



Revd Ro's Reflection on Trinity Sunday

Year A

2 Corinthians 13.11-13

Matthew 28.16-20

When I was ordained twenty years ago this month I received some wonderful and thoughtful presents, all of which I still possess and treasure. One was a representation of a Celtic knot, three rings symbolising the Holy Trinity. I keep it by my bedside. To the Celtic Christians the trinity was at the centre of their lives. Even the humblest task was done in the name of the trinity and God in three persons was ever at their side. That is so wonderful; the high king of heaven was also as close as their breathing. This I think is something we should try to get back to.

Our gospel reading for Trinity Sunday is the conclusion to St. Matthew's gospel, chapter 28; it is a short chapter but contains so much! It begins thus,

^{28.1} 'After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.'

So here we are on the morning of the resurrection. Mary Magdalene is present but we are told of another Mary. Maybe she was Mary the wife of Cleopas and he was the Cleopas we hear of on the walk to Emmaus that evening. There they not only see the angel and the stupefied guards but, on the way to tell the disciples the wonderful news of the resurrection, they meet the risen Lord. What they do is vital,

⁹ 'Suddenly Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings!' And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him.'

There is no doubt, no questioning, this is Jesus and he has been raised from the dead, they fall down and worship him as God. This is a prerequisite of the Christian life, worship whether public or private. Jesus tells them to instruct his disciples to go to Galilee where he will meet them.

There follows an interlude which must not be ignored. The soldiers rush back to tell the chief priests what had happened. The chief priests and elders have a meeting and bribe the guards of the tomb.

'You must say, "His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep." ¹⁴ If this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.' ¹⁵ So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story is still told among the Jews to this day.'

People will always find reasons to explain away the resurrection; people don't rise from the dead - fact. Well that is fact, people don't. Jesus has raised people from death, the widow of Nain's son, and Lazarus but they are resuscitations done in and through the power of God, they will die a human death again. The resurrection is not like this, Jesus is human and divine and only God can vanquish death. He is alive for evermore. The resurrection is the lynchpin of the whole of Christianity. As Paul puts it, 'If Christ had not been raised we are of all most to be pitied, but Christ was raised.'

Jesus is part of the Godhead. That is the key point Matthew is making. Our reading is that of the meeting of disciples with Jesus at the mountain in Galilee prior to his ascension.

¹⁶ 'Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.'

The fact that it is on a mountain is so significant, think of the Sermon on the Mount, the transfiguration and of course if we go right back into the Hebrew Scriptures the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. The reaction of the disciples is similar to the women when they saw their risen Lord.

¹⁷ 'When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted.'

That is so factual, the fact we are told by Matthew that some doubted, he need not have included that detail. I wonder if it means doubt as we know it, don't believe or find it hard to believe or if it means they were afraid. I also wonder just who they are that Matthew is referring to, we will never know. The point is any 'doubt' would have evaporated when Jesus addresses them. His words are called, 'The great commission,' each sentence has a purpose. There is no conventional greeting such as the 'Peace be with you,' as in St John's gospel, Jesus gives them his final orders.

¹⁸ 'And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.'

Firstly Jesus states who he is, he is part of the God of earth and heaven, of all that is and his Father has given him authority over all. Think of chapter one of St. John's gospel,

¹ 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.'

St John's gospel was the last of the gospels to be written, theology has developed a good deal further but actually if you analyse Jesus' words in Matthew they are very similar. 'All authority has been given to me' or as St. Paul puts it.

9 'Therefore God also highly exalted him

and gave him the name

that is above every name,

10 so that at the name of Jesus

every knee should bend,

in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

11 and every tongue should confess

that Jesus Christ is Lord,

to the glory of God the Father.' (Philippians 2)

The first thing Jesus does in our passage is to spell out to the disciples exactly who he is, having done so he can move on and the 'therefore' is the command, it is because he has the authority he can authorise them,

¹⁹ 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,'

The baton has been passed to them, Jesus is returning to his Father and it is time for his followers to take out his good news to the ends of the earth. That is their mission and it is ours. Baptism is at the heart of Christianity, it is not a rite of passage it is a biblical commandment. At baptism the candidate confesses Christ as saviour and their belief in God the trinity as they turn from sin and turn to him. At baptism the power of the Holy Spirit is called down on the candidate. I have heard it called ordination to the priesthood of Christ's holy people, which is lovely. All those who turned to Jesus and became his followers were baptised and here Jesus gives the words which are used, in the name of the trinity. Here it is that Matthew tells us Jesus speaks of God as trinity. It is a huge sentence, later John will explore it, 'I am in the Father and the Father is in me' and 'I will send you another comforter, the Holy Spirit.' For now we have those simple words that mean so much and of course that is why this reading is set for Trinity Sunday.

Thirdly they must teach. The disciples will have to understand Jesus' teaching before they can do that properly. In Acts one the disciples and followers wait in the upper room for the promised Spirit. The Holy Spirit transforms, emboldens and enlightens them. They are empowered to teach with understanding, prior to that they are confused and uncertain themselves. Now they have the authorisation of God's Holy Spirit and as Jesus promised will be able, through that power, to heal and to teach others. They can baptise and God's Holy Spirit will descend on the new Christian.

Jesus gives a final promise

'And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

How is he with us, in the Holy Spirit of God. What a wonderful promise, God is with us, we are not alone. This 'great commission' to the disciples is ours too; every word of it is for each follower of Christ. We must take out the good news, teach with understanding and live it out in our lives. Jesus is with us always.

Our reading from 2 Corinthians contains similar words,

^{13.13} 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.'

Paul is ending his letters to the Corinthians with a blessing. The blessing is one which is so familiar to us and it has been used in churches throughout the centuries. It refers to God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit of God. Paul is writing before the gospels, theology was still in its infancy, the word trinity has still not been used. But this is the centre, the keystone of our faith. God is one God in three persons. The three persons of the trinity are in relationship with the other, though distinct. The word for this is perichoresis. It has been called the dance of divine love or perfect community. 'I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Here Paul speaks of it as true fellowship or communion. We in our communities are meant to reflect that loving communion of God.

Jesus of course is God incarnate, the face of God that humans have seen. When Paul uses the word 'grace' it is not throwaway it is so central. Humanity has been rescued by Jesus through the freely given grace of God, we have not earned it. The loving Father has opened his arms in Jesus and

drawn us to him in a loving relationship with him. All who follow Christ are equal in the sight of God and all are loved by him.

Just as Jesus' great commission' is not for those first disciples only but for all his followers, so too with Paul's final words to the Corinthians.

¹¹ 'Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you'

Here is Paul's instruction for community. Paul had had a great deal of trouble with the Corinthians so he leaves them with a pattern for their church. This should be the aim and objective chosen by every church. It should be our pattern too. Care for one another, put others before yourself and live as Jesus taught. Do not put self at the centre, do not seek for power, do not fight and wrangle.

Our God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Jesus walked with humans as incarnate God, he gave his life in love for us and won for us eternal life with God. He will come again as king and judge of all in God's newly created order. Until then we have Jesus' promise, 'I am with you always till the end of time.'

'God sends his Holy Spirit to show by works of power that Jesus is Lord.' David J Mansell.

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