

Trinity Sunday, Year A, 2020

It is in Matthew's gospel that we read Jesus questioning Peter: but whom do you say that I am? and we are here today, on the occasion of Trinity Sunday reading from the end of this same gospel, so it is fitting that we would retell that story as we have it in the earliest manuscripts: *Jesus said, Whom do men say that I am? And his disciples answered saying, Some say you are John the Baptist returned from the dead; others say Elijah, or other of the old prophets. And Jesus answered saying, But whom do you say that I am? Peter answered saying, "Thou art the Logos, existing in the Father as His rationality and then, by an act of His will, being generated, in consideration of the various functions by which God is related to his creation, but only on the fact that Scripture speaks of a Father, and a Son, and a Holy Spirit, each member of the Trinity being coequal with every other member, and each acting inseparably with and interpenetrating every other member, with only an economic subordination within God, but causing no division which would make the substance no longer simple."* And Jesus answering, said, "What?"

In the rhythm of the Church year it is right for us to stop at this time and ponder the Trinity. We have gone through Eastertide and Pentecost, and now we are beginning what is sometimes called common time, by pondering the Trinity. In a sense it's like last week we recognized the birth of the Church and now we begin a season where we practice being the Church. Therefore it seems appropriate that we should start at the beginning with the fundamentals. Even professional athletes and musicians remember that it is essential to practice the fundamentals. So let's use this week to remember the fundamentals.

Matthew's gospel begins with the announcement of Jesus' birth referring to him as Emmanuel, God with us, and these are Jesus' last words to his disciples as well, as we have them today in the final episode of Matthew's gospel known as the Great Commission. The idea creates bookends in the gospel and the repetition makes it a focal point of Matthew's message about the identity of Jesus. So one fundamental Christian understanding about the nature of the divine is that in the person of Jesus Christ, God is with us - Emmanuel. Each of us may think of this in a number of ways as Christians have throughout the centuries. Many hymns invite Jesus to walk with us: I want Jesus to walk with me; He walks with me and talks with me and tells me I am his. It's a fundamental in Christianity that we do not walk through life alone and anywhere we may wander, Jesus has already led the way. This is supposed to bring us hope in times of despair, courage when afraid, and companionship when we feel alone. As children of God, in the Kingdom of God, we are never alone. Emmanuel is always by our side.

To some, this language and these images or stories we have in scripture may be taken literally and to others figuratively. Christians have had this discussion since day one and continue to have it even today. You may vacillate between one or the other depending on the story or if you got up on the wrong side of the bed. Great tragedy in a nation or a person's life can dramatically alter how one sees scripture or the shape of one's faith. In other words, if your faith or understanding of the divine is not the same as it was yesterday, that's just fine. And if you are going through a period of doubt, that is just fine too. One way I know this is from our gospel reading today where it notes that the disciples gathered and some doubted. Really? The ones who witnessed the crucifixion and resurrection? The ones who watched helplessly as Jesus calmed the storm or fed five thousand? Those disciples doubted? Yes, it seems. But the doubt

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is not the fundamental we should focus on here. Rather, as in all things, Jesus is the focus and it might be striking to you as it is to me that even amongst those who doubt, Jesus still carries on. There is no shaming or even mention of it. There are just the marching orders. This is also a fundamental of Christianity.

We sign on to a way of life which does not ask us to smile every day or feel an emotional high every time we pray. It is lovely when we do and I hope we all seek out opportunities to connect with God deeply and meaningfully so that indeed we do feel like we are walking on sunshine most of the time. But we are asked to make disciples of all nations. That is who we are as a people. This requires prayer and service. Prayer and service. We are people who pray and we are people who serve. In Anglicanism there is the notion of holy habits. We pray regularly, making it into a habit so that even when we are not in the mood, there it is. And again we hope each time we encounter the Divine in prayer it is a moving experience, but returning to the analogy, an athlete or musician does not smile at every practice, or at the hundredth repetition. Rather, we do it for the love knowing each prayerful activity is important without having to feel an emotional high. It is a holy habit.

The same can be said for service. It can be fun and fulfilling to serve others and I would hope it would be for us all. Shouldn't we feel good interacting with our neighbors, particularly someone in need, knowing we are making the Kingdom of God a reality for one another through our love for each other. Of course. But stuffing envelopes, and saying no to something more fun, or living into a commitment on a cold rainy night can make anyone question one's commitment. In this way, service to others is also a kind of holy habit. It is a fundamental of Christianity. Holy habits like prayer and service help make the well deeper and deeper and the beauty of that is one day we will need that life giving water to sustain us or someone we love and there it will be.

So we have the knowledge that Jesus walks with us, our holy habits of prayer and service, and since it's Trinity Sunday let's have a third fundamental: community. We are the Body of Christ. Jesus called a community to follow him, and sends them out to create a worldwide community. In our reading from Second Corinthians today Paul concludes by addressing the people as brothers and sisters, gives instruction on how to greet each other, and describes the Holy Trinity in terms of grace, love, and community. Which is one way we understand the Trinitarian God: as a community of grace and love. Throughout history some have used the term *perichoresis* to describe this relationship. There are images of three persons, the Trinity, arm in arm dancing in a circle which portray this concept. Who we are, having been created in the image of God, understanding God as Trinity, are people who live in community. We are the Body of Christ who understand the world as children of God in the Kingdom of God longing for the presence of God which can find its truest expression in community with each other. Community is fundamental.

Walking with Jesus, the holy habits of prayer and service, and being in community are three fundamentals of who we are as Christians that we might ponder on the day we ponder the Trinity. May our wondering help us grow in faith and love deepening our spiritual well always filling it with more and more life giving water to drink and to share.