

Matthew 28:16-20
"Joined Together"
September 24, 2023
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Our Second Testament reading is Matthew 28:16-20, let's lean in & listen...to God's word for us this day...

Scripture (New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition)

The Commissioning of the Disciples

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 When they saw him, they worshipped him, but ~~they~~ (some) doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 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 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Let us Pray:

Come, O Holy Spirit, come.
Come as the fire and burn,
Come as the wind and cleanse,
Come as the light and reveal,
Convict us, Convert us, Consecrate us...until we are wholly thine.

And now, Lord, my prayer is simply this:

That the words of my mouth

And the words of all our hearts will be found pleasing and acceptable to you,
for you are our rock and our redeemer...Amen.

Sermon

This morning, I want us to spend some time thinking about *The Trinity*.

I want us to pause for a moment to appreciate and celebrate the inter-connectedness of the Godhead – Father / Son / Holy Spirit – Creator / Redeemer / Sustainer.

Jurgen Moltmann, German Reformed Theologian and Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology at the University of Tübingen, has said, "[the story of the gospel is] the great love story of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, a divine love story in which we are all involved together with heaven and earth."¹

¹ Migliore, Daniel L., *Faith Seeking Understanding*, Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1991, p. 60.

The Reformer Martin Luther is attributed with the following quote, “To deny the Trinity endangers your salvation; to try to comprehend the Trinity endangers your sanity.”

I will not seek, today, to define the Trinity – I will not seek to explain the Trinity – my ambition and goal today is to draw us into the mystery of the Trinity AND how that mystery empowers us to go forward in this world.

Our Matthew text this morning is helpful in this regard, in that it is not seeking to explain Trinitarian theology – rather it is helping us to talk about the God among us – at work in us and through us – and all the requisite mystery and transcendence that goes along with our encounter and experience with this God who is eager and willing to be known in the every day stuff of our lives.

Perhaps our question today is not so much what we know about this God who is active in ways that are creating / redeeming / sustaining –

Perhaps our question is not even how we explain this God who is Creator / Redeemer / Sustainer –

Perhaps our question is what difference does our encounter with this God who is active in our lives in creative / redemptive / sustaining ways make in our lives AND in what ways can we see God’s creative / redeeming / sustaining presence at work in the communities around us AND through us?

In essence, what does our “sentness” – our going out – look like as we follow this calling to go into the world and to bring the good news to those we encounter along the way.

In what ways are we involved in the **CO**mmission of Jesus – that is **mission with** one another and the one of whom Matthew’s gospel declares at both the beginning and the concluding chapters – is God with us!

They shall name him Emmanuel which means *God is with us*. – Matthew 1:23

And remember I am with you always to the end of the age. – Matthew 28:20

The good news of this news is that we are not alone – we are joined together – by one another and by the God who calls us into this endeavor.

We don’t have to have it all figured out – in fact faith may reside best in the questions – as we persist together in the faith to do the work of God “in spite of” our certainty.

In our text, one of the key phrases – at least for me – is “...and some doubted...”

Amid the doubt – amid the challenge to our confidence in the faithfulness of God – the promise is that God is with us...

This is a recognition of the reality we might find ourselves occupying at various points in our life journey ...

– those times when we wonder questions like “how do I hold onto hope?” – in those moments, perhaps our greatest solace is the recognition of the life creating / redeeming / sustaining promise we can hold onto – that God *is* with us

sometimes God is with us as the one who creates out of chaos /

sometimes God is the one who sustains us /

sometimes God is one who teaches us / redeems us /

sometimes God is the one who calls us, seeks us, shows up at just the right time

– God *is* with us is a promise we can hold onto wherever we are in this world...

...to the end of the age.

The translation of that phrase *the end* is interesting.

– it can also be translated consummation – completion – perfection

– this casts the concept of *end* in a whole new light – it is not so much the end as in eternal – instead it is the end as God imagines the end of God’s revelation

– the end as in the way God knows it can be – there is a perfection yet-to-come that is only known by God.

Don’t we pray it each week in the Lord’s Prayer – “thy will be done...on earth...as it is in heaven”?

And we are called to participate in that ever-unfolding yet-to-be thing God is creating / redeeming / sustaining ... that kingdom God is calling into being!

And we are not alone in this endeavor...

“All authority,” Jesus said, “in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 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 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. ...”

In Matthew’s gospel, “authority” (*exousia*) is always connected to Jesus’ healing and forgiving acts. People celebrate Jesus’ deeds and words because they recognize he is acting *not authoritatively* rather he is acting as one *with authority* – there is a difference:

The former is about subjugation and conquest of the world – it is an exertion of power to control.

The latter is about liberation and service for the world – it is a power to do justice.

Only in Matthew does Jesus say, “Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ (Matthew 9:13)

Matthew’s Risen Christ is calling people to journey together (with God and with each other) to proclaim God is at work creating / redeeming / sustaining a new reality where people are called to serve the communities in which they reside with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love that they may see beyond racial, ethnic, cultural and religious differences.

That they may become communities which “...obey everything [Jesus has commanded them]...”

What exactly has Jesus commanded?

Just a few chapters earlier, in Matthew 22:36-40, an expert in the law asked Jesus, ³⁶ “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” ³⁷ [Jesus] said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

In essence, our orthodoxy (what we believe) must match our orthopraxy (how we live out our beliefs).

In practical terms, people won’t care what we know until they know we care.

In faith terms, people will know the good news about God’s incarnate love by how we treat them.

One story and then I’ll close.

A New Year Resolution to get into shape hit a middle-aged man and so he decided to start jogging Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday mornings in his neighborhood. He laced up his shoes, stepped outside his duplex and headed north up the block of his street. He took the same route every morning. Like clockwork he’d be out the door and home in about 30-45 minutes.

Something happened on those morning runs – something bigger than merely his body becoming a fine-tuned caloric burning machine. He noticed the people around him. More importantly, he noticed people by recognizing when he didn’t see them in the familiar place.

On his weekday runs he noticed along his route men, women and children lining up in front of the local soup kitchen for a breakfast meal.

On his Saturday morning run he realized something – the local soup kitchen isn’t open and there was no line of men, women and children waiting for their breakfast meal.

Over the next few months, he began to recognize those men, women and children who were outside the soup kitchen were still in the neighborhood on Saturday morning – they just didn’t have the place to congregate on Saturday because the soup kitchen was not open.

Hard as he tried, he couldn't get the faces out of his head.

And so, one Saturday morning he decided to do something different after his morning run – he dug a Camping Stove out of his basement – went to the supermarket and bought two dozen eggs, some bagels and cream cheese, OJ, Milk, cups and napkins and he went back in front of that soup kitchen and cooked breakfast for some of those men, women and children.

And now he's adopted a new cool down exercise following his Saturday morning run which involves setting up a portable kitchen on the sidewalk and cooking breakfast for houseless people.

Now, he serves coffee to his friends and talks with them and sometimes even prays with them but even if he doesn't pray with them, he is always praying for them in his devotional time.

This man's prayer has become, "God, help me to see the faces of those around me and to see them long enough that I might discern what I could do to help them."²

Creating / Redeeming / Sustaining – that's what this man offered in that breakfast meal.

Creating / Redeeming / Sustaining – that's the mystery of the Trinity.

Creating / Redeeming / Sustaining – that's what we're called to do as well.

To God be the glory – now and forever more!

Alleluia and Amen.

² This story taken from Donal Miller's book Blue Like Jazz.