

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David J. Powers
Sunday, May 10, 2026

We have been making our way through an Eastertide sermon series entitled Resurrected Life. What does it look like for us to move through the world in the presence and with the spirit of the risen Christ? Our text this morning that will center our study and the proclamation will be Matthew 28. We're going to start in verse 16 and go through verse 20. These are probably going to be familiar verses to you because you had just heard them when we were at the baptismal font. Okay? These are verses that we hear every time we gather around the water. And they're known to us often. They're referred to as the Great Commission, which is certainly something that is going on in this text. But I want to offer to you this morning that there is more going on, more going on for us this day.

As we prepare to hear God's word read and proclaimed, I invite you to get comfy in your pews. Take whatever prayer posture feels most right to you. Close your eyes if you would like, and take a couple deep breaths with me. So, let's take a deep breath in. Breathe it out slowly. Another deep breath in. And breathe it out slowly. Breathe in God's mercies and breathe out God's mercies to others. Breathe in God's mercies and breathe out God's mercies to others.

Gracious spirit, you are as close to us as our very next breath. And so we pray that we would be attentive to your presence within us and around us. That by your spirit you might quiet any voice within us but your own. That we might hear your word for us this day. And that in hearing we might be called to lead lives of response. So may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, God, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Beginning in the 16th verse of the Gospel according to Matthew, the 28th chapter.

Now the 11 disciples went to Galilee to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him, but others 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, even to the end of the age."

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our Lord endures forever. Amen.

So, we are now two Sundays into a month of milestones. That's how I understand May. There are all sorts of important moments and transitions that are marked during this month annually. Just last Sunday evening, we gathered in Montgomery Hall to celebrate our graduating seniors. We heard from their parents of their journey, and we celebrated them all together. Next week in this place, we'll host graduation for Hutchison School and later a promotion service for Idlewild Elementary School. This is a month of final exams and presenting thesis papers, of awards

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ceremonies and musical performances. This is a month full of milestones. And these milestone moments, they are important for us because they mark change in our identity from one thing to another. From an elementary student to a middle schooler, from a middle schooler to a high schooler, from a high schooler to a college student, from a college student to...either out in the workforce, or out in the world studying even more beyond that. And these endings and new beginnings, they affect even those who will not walk across the stage or receive an award. We know and we love and we live with and we care for those for whom this month is a month marked by milestones. It's important for us to ritualize the changing of moments of identity for us. Our scripture lesson marks a significant milestone this morning in the journey of Jesus's friends. In this passage, they move from one identity to another. They move from disciple to apostle, from disciples to apostles, which means they move from following to being sent, from learning at the feet of Jesus to witnessing to Christ in the world. They move from being within the very presence of Christ to being the presence of Christ out in the world. Disciples follow in discipline. They learn. They worship. They receive. Apostles go. They witness...with Christ's presence. To be a disciple is to come to Jesus. To be an apostle is to be sent by Jesus.

Marking our milestones as followers of Jesus is important for us as well. We spent the entirety of Lent studying what we believe to be the marks of a disciple of Christ so that in this season of Eastertide, we might understand ourselves fully as those who are now prepared as we are being sent out into the world. Our identity, of course, doesn't simply shift once like it does for the disciples here in this 28th chapter of Matthew. Our identity has more fluidity to it because there's a weekly rhythm to it. We move from disciples here to apostles out in the world. From those who gather at the feet of the cross here and at the feet of Jesus to learn here in worship to people who are sent out into the world. That's the rhythm of our movement marking this important ritual, this milestone. Every single Sunday we draw ourselves into this place, call ourselves, are indeed called by God to worship, and then we are, with a charge and blessing, sent out each week.

One of the joys of being one of your pastors is that I get to witness this movement, this movement in and then out. Each week you come into this place, and you sing and you pray, and then some of you move out from this place to serve. Some of you will be here on Thursday to serve a warm meal to our unhoused neighbors and those who are food insecure. Some will come later that evening to stay with women and their children who are in need of a safe place to lay their head. Others of you will move from this place, and you will provide legal assistance at our legal clinic that we celebrated a decade of a couple weeks ago. Some of you will move out from this place to visit and to pray with members and visitors alike. Others of you will move out from this place to stand at the corner of Highland and Poplar to protest the ills of our world, to advocate for justice and equality and care. Some of you will use your voices. Some of you will

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use your hands as you go from this place. Some of you will use your bodies. And some of you will use your platforms. I'm grateful over the last few weeks to have been able to read the words of our own Jeff Calkins advocating for the people of our city, even as our city has been divided into thirds, our voices as well. Some of you move out from this place into hospitals and others into high schools, some into boardrooms and others into courtrooms. And always as those who sit at the feet of Jesus and those who are charged and blessed to go from this place, these movements are rooted in our faith, grounded in Jesus's ministry of love and justice and peace. Sometimes these movements of ours from this place out into the world, they are marked by joy. Sometimes we get to go have a lunch after a baptism. Other times they are marked by difficulty and the ills of the world. That is not simply true for us. It was true for the disciples then. And Jesus knows this. He knows the end that they will all reach as those who are apostles now of Christ in the world. Their lives will not end the way they hoped they will end. And so beyond simply marking the milestone of their movement from disciples to apostles, he marks their milestone with a promise. The last words of the gospel. "And remember, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Jesus knows it will be trying. He knows that there will be times of trouble. He knows that they will have deep needs. And in that need, they will need to know especially that they are not alone. More especially that their God is with them. So it was with the disciples turned apostles, and so it is with us. "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." "There is no place that you can travel or I will not meet you there. No trouble that you will encounter that my grace will not carry you through."

I need to tell a personal story this morning. I hope y'all will entertain it. A year ago, this week I was in my third week of sabbatical. Hallelujah. It was wonderful. I had taken a trip out to Ojai, California to start out, and I had a whole itinerary of the 13 weeks that I would be away from this place. Trips and also time at home just to rest. The second trip on my sabbatical itinerary wasn't so much the spiritual reflection and learning kind of trip. It was a trip to Chicago. And I need to frame Chicago for you in my life and its meaning. Chicago is the city that when he was 17 years old, Richard Joseph Powers moved to from Boston, enrolled at the Illinois Institute of Technology. It took him eight years to get through. Not because of his intelligence. Shout out, Dad. But because he co-oped for a year and then went to school. Co-oped for another year and then went to school. Took him eight years to get through. It was also the place that upon graduating Auburn University, my mother moved. A girl born in Houston, Texas, baptized there, educated in the south, moved up to Chicago. She worked at Commonwealth Edison, which is our equivalent of MLG&W up there. My parents met in Chicago. She was...my mother was my father's boss. Don't call HR.

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They fell in love there. They were married there. When I asked my father some years ago when I was in college what his favorite memory of his college years was or the years just after his 20s, he said, "I can remember driving down the Miracle Mile listening to Hey Jude with your mom beside me and the windows rolled down on a spring day in 1974. And I'm not sure it could get any better than that memory."

So Chicago is a meaningful place for me. I wouldn't be here if not for Chicago. What was even more meaningful that weekend was that it was a significant date, around a significant date, I should say. Last year my parents would have celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. As many of you know my mother passed away on June 10th, 1994, when I had just turned 13. For others of you that might be new news.

So I was returning to this city that meant a whole lot to me. One that I didn't know well. It would be fair for me to say that after having come down from and disconnected from church and ministry in the ways that a pastor is supposed to during sabbatical, feeling the peace of that, it would be fair of me to say that as the trip to Chicago approached, my emotional river was barely within its banks.

But the trip wasn't just about reminiscing. This was primarily, as I said, not a spiritual journey, but a golfing venture. Two of the top 50 golf courses in the country are in the Chicago metro area, and that's what I was going for. My friend Kyle Veazey was with me. Usually sits back there. Must be watching online this morning, actually. We hopped on a plane early on Thursday morning. Made our way up there, played golf on Thursday afternoon at Chicago Golf Club, which is a beautiful track. Had a great dinner, got some rest, woke up the next day, played 36 holes at Medina Country Club, which is a wonderful place as well. I was on a high this weekend that I had imagined was going to be kind of melancholy. It was just really full of joy. Didn't help. It didn't hurt that it was 75° and no humidity and sunny. It was just perfect. Then we got back to our hotel room on Friday evening, and I looked at my phone, and there were a ton of text messages from various friends. I got some news from back here in Memphis that turned my world upside down. The specifics of that news are actually unimportant for this story. But the emotions, my emotions, they're critical. This news that I had received hurt me. It made me fearful. It made me angry. The cloud over all of it was this deep sense of kind of powerlessness over controlling this situation. I told you that my emotional river was barely within its banks, and the additional emotions that were added to that river overflowed them. We were at flood stage. I didn't sleep all of Friday night. I was feeling all the feelings. And yet, we had prepaid for a tea time on Saturday. So, we got up early, and we got a cup of coffee, and we made our way to the south side of Chicago, closer to where my dad actually lived. As we made our way to that place,

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Kyle knew the heaviness of the burden that I was carrying with me, tried to cheer me up, but he knew there was kind of nothing he could do either. He was powerless over that as well. I'm embarrassed to say that I played the front nine pretty well, and that did improve my spirits, but that was fleeting with a couple back-to-back double bogeies at the turn. I was feeling the weight of the moment and this news that I had received. Then we made our way to the 13th hole at Olympia Fields. The 13th hole was a really easy par three if you're a golfer. It's pretty short. There's a big old green. Just the sort of hole I needed. And I threw a dart to about three feet. Not going to tell you if I made or missed that birdie putt, but it felt real good on the tea. Walked up to the green, and this place is, I should tell you, it's pristine. Every blade of grass is in its place. It's out in the southern part of Chicago metro, and so there's really nothing around it, okay? You feel like you're on your own. You're kind of by yourself in this place...except for your companions that are walking with you. We got to the 13th green, and I proudly marked my golf ball. And as I was reading the way in which it was going to make its way, take its path, to the hole, I saw in the distance about 50 yards away in a sand trap, uh, this piece of trash swirling in the Chicago wind. I couldn't really tell what it was. I was just disappointed that somebody had left some litter on the golf course. It's kind of one of my things. I try to pick up broken tees, or if there's a cut blowing around, I'll pick it up, put it in the bag. Right? We all should do our part with that. So, I see it in the distance as I'm reading the putt and I finish out the hole and I look back over at it, and it's still there swirling. I think to myself, I should walk over there and grab it, but it's too far away and the caddies are already going the opposite direction. So I walk on and we play 14, which goes away from the green on 13 and then 15, which comes right back by. As we make our way up 15 towards that green. I look over and that piece of trash is still swirling in the wind there. And then as fate would have it, it took off and began to come our direction, and it made its way slowly towards us. And Kyle and I are just kind of watching it, mesmerized. And I decide, well, this is my chance. God wants me to pick up the litter and do away with it, right? So, I kind of start doing one of these, getting prone and ready to somehow grab this piece of trash out of the Chicago wind. And I'm hearing in my head when I was a second baseman in Northwood Little League, my mom would tell me, "You got to get your bottom down, your glove against the ground if you're going to get it." So that's where I am. And the crazy thing is in the windiness of this golf course, I didn't have to move. Not an inch. Blows right to my feet. Put my left foot on front, on top of it. And then I pick it up off the ground. And it's a mylar balloon, and it still has a little bit of helium in it. And I open it up and I immediately start crying, and Kyle looks over and walks over to me and he says, "What's it say?" And I said, "It says, "Love you, mom." And then he starts crying and then our caddies walk up to us and they're like, "What is going on?" I said, "Well, my mom died when I was 13. Uh, my parents got married here." Through tears I'm saying all this to them. "And I've just kind of had the worst 24 hours of my life, if I'm being really honest. And uh, and I just found this."

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And this sixty-year-old caddy starts crying too. And all of a sudden, there's three men holding up traffic on the 15th hole of Olympia Fields because we're crying. "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." So Kyle pulls out his phone, and he takes a picture, and it's one of the worst pictures of me ever because I'm a mess. And yet, it's one of the best pictures that I'll ever look upon because it's this consistent reminder every time I open my phone of the time in Chicago when I was at my bottom in the midst of some real significant difficulty. and the one that I call upon, the one that we know as Christ Jesus, you know, finds a way to take the promise and to reassure me in the moment. "I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

I'm not sure what the banks of your emotional river look like right now. I don't know what you are carrying with you in this moment. Not sure what milestone you're looking back upon or staring right at.

Perhaps there is deep joy for that which you are navigating right now. But if there is not, if there is difficulty, if there is resistance, then our text this morning does two things. First, it says to you that you have been called and sent by your God to be about grace and peace and love and justice in the world. That is your calling. No matter what the world says and does, no matter what the people around you, how they emote, you are to be about love and justice and peace. Jesus has sent you into the world to be extensions of his grace.

But the second thing is perhaps more important for us.

There's not simply a movement that will happen when you leave this place from disciple to apostle. There is a spirit that will go with you. And so whatever it is that you have to navigate in the world in the next week or so, whatever it is you're walking back into in the courtroom or the classroom or your dining room, whatever it is you're walking into at work or in a hospital room, whatever it is you are walking into as you move into that place called by our God, I can assure you that the promise of Jesus is true for you. just as it was true for the disciples who became apostles a couple thousand years ago. And this morning, this text is meant to remind you, to have you remember, that Christ is with you always, even to the end of the age.

What was true for the disciples is true for us. May we trust it this day and always.
In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, Mother of us all. Amen.