

On Trinity Sunday, some of us are like bees drawn to nectar. It's as though, on Trinity Sunday, clergy and theologians can be mesmerized into preaching a carefully constructed and reasoned explanation of the Holy Trinity. We become fascinated by the "mysterium absolutum" or we give in to the impulse to lay out the history of Trinitarian theology. We imagine that everyone is intrigued by inquiries into the immanent and economic Trinity.

But none of that is on the Gospel author's mind. And none of that is on our hearts and minds this morning.

On *this* Trinity Sunday, in this parish, there are concerns that are more of the heart than of the mind. And in these, the last five lines of Matthew's Gospel, there are words of reassurance and strength. They have almost nothing to do with theories about the Trinity and almost everything to do with our relationship with the Holy One.

Let me show you what I mean: Just before this reading, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary encountered the Risen Christ who told them not to be afraid and gave them a message to pass along about where he would meet his friends. And so, following the women's guidance, the 11 remaining disciples have returned to Galilee.

Eleven people. Not hundreds of trained, influential champions with deep pockets, but eleven people who are still traumatized by the murder of their friend and teacher just days before. Against all reasonable expectation, their murdered teacher has appeared to them.

The translation that we heard this morning, like many, presents Matthew's Greek as "they worshipped, but *some* doubted," as though a few of them offered devotion and a few of them harbored questions. Maybe. But devotion and doubt are not mutually exclusive. In fact, as we mature in our faith, these become increasingly intertwined and fruitful.

And a more accurate rendering of Matthew's Greek portrays this more complex and realistic human emotional response. Consequently, when this remnant of loyal followers saw Jesus, "they worshipped but they doubted."

Sitting here in these pews are other loyal followers who have come to this holy space to offer their devotion *and* their doubt. Among the people who are filled with gratitude, there are people bringing hearts broken open

by grief, pouring out love in a different way. Among those basking in serenity are people in relationships fraught with frustration offering all the trust they can muster. Worshiping beside people brimming with enthusiasm are people wrestling with unfair or unjust life circumstances who are rightfully hoping and waiting for God's intervention.

We are a small group of loyal followers, including worshipping doubters, who have brought *all* of ourselves before the God that we adore. Having seen the Risen Christ, we worship even as we question. This is not a sinful position to be in, but for many, it is a painful place.

Matthew's Jesus gave an astonishing answer to the small and traumatized gathering of 11 disciples. But the answer is in desperate need of rehabilitation. What we hear is: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...."

And that phrase may be one of the most influential in the entire history of Christianity. That *one short* phrase has been a source of both beneficial goodness and painful mischief. Fortunately, everything we need to maintain the blessings planted in this phrase and forgive the missteps it has inspired are right here in our Scripture.

First, we have to hear Matthew's Risen Christ saying: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given *to me*." Not to the disciples, not to the church, not to those who have been ordained or even to those who have been baptized. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Christ.

For Matthew, Jesus was the new Moses. Matthew's Jesus embodied Torah, the instruction revealed to Moses that God gave him to teach us the truth about God. Jesus *does not replace* the instruction God gave Moses. For Matthew, the Risen Christ *is* the teaching – and *that's* the authority God has granted.

Now, the author of Matthew's Gospel wrote Greek and wrote it well. And there is something that we have let become hidden in the English phrase: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...." What Matthew's careful choice of words actually says is something more like: "As you go, *disciple* all the Gentiles."

As you are out and about, Jesus says, *disciple* all the people who are not like you. It's a verb, not a noun; an action, not a result. To *disciple* people is to contemplate and live what Jesus taught, and then to interact

with people who do not yet see themselves as children of God so that they experience something of God's light and of goodness. To disciple is to interact with people who are in different circumstances so that they receive something of God's mercy and of compassion, a taste of God's justice or reconciliation. To disciple is to interact with people in ways that allow them to discover God's hope and wonder and light in their own way, without imposing our own cultural traditions in the process.

This may have seemed an already unreasonable task to the 11 astonished people still reeling from the crucifixion and rubbing their eyes at the sight of their resurrected friend and teacher. But then, as if that weren't daunting enough, Jesus told this stunned little cluster to teach the world how to be in relationship with God. For this fragmented group, continuing on must have seemed absurd. So few of them and such an intimidating responsibility. Think of it.

Now, some people refer to this passage as the Great Commission. I don't. Emphasizing the command Jesus gave them neglects those who, at least for a moment, must have felt burdened beyond their strength. Even for those filled with enthusiasm and joy, the project that Jesus has handed them is preposterous. An effort that is hopelessly unattainable *unless*, that is, *unless* we reframe the emphasis.

Think of the last words that Matthew's Jesus speaks as something beyond a directive. Hear them instead as a final promise. Even on Trinity Sunday, these are the most important words in this passage: "Behold," the Risen Christ says. "Behold, I am with you all the days even to the completion of the age."

"Behold," not "remember." Remembering is mostly just calling a past event to one's mind. Beholding is opening ourselves fully and in humility to God, accepting and living into our shared nature with God. To behold is to notice the human participation in God's Divine outpouring upon the world. To behold, embrace and act on this truth in our lives, especially our lives together in community, is what perpetuates the presence of Jesus Christ.

As we disciple others, God plants curiosity in them, stimulates their hope and, through our actions, begins making them whole. When they are ready, we can teach them how to listen and welcome them into the body of Christ in baptism.

We don't make disciples, God does. God draws them to Godself by the presence of the Risen Christ in a community. People see who is included in that community, who is lifted up, who is strengthened. The more we disciple, the more God breathes out the Holy Spirit through us into each other and into the people that we serve.

That's how we participate in God's work of making the realm of God's heaven just a bit more real. The Trinity inspires contemplation into action, and nurtures the heart of authentic holy relationships.

Someday, we'll talk about the Trinity and maybe even explore some of the various and evolving teachings about the One Holy and Undivided Trinity that we call Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

But on this Trinity Sunday, I would invite you just to behold, to drink in, the promise that Christ is with us. Not only in the future, but now and on all our days; days when we are confident of God's presence and days when we wonder if God even exists, let alone cares. Days when we flow with gratitude and days when we grow impatient with waiting. Days when we radiate joy and happiness, and days when we wonder why we should bother leaving the house.

Christ is here with us on all our days with whatever is on our hearts. Encouraging, comforting, guiding, protecting and listening, but always pouring out grace and peace.

On this Trinity Sunday, whether it is joyful or painful to do this morning, behold, *take into* yourself the final promise that Matthew's Jesus made with no qualifiers, no restrictions, no exceptions: "I am with you always, to the end of the age." Right here, right now and forever.

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