

Sermon June 4, 2023 Trinity Sunday Fr. Nick Smith

Genesis 1:1-2:4a Psalm 8 2 Corinthians 13:11-13 Matthew 28:16-20

In the name of God, who makes us, loves us, and keeps us. Amen

Have you ever watched one of those movies where the beginning scene is a confusion of events and characters you haven't met and leaves you wondering just what is happening, and then the next scene begins with a title "six months earlier"? Well, if we read today's Gospel selection from Matthew and then look ahead to next week's, we might find that next week's scene ought to have such a caption. Fact is, this week's reading, which you just heard, comes at the very end of Matthew's Gospel narrative, and might just leave you wondering how the disciples came to this point in their lives and ministry, and then have to wait until next week's scene to find out. We will be reading a lot more from the Gospel according to Matthew this year, and slowly the themes will develop and then lead us back here to today's outcome, to today's final scene. Meanwhile, taking today's reading out of context, we might scratch our heads and wonder why the disciples went to Galilee (I thought they stayed in Jerusalem, locked away in a room where Jesus came to them on Easter day and showed them his scars), why there were only eleven of them (I thought Jesus called twelve disciples), why they worshiped Jesus despite their doubts (could they have it both ways?), why are they being told to baptize people (except for that scene where Jesus begins his ministry by being baptized by his cousin John, I don't remember any baptisms in the any of the Gospel stories, do you?). Stay tuned, and Matthew will try to tell us how we came to this concluding scene.

Yes, uniquely, Matthew's Gospel ends with a final scene in which Jesus gives the remaining disciples a great commission. The women who have discovered the empty tomb and met the resurrected Jesus along their way bring instructions to the disciples to go to Galilee where Jesus will be waiting for them on some random mountain. Some of you have watched the show "The Chosen", in which the screenplay is a blending of information from the four gospels, and I'm curious what the writers will do with a future episode about the end of the story. In Luke and John, Jesus specifically tells the disciples to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit, but in Matthew there is no such command, nor an ascension up into the clouds in Bethany. What Matthew finds more important is this great commission to evangelize the whole world, all races and cultures and ethnicities and nations, making more disciples in the name (that is to say, in the purpose) of the Trinitarian God. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Not three Gods, mind you, but one God whose three distinguishable aspects have been revealed through scripture and personal experience. This revelation has been brought to the disciples through Jesus, and now they are to reveal this epiphany to the whole world. Despite, by the way, their various doubts, their general inexperience, their unfamiliarity with other cultures and languages, their lack of formal education, and their own concerns about being worthy of the task. Really? Is this what Jesus came back from the dead to tell them? Is this why he had the women tell them to make that long, arduous trip to Galilee? Is this why he insisted they return to the place where their discipleship began? They must have been scratching their own

heads, too! But there it was, that command to “go”, to just go and do all those things which needed to be done for the salvation of the world, all those things which were intended to repair the broken creation.

So, today is the day when we specifically celebrate the Holy Trinity. It’s a central Christian doctrine, and so it gets its own special day on the church calendar. Shall I explain it to you? Do you think that the disciples, in the great commission, were meant to go into the world and explain it to everyone? Personally, I think that experiencing the trinity is more useful than explaining it, that talking to God is more helpful than talking about God. I think that may have been the intended task for the disciples: to participate in life with the Trinity and share that experience with the world rather than lecture about doctrine. Teaching sometimes has more to do with learning than with passing out information. And Jesus may have thought that by teaching, his disciples would themselves be taught. As we share our passions and our love with others, we learn how to love better. But that sharing requires boldness, and so it makes sense that Jesus would tell them, and us, to just go and do it, even if we are full of our own questions. And if you do have questions about the nature of the Trinity, live out those questions faithfully and share them with God and with each other.

Simply put, the concept of the Trinity is meant to express God’s creativity, God’s gracious outreach to people, and God’s inspiration which makes life flourish. We find evidence of Trinitarian intent in our sacred scriptures, in the prayerful deliberations of our church traditions, and in our daily lives, too. Whether we say ‘Father, Son, and Holy Ghost’, or ‘Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer’, or ‘Parent, Christ, and Spirit’, or any other image we choose, the Trinity is meant to express the miraculous blessing of God’s nature as we are able to see it. We believe in one God, not three gods. According to what has been revealed to us, God is love and we can apprehend and celebrate that love in three ways, each of which is a blessing and each of which works together to create, redeem, and sustain. It is all love. It is all God. How is this possible? Well, just asking that question will enrich our lives and, with our help, could set everyone in the path of restoring the creation, building helpful relationships, and repairing this broken world. So, please, keep asking that question.

In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus tell the disciples to always remember something both reassuring and yet a bit challenging. He says: ‘Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’ Given what he has asked them to do in the world, this is probably the thing they most need to hear. God’s creativity, forgiveness, and spiritual fortitude will always be at their backs, and will lead them forward, too. And I’m quite sure that Matthew wanted us all to hear that reassuring word as we tackle the tasks of discipleship in our own lives and times. May Christ’s command to ‘go’ and just do it be heard from our own random mountainsides even today. And may God’s Trinitarian love be with us all. Amen.