

## Trinity Sunday 2020

In the Gospel reading which I chose for last Sunday (John 20.19-23), we heard Jesus commission his disciples – ‘As the Father sent me, so I send you’. Today, we have Matthew’s description of that same commissioning (sometimes called The Great Commission). ‘Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations’. ‘Go and make’ is the imperative – this is what you must do – and then we have how it is to be done – baptize and teach. Earlier in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus has sent out his disciples, two by two, to proclaim the kingdom, telling them to go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (10.5-7). But now he revokes that limitation – they are to make disciples ‘of all nations’. This is not something entirely new in Matthew’s Gospel; it is a theme we have heard from the start. His genealogy of Jesus includes gentile women; wise men come from the east to worship Jesus (while Herod acts more like Pharaoh than a Jewish ruler); Roman soldiers become models of faith, as does the Syro-Phoenician woman with a sick daughter, and Jesus has predicted that ‘the Good News of the Kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come’. In the Jewish culture of first century Palestine this would have been scandalous, and to Matthew’s first Jewish Christian readers, totally unexpected. Israel lived in an ‘us and them’ world; Jews were definitely ‘us’ (God’s people) and Gentiles (the nations) were ‘them’. And yet, in spite of this, the first Jewish Christians did precisely that – they proclaimed the Good News of the Kingdom to everyone, not just their fellow Jews, and within a century people were

worshiping God as Father and Jesus as Lord across the Roman world. So why had Jesus told his disciples previously to go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel? Perhaps because at that time the disciples weren’t ready to engage with the wider horizon of Jesus’ mission; they hadn’t grasped the enormity of what God was doing in and through Jesus, nor what would be expected of them. And aren’t we sometimes the same? So far but no further – not quite ready to take the bigger step, to engage with those we feel are ‘other’, to make a commitment which could be – will be – life changing.

And as well as ‘making disciples’ there is baptizing. In Matthew’s day Jewish people baptized Gentiles who converted to Judaism. John’s baptism for repentance was something new and strange, perhaps offensive – baptising Jewish people as if they were Gentiles – ‘them’. But John told the gathered crowd that the one who would come after him would baptize with ‘the Holy spirit and fire’, so maybe, in the community to whom Matthew was writing (mainly Jewish) baptism wasn’t necessarily immersion in water as a sacramental act (as we think of it today) but rather an act of conversion. The disciples were to make new disciples by calling them into the Good News of the Kingdom. John proclaimed repentance in the light of God’s coming reign.

Jesus began his ministry in Galilee by proclaiming ‘Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near’ and he told his disciples to do the same. So making disciples is an act of proclamation – and also one of witness. We proclaim the Good News not only in what we say but also in what we do;

indeed, by what we are- and that is also how we teach. There is an awful lot of teaching in Matthew's Gospel – and Jesus does it all! He teaches by healing, by feeding, by forgiving, by welcoming and yes, by talking, telling stories (parables) directly addressing those who were used to being ignored or despised. Now the disciples (that's us) are told to go out and do the same. They/we are told to go out and make known his message, identify with his mission, learn to live like him and, as far as we are able, be his presence in the world. That is how we learn to be his disciples, that is how we call others to follow in our – and more importantly in His – footsteps. If that seems terrifyingly impossible remember who it is who is sending you – the one to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given. And not only is he sending us, he is going with us! 'And remember (or perhaps better 'Behold') I am with you always to the very end of the age'. So we go in the name and pattern of Jesus, supported, empowered by, the Holy spirit to build the Kingdom of Heaven, the Father's will for the world. That is the meaning of our faith, that is why we have Christian communities. That is why everything is directed to learning and to teaching people to live like Jesus, strengthened by him. He remains alive in his communities, with us, amongst us, healing, forgiving, welcoming. The Father has given all authority to Jesus and he gives it to us – 'Go, therefore' the Great Commission – but also the great invitation, an invitation to share in the life of god and his mission in the world. It is not an easy life to which we are invited, this life of service where we seek to show God's love to everyone we meet and to draw them into his family.

To do that we need and indeed are gifted

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.*

The word Trinity never appears in the New Testament. It was centuries after these events that Christians invented the word to describe God as they knew him – or her.

What does appear in the New Testament is a simple acceptance that there is one God (that comes from mono-theistic Judaism) yet there are distinct characteristics which all seem to be God. There is a simple acceptance that these three persons relate to one another, communicate with one another, and yet are one.

In Judaism, we meet God the Spirit, hovering over the chaotic waters, and bringing order. We meet God the Word, spoken to produce life. There is God the Lawgiver, who guides his people. There is the God of Glory, dwelling with his people in fire and cloud, tabernacle and temple, and there is God's wisdom, the handmaid of creation, the first-born of all his works, his chief of staff, his delight. Through Wisdom, God creates everything, including the human race. So to embrace the Wisdom of God is to discover the secret of being truly human, of reflecting God's image. Wisdom is that aspect of God which will guide you through the mazes and mysteries of life.

It was into this rich tradition of Judaism that the early church went delving for words to explain what they now believed. Into the melting pot went Spirit, Word, Law, Presence (or Glory) and Wisdom, and what emerged was

‘Trinity’. Which is why we now address our prayers to the Father, in the power of the Spirit, and in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord – and if you still don’t understand the doctrine of the Trinity, don’t worry. After all, God is a mystery.