

All In

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Twelve years ago I took pilgrimage to an island off the west coast of Scotland called Iona. Iona is a small island – not much bigger than Siesta Key – it has a population of 125. I stayed at a small inn there on the island and one night as I sat in bed reading at about 11:00 p.m. I heard the sound of oarsmen rowing their boat into the harbor. The cadence of their rowing was being called out by a coxswain. I looked out the window and a small group were assembled at the dock cheering for this little crew of what turned out to be thirteen men all dressed in cassocks – monk’s cassocks. I made my way down to the dock and arrived at about the same time the monks arrived in their little boat – about 20 feet long -- just big enough to accompany the thirteen of them. It took a little bit of time to put the pieces together to figure out that these thirteen monk-looking men (none of them were monks) had spent that last several days rowing from the tip of northern Ireland up and over to Iona reenacting the famous voyage – 1440 years before -- of a priest named Columba and his twelve fellow monks who had left Ireland in exile and brought Christianity to Scotland. St. Columba – or Colm Cille –in Gaelic, was to Scotland what St. Patrick was to Ireland. Columba established his Christian community of brothers there on that little island and they, in effect, served as Scotland’s first mission post converting the Picts and becoming over the centuries the center of Christianity for Scotland. Today it is one of the great pilgrimage sites for all of Christendom. All told 48 Scottish Kings are buried on the tiny island of Iona including the Macbeth of Shakespeare fame. But it all started with those thirteen monks back in 563 setting off from the shores of Ireland, straining at their oars against the ocean, making their way to a land unknown in order to live a unique life together so as to

introduce an unfamiliar God to a foreign people. This is what I saw reenacted by those thirteen men late that night.

You sort of have to be crazy, don't you? Against all odds, at risk of losing everything including your life, inhabiting a dot of an island off the coast of a land hostile to your life and allegiance – you sort of have to be crazy.

Now it takes little stretch of the imagination when thinking of these thirteen possessed monks to then think of these last several verses of Matthew's Gospel I just read to you. Jesus and the eleven disciples on top of a mountain in Galilee. And there Jesus offers to them his last words -- what tradition calls the Great Commission – Go and make disciples. Go and make disciples. Those are the Cliff Notes – but the Cliff Notes really don't do justice to these last words that Jesus has for his eleven. When you read these last verses of the Gospel – what jumps out at you is the repeated use of one word. Jesus uses one word in his last words over and over again. And since they are Jesus' last words recorded by Matthew – his precious remaining words – and since he chooses to repeat one word over and over again – it's probably a good idea to pay attention. The word Jesus keeps using over and over again is the word "all".

“**All** authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Go and make disciples of **all** people. Teach **all** that I have commanded. And I will be with **all** of your days.”

The all-encompassing claim: “**All** authority in heaven and earth has been given to me.” The all-encompassing commission: “Go, therefore and make disciples of **all** nations.” The all encompassing command: “Teach them **all** that I have commanded you.” And the all encompassing comfort, “I will be with you **all** of your days.”

An all encompassing claim --- an all encompassing commission --- and all encompassing command and an all-encompassing comfort. “**All** authority has been given to me. Go and make disciples of **all** people. Teach **all** that I have commanded. And I will be with **all** of your days.”

All. All. All. All.

And actually there is another all in this great commission and it has to do with the people Jesus is talking to – he is talking to the disciples and Matthew says that when they saw Jesus they worshipped him, but some doubted. They worshipped, and yet some still doubted. And yet Jesus speaks to **ALL** of them. The worshippers, the believers, the doubters. He speaks to all.

To all people Jesus says, all authority has been given to me, make disciples of all people, teaching them all that I have commanded, and lo I am with you all of your days. Do you think Jesus is trying to say something here?

You see from the very start Matthew the Gospel writer has been trying to drop the hint that the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus is the turning point for the cosmos. From the very beginning when the stars of heaven align around Bethlehem and wise men travel afar from Eastern kingdoms and when powerful King Herod cannot even put a stop to it – the birth, the life, the death and the resurrection of Jesus become the all-encompassing universal event. All authority. All command. All nations. All days. All people. This is the message Matthew would have us hear. The kingdom of heaven is being established and it's time to get on board. Like those 13 monks - it's time to get on board.

Victor Hugo said, “No army can withstand the strength of an idea whose time has come.” Matthew says, The time has come. Jesus says, Time to get on board – the ship is sailing. Better jump in!

It explains the craziness, right? It explains the craziness of the commission, it explains the craziness of those disciples and it explains the craziness of those monks. And the craziness comes from this new perception of the world. That the world is encompassed by the Christ. It wasn't that the world needed to be encompassed by Christ. It isn't that the world still needs to be encompassed by the Christ. It is that the world is already encompassed by the Christ. This was what the birth, the life, the death, and the resurrection were about – to reveal that Christ is above all, in all, and through us, for all.

“He is,” writes the apostle, “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

You see when you become convinced that the world really is this way – the universe really is this way – encompassed by the Christ – all in all – then you start the crazy thing. You start setting sail for foreign lands. You start thinking that maybe the world needs to know of this incredible truth. You start giving away more and more of yourself to the truth as you see it. You start being less afraid – because you know that your life is enveloped already. It was enveloped since the beginning of time. Nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. You are encompassed – and your encompassment (yes, that's a word) sets then your compass. Christ above all, Christ in all, and through us, Christ for all.

You're not crazy – you are encompassed! And your encompassment sets then your compass. Christ above all, Christ in all, and through us, Christ for all.

One of the greatest Christian books, in my estimation, is the great classic *Don Quixote* by Cervantes – a book that says very little about Jesus, but a lot about what life looks like when you get encompassed by a vision. We all know the basics of the story – Don Quixote the self-appointed

knight errant who sets out on the quest to live the life of chivalry. He is going to bring truth and justice to the land – and to do so he acts in most people’s minds in a delusional way. But he’s been encompassed! And we remember that famous scene when he and his sidekick Sancho Panza come upon a row of windmills and Don Quixote sees them as an enemy to vanquish – he sees in them giants with which to joust. And Sancho Panza says, “Now look, your grace, what you see over there aren't giants, but windmills, and what seems to be arms are just their sails, that go around in the wind and turn the millstone.”

And Don Quixote is perplexed that his sidekick cannot see what he sees and says, “Obviously, you don't know much about adventures.”

You see the adventure begins for you and me when we allow ourselves to see the world as Christ sees the world. The world for whom He died. The world for whom He was raised. Like those words, immortalized by Robert Kennedy, originally from George Bernard Shaw - “Some see things as they are wonder and say why? I dream things that never were and say why not?”

I love that scene in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* when Narnia is frozen by the reign of the White Witch – and the Narnians are frozen some in body and some in spirit. But then comes the word that Aslan is on the move. Aslan is on the move. And when Aslan is on the move the whole of Narnia is on its way to being encompassed by the spirit of Aslan. And the Narnians unfreeze – and more than unfreeze – they are emboldened to live as Narnians because this is Aslan’s land! And they see things not as they are, but as they should be!

Christ over all, Christ in all, and through us - Christ for all.

Christ for those who worship, Christ for those who doubt, Christ for those who are far away, Christ for those who despair, Christ for those who even deny. And with this encompassment we get to see all people as Christ sees all people. And we get to live for all people as Christ lives for all people. We get to encompass all people as Christ encompasses all people.

We get to set sail with a new vision - Christ over all, Christ in all, Christ through us - for all.

Maybe you remember the story written by John Irving called, *The Cider House Rules* that features Dr. Wilbur Larch who runs an orphanage of boys and girls – children without mothers and fathers left to wonder if anyone really wants them. And every night Dr. Larch comes up to the room where the boys stay and he reads them the greatest of all orphan stories, *David Copperfield*, to encompass them every night with this great story of a young orphan's journey. And then each night as he sends them off to sleep he says to them, "Good night you Princes of Maine, you Kings of New England." Princes and Kings? But these are orphans? Oh no, not to Dr. Larch – he sees what most cannot see.

And isn't that what this great commission does for us? Encompasses us with a story different than what most can see. Christ in all, Christ for all. That we could see all as Christ sees all. Princes and kings. Princesses and Queens. And that we are to strike out on the adventure that all nations, even the Scots for God's sake, that all nations might know that all authority has been given to him. And all commands are good to be followed. And lo – he will be with us – he will be with all – all of our days.

What greater commission could there be?

