



Matthew 28:16-20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”^[a]

Grace and Peace to you from the mystery in whom we live and move and have our being

I’ve always been afraid of heights. I mentioned it when I was the speaker at a men’s retreat. At the long afternoon break a few of the men invited me to hang out with them. I said sure! I’d love just sitting together, drinking coffee, talking about stuff, offering my wisdom.

They said, “Great, we’re going repelling.” I thought, “Excuse me? Didn’t you hear my moment of vulnerability when I shared my fear of heights?” Instead, I immediately responded with, “You know what, I’m going to stay back and pray and work on our next session for tonight. I could use the rest as well.”

Surprisingly they were not going to have me miss out on this moment to face my fears. “They smiled and said, “No, you’re going repelling.”

I did go repelling and I have to tell you, I discovered many ways to use the Lord’s name in vain while dangling 230 feet above ground.

You’d think this was the scariest moment of my life. Because, you see, I feared there was an end game, and the end game was death. But it wasn’t the scariest moment of my life.

You’d think it was the time I agreed to get on a ferris wheel and got stuck at the top. I discovered this always happens to people who are afraid of heights. It’s a conspiracy done by the universe just like the men at the retreat! I thought we would literally never come down alive.

In my imagination there was an end game to this ferris wheel thing and scared me. But it wasn’t the scariest moment of life either.

Perhaps the scariest was looking down into the Grand Canyon with no physical barrier of protection, or atop the Space Needle in Seattle or taking my first and every subsequent plane trip. Though in my mind there was an end game that wasn’t good, they weren’t the scariest moments of my life either.

One more scary moment. Being alone at home for the first time. Being a child with abandonment issues that should have been my scariest recollection. But it isn't.

What scared me in all those moments was that there was an end game in all that was happening, and it was this feeling that the end game is the finality of my life. Or simply the separation from this life as I knew it, from family, and from this earth. For me the world did not feel safe. To me the potential death or separation was the end game of all these events.

So, what was the scariest moment of my life?

It was being coerced at sixteen years old to go door to door sharing the gospel with strangers in Dallas, Texas.

In 1972 a week-long event put on by Campus Crusade for Christ I was dropped off on the campus of Southern Methodist University. Expo 72 as they called it was a phenomenal experience for the most part.

But the purpose became very clear as we attended daily workshops on how to share the "Four Spiritual Laws." They described the end goal: if one does not accept Jesus into their heart, they are condemned for all eternity—separated from their loved ones and from this earth.

As we went door to door, we carried with us the "good news." Which included their final destination, death or life.

We went out in teams of two, dropped off in an apartment complex and were like a couple of kids selling fake magazine subscriptions thinking they had their first job. This was the scariest of all! The potential for something to go wrong seemed inevitable.

It felt forced to share because we didn't want to disappoint the Campus Crusade leaders when they asked how many had prayed the abracadabra prayer. The end game was to save their souls from hell. But it was presented as a loving gift of reunification with an estranged Jesus.

This was the scariest moment of my life because there was a fear that the end game would one way or another end in death.

This gospel sharing to save the rest of the world was coined "the great commission" not by Jesus and the disciples but Justinian von Welz in the 17th century. Not even AI could locate more information on. To him and other missionaries, Jesus sent all of his disciples to warn others of the divine end game.

It was taken from these scriptures we are reading today. But in these final instructions from Jesus, he is telling them to not think of an end game. Do not think I will never return. He said, "I will never leave you; I will be with you always." Always! There is no end game in this plot. There is no final buzzer, so live. Invite others to a spiritual awakening on this earth. Transformation does not have an end game! It is a process of reconciliation, reunification in the same manner as the Trinity.

It is very much described in the 12th step for alcoholics.

The 12th step reads, "Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

Jesus in his final instructions tells his disciples, who by the way have faced many scary moments, that they are to share the "no end game" life of spiritual awakening and transformation with others.

There is no end game in the eternal affairs of God with us. It is all about living in the "I AM" of the present. Living this joyful, compelling life and sharing it with others "as you go."

In the Greek translation it refers to the sharing of this circular life with nations which means all ethnicities in the Greek, not countries. Tell every person they belong and to begin the "divine therapy" as Father Keating calls the 12th step and I would say the same for Matthew 28:16-20.

After Jesus' previous teachings on the beatitudes and the parables of the kingdom of God and heaven, how can this be anything but a way of being with others in the world. How to follow the embodied life of love as Jesus did?

Jesus told them "I will be with you always." Because he embodied the compassion and love of God and the Holy Spirit will empower us to embody this as well. So, our spiritual awakening is to surrender to this life of ongoing transformation, or divine therapy, with no joy that there is no end game. That is good news!

Jesus is giving the disciples the original 12th step. As his apprentices and followers, we share this non-scary moment of profound spiritual awakening and realization of the interconnectedness of all beings with others, that they too may experience a profound sense of freedom, liberation, and wholeness.

There is no end game. It's just the beginning.

AMEN