrection story that might be easy to overlook. I think it's a very important word. The word is “Galilee.” Did you notice that word when today's scripture passage was read?

For most of my life I read Matthew's resurrection story without paying any attention to the word, “Galilee,” but a few years ago, it caught my attention. The Bible is an amazing book, isn't it? We can read it over and over again, and find something new every time.

If you have you're Bibles handy, I invite you to look at Matthew 26:31-32. This recounts a conversation between Jesus and Peter after their Passover meal. Let's read what it says, “Jesus said to them, ‘You will all become deserters because of me this night: for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to **Galilee.**” Galilee—did you see that word?

Next, let's jump ahead in time—to a few days after Jesus' crucifixion. Let's look at today's text again (Matthew 28:1-10). This recounts a vision the women at Jesus' tomb had of being spoken to by an angel of the Lord. But pay attention once more to what the angel tells the women. Let's start in verse 5: “But the angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus

who was crucified. He is not here: for he has been raised, as he said. Come see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to **Galilee**; there you will see him.’” Did you see it again—the word, “Galilee?”

Now let’s read on further. (Read 8-10) Did you notice “Galilee” once again? The writer, Matthew, is obviously trying to make some kind of *point*.

Here’s my question for you today: Why would the resurrected Jesus want his disciples to meet him in Galilee? Remember—he was crucified and buried in Jerusalem. Galilee is over 100 kilometers away.

Well, there are many clues for us as we try to solve this puzzle. First of all, the word “Galilee” is quite important in Matthew’s gospel. He uses it 18 times. I’m sure you know this already, but Galilee, remember, was a small, hilly territory of Israel, just north of Samaria. It was bounded to the east by the Sea of Galilee and to the west by Phoenicia and by the Mediterranean Sea. Remember that, in Matthew 3, Jesus is said to have *come from* Galilee to see John the Baptist baptizing in the Jordan River. That’s because Jesus, himself, was a Galilean—he was known as “Jesus of Nazareth”—Nazareth being a town in Galilee. In Matthew 4, Jesus calls his first disciples by the shores of the Sea of Galilee. According to Matthew, most of Jesus’ ministry, in fact, occurs in Galilee—chapters 4-18 of the gospel of Matthew are all set in Galilee. Only in chapter 19 does Jesus finally move south towards the capital, Jerusalem. *Galilee, in other words, was the center of most of Jesus’ work.*

Also, interestingly, most of the 12 disciples are clearly *from* Galilee. Remember the sermon Matsuda-sensei preached a few weeks ago about Peter’s denial of Christ? Remember that Peter was given away as a follower of Jesus because of his *Galilean accent*? Again, let’s turn in our Bibles to Acts 1:11. Let look at Luke’s story of Jesus’ ascension together. Notice what the disciples are called in this verse. “The angels said, ‘**Men of Galilee**, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you, will come in the same way as you saw him go.’” Galilee, for the disciples, is *home*.

So let’s go back to our original question. Why does Jesus want the disciples to meet him back in Galilee? Why there and not somewhere else? What do you think?

Don't you think the point of Jesus' command, "Meet me in Galilee," could be something like this: "Okay—many terrible things have happened in the past weeks. You're all surely confused about what happened in Jerusalem. Things have not gone as you thought they would. You need some *space*. We need to take a trip back—a trip back to *the beginning*. Let's go back *home*—back to the *starting point*. And let's start all over again. And this time, *let's do it right...*"

And so we read in verses 16-20 of Matthew 28, "Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some 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.'"

We often talk about this famous passage as the disciples' "commissioning," but remember that these disciples had been commissioned *once already*. In Matthew chapter 10, Jesus sent his 12 disciples out to preach the message, "The kingdom of Heaven is near" (Matt. 10:7). At that time, these men were supposed to be living symbols of the "new Israel"—12 disciples, one of them for each of the 12 tribes of Israel. This is obviously a symbolic number. Their mission was to interpret the Kingdom Jesus was building to their Jewish brothers and sisters.

But something had obviously gone wrong. The disciples, along with the rest of the crowd following Jesus, had tragically *misunderstood* what Jesus had said.

We are clued into the fact that the disciples had misunderstood Jesus' intentions for the Kingdom when, for instance, the mother of James and John comes to Jesus (in Matthew chapter 20) to ask for her two sons to be given positions of high authority in Jesus' kingdom. What kind of future was she imagining? What were *they all* imagining? Clearly, even the people who knew Jesus best were expecting that Jesus would take advantage of the popular support he had gathered, and that he would rise to a position of *political authority*. They thought that he would march into Jerusalem, be crowned as "King," and finally, the long-awaited day would come when David's son would once again control of David's city—Holy Jerusalem. They had imagined the "Kingdom of Heaven" to be the salvation of the Jewish State—a quick cure to the problem of the Roman

occupation. But as we all know, this vision—this hope—had been *dramatically wrong*. This is not what Jesus had intended at all. So after the Jesus' crucifixion, the disciples, understandably, had been left *devastated*.

Do you remember the story I told you just a while ago about the rickety clubhouse I tried to build when I was 10 years old? I didn't tell you the end of that story, did I? Let me tell you what happened with that clubhouse.

In fact, after kicking our lousy clubhouse to the ground one day, I went home and complained about it to my father. I explained to him how frustrated I was and how we had worked so hard to build that clubhouse, but it kept falling over. I think I even broke out in tears. But do you know what my dad did? He said, "Don't worry—Let's go together tomorrow, and we'll take another look at it."

The next day, he went with my friend and me to the clubhouse. Very soon after we got there, to my surprise, my dad started *taking our clubhouse apart*—pulling the boards apart one by one. He was slowly deconstructing the entire building! "Wait, I thought! You're not *fixing* the clubhouse! You're *tearing it down!*"

But as he was taking it apart, he began to explain to us that we had built the house too fast. We should have built a *frame* first—not the walls. What we needed to do was to take some time to *measure* and *cut* the boards. He gave us a saw and a tape measure. He used the hammer to straighten out the nails, and he started us out on the work of building the clubhouse over again, from the very beginning...

This is Galilee. This is what Jesus is doing on that mountaintop, back in Galilee. He's going back to the beginning. The disciples had built all sorts of ideas in their minds about the kingdom Jesus was building, but now, Jesus—the "Master Builder"—is tearing them down one by one. He's tearing them down so that a *truer, stronger kingdom*—God's Kingdom, could begin to take shape within them.

No doubt during their years with Jesus, the disciples had been caught up in the busy-ness of the ministry. They had been caught up in the fervor of it—in the excitement of the movement. But they hadn't really heard what the Master had been trying to say. They hadn't really understood him at all. But now this time had passed. They had been called back to the beginning—back to Galilee. And the King was still alive. So must be His Kingdom.

Some people call this kind of experience a “spiritual crisis.” I don’t know if that’s good language or not. The term “spiritual crisis” makes it seem like it’s an exceptional—maybe once in a life-time—event. But in my own personal experience, I think I have been called back to Galilee many times.

As people—as individual Christians—it’s easy to be caught up in the busy-ness of life. We work hard at our jobs, we fulfill our duties in the community, go to church regularly, serve faithfully on various boards and committees, we raise our children, we attend to our parents. A certain rhythm of life develops—a pattern. Our date-books are full—our bank accounts always seem to have enough money in them—somehow or other we make it from day to day.

But then sometimes, something happens. It could be something drastic, like the death of a loved one or the loss of a job, or a crisis in a personal relationship. It could be something mundane, like seeing a little child, perfectly carefree, throwing sand up in the air in a sandbox. No matter what it is, all of a sudden, *we see the true shape of our life.*

These kinds of events force us to stop—they force us to ask the question, “What is my life *for?*” “What am I *doing* here?” “Has all of this been a *waste of time?*” Like the disciples after the crucifixion, we are left confused and overwhelmed.

It’s at times like these we need to have a vision of the living Christ—a vision of Jesus standing outside the tomb, saying to us, “Go back to Galilee. I want to meet you back at the beginning—back at Galilee.”

It’s at times like those when we need to go back to the *foundations*. Back to the Christ who called us on this journey with him. We need to go back so that we can ask the questions, “Do I really understand what the Master wants?” “Or have I been building some other kingdom in my own mind?”

It’s at times like this we need to go back to the portrait of a disciple Jesus draws in the Sermon on the Mount and ask the question, “Do I see myself in these verses? Am I really happy? Am I really a part of the Jesus *movement?*”

It’s at times like this we need to hear the Master say, “It’s alright, my friend, let’s start over now, and this time, we’ll do it right.”

Churches, too, I think, need to go back to Galilee from time to time. Theologically speaking, the church is constituted as the “body of Christ”—the incarnation of Christ in the world. But all of us know very well that the church is a very human institution. And because of that humanness, the church, as an organization, just like we as individual believers, can become tempted to build kingdoms that are not the kingdoms of Christ.

When this happens, the church becomes ingrown—more interested in preserving the institution than in proclaiming Jesus’ vision. And when a church loses sight of Jesus’ vision—when it loses sight of Jesus’ hopes for the world—that church loses its soul. The inevitable result is death.

Do you hear these words today? “Meet me in Galilee.” They’re a call for us to go back to the basics. They’re a call for us to have a new encounter with the living Christ. They’re a call for us to reclaim our commission.

So I invite you today, if you need to: to go back to Galilee with me. Let’s go back and meet the Master again, and let’s begin to understand *his* Heart. When we truly understand *his* Heart—*his* Vision, *his* Kingdom—we can’t but live in *his* Power.

Father God,

It is a joy to be with you in this place.

We praise you.

But we sometimes find ourselves lost, frustrated,

Feeling that what we’re doing makes no difference.

Draw us back to Jesus. Show us his Heart.

If you need to tear down false kingdoms we have set out to build,

Bring them down. Give us time to recover.

Reveal to us your will for our lives,

And give us the strength to pursue it.

We ask in Jesus name, Amen.