

## Who Authorized This?

Our second scripture reading this morning comes from the Gospel of Matthew 28:16-20. Listen now for a word from God.

“Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Today in our liturgical calendar marks Trinity Sunday, the Sunday in which we acknowledge the mystery of our faith in the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It follows directly on the heels of Pentecost, which celebrates the gift of the Holy Spirit descending upon the disciples in tongues of fire, binding them together as one body, the church. Trinity Sunday marks the transition from Eastertide to Ordinary time, the liturgical season in which we remember that God is being revealed in the ordinary rhythms of everyday life.

That Christ calls us into discipleship, week after week. That the Holy Spirit is moving, encouraging, challenging, and inspiring in each new moment.

This week in my clergy group text chain one person asked if any of us had a good metaphor for the Trinity, that she could use to teach the children at her church. One person said that he once peanuts M&M's to teach about the Trinity. There are three layers of the peanut M&M, the peanut at the center, the chocolate layer surrounding the peanut, and finally on the outside the candy coating. Each of the three layers, he said, cannot be separated from the others, and without any one of them, the peanut m&m is no longer a peanut M&M—it becomes something else. He added, however, that this metaphor commits the heresy of partialism, suggesting that each of the three persons of the trinity is only a part of God, and not fully God in and of themselves. Another person suggested a well-known image for the Trinity is like water, which you can find in three forms: ice, liquid, and gas. This too, however, commits a heresy called modalism: that each of the persons of the trinity is one form that God takes, and minimizing the distinctness of each of the three persons.

Can you see the trouble here? There isn't a singular image that can distill all that God is into something that is easy to understand. For centuries

theologians have tried to find language to help us understand the Trinity, and yet with each new conjured image, we are met with still more mystery.

Because God isn't an ice cube, or a peanut m&m, or a three-leaf clover to be plucked up and kept in our pocket. Any language that we use to describe God inevitably falls short of the fullness of God's mystery. And yet this baffling, mysterious, wonder-inspiring triune God has something to teach us about faithfulness, in the ordinary times of our life. About what it means to follow Jesus, to proclaim good news,

Our text for today is the very last text in Matthew's Gospel. It is Matthew's conclusion to his telling of the Good News. Jesus has been raised from the dead. The women have arrived at the tomb to find an angel of the Lord, who tells them to go to Galilee, where the risen Christ has gone ahead to meet them. So, the women leave the tomb, gathering the other disciples and going to Galilee where they are reunited with the risen Christ.

And we hear from the gospel writer that when they see him, they worship him, but some doubted. Some doubted. Even as they stand on top of a mountain with their friend, their teacher, the one who they watched die on the cross, now suddenly alive, they worship, and they doubt. It might be easy

to stand in judgment of these so-called doubters. But I think that for most of us our worship and our doubt go hand in hand. We worship a God we cannot possibly understand, and we doubt that such a God could even exist at all. We worship Christ who rose from the dead, and we doubt the sheer absurdity of such a thing. We worship a God who promises to make all things new, and we doubt whether those promises will ever come to be. We worship a God who beckons us come and follow, and we doubt whether we are capable of answering the call.

One of my favorite movies from in recent years is *Conclave*. In the movie Ralph Fiennes plays Cardinal Lawrence, the dean of the college of Cardinals, who is tasked with organizing the conclave to elect the next pope. As the cardinals arrive in Rome for the conclave, there is uncertainty, political maneuvering, scandal, jockeying for position. And Cardinal Thomas prepares to deliver his sermon which will set the stage for the conclave's proceedings. The sermon he gives is a powerful about the relationship between doubt and faith. He says:

*There is one sin which I have come to fear above all others. Certainty.*

*Certainty is deadly enemy of tolerance...Our faith is a living thing*

*precisely because it walks hand in hand with doubt. If there was only certainty, and no doubt, there would be no mystery and therefore no need for faith. Let us pray that God will grant us a pope who doubts.*

Matthew makes sure to include the presence of those who doubted, because he wants us to know that doubt is not a disqualifier for discipleship. Doubt is a reality of faith. They worshiped, and they doubted, and there in the presence of the risen Christ, those who worshipped and doubted and were commissioned by Jesus.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given unto me, 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.

It is a monumental task that Jesus puts before the disciples. This is the moment in their ministry where all their preparation will turn to practice, where their learning turns into doing, where the theoretical becomes concrete, the intellectual becomes embodied, the theological becomes practical. Jesus commissions them to continue the work that he has started. To go throughout the world, to spread the good news, to make new disciples, and to baptize them in the name of the Triune God. It is a monumental task,

and yet they need not be afraid, because they are sent by the one to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given.

The mystery of the Trinity is that in some unknowable way, this Jesus who stands before them on the mountain, is the same one who hovered over the waters of creation, who spoke the world into being saying let there be light, who called generations of ancestors in the faith to serve God, who inspired prophets to speak truth. This Jesus is, as John describes it in his gospel's prologue, the eternal Word, who was in the beginning with God. Who was God. Through whom all things came into being and who without, not one thing came into being. This same Jesus stands in front of them, their friend, and teacher, and the one who trusts them to carry on his work. So, it is a monumental task that Jesus gives them, but they do not need to be afraid, because they go in the power and authority of the risen Christ.

When I was in seminary taking intro to Hebrew bible, we had a team of preceptors who helped our professor to teach the class. They were students in their second or third year who had done well enough to be asked back to teach the next class of students. They were responsible for leading small groups, tutoring, and for administering our tests and quizzes. And more often

than not, they were a pastoral presence to first year seminarians, struggling to decode ancient Hebrew.

One of our preceptors, whose name was Jenny, had a particular way of comforting us, when we felt like we just weren't getting it. Anytime we had taken a quiz or a test, and especially when we hadn't done particularly well, she would tell us "Remember, your baptism is sufficient for your call." Your baptism is sufficient for your call. It was of course, a subtle and humorous way of saying, it's ok if you failed, it's ok if you can't translate a lick of Hebrew. God has still called you. God will still use you. But the truth of that statement extends far beyond the scope of an intro to Hebrew class. It is a powerful affirmation of what we believe about God. Each of us, in the waters of baptism is claimed by the love of the Triune God. Each time we gather around the font to welcome even the smallest infant into the body of Christ, we believe that they are called to participate in the work of Christ in the world. They are marked as Christ's own, the one to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given. They are drawn into the sacred and mysterious dance of the Trinity.

You and I, and everyone who has been claimed in the waters of baptism, are called to serve, commissioned by Christ to live faithfully, to proclaim the gospel, to teach and make disciples. And we do so, trusting that we have been sent by the one to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given. Your baptism is sufficient for your call.

Jesus ends with a word of comfort. “Remember I am with you always until the end of the age.” Christ who is Emmanuel, God with us, promises to continue to be with us throughout any challenges that we may face. The triune God who confronts our certainty, confirms our call, also comforts us in the face of trial. This promise to be with us isn’t just a platitude, but a truth made real by the power of the Holy Spirit. With the psalmist we rejoice that there is nowhere we can flee from God’s presence, nowhere in heaven or on Earth where the Triune God will not find us. Thanks be to God. Amen.