

Sermon preached at Gisborne, June 7, 2020 (Trinity Sunday)

Holy Spirit, pour out upon us, wisdom and understanding, that, being taught by you in Holy Scripture, our hearts and minds may be opened to receive all that leads to life and holiness. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Genesis 1:1-2; 4a; Matthew 28:16-20

The road that taken

The picture in the front page of the order of service is called *The Trinity* by the Russian iconographer Andrei Rublev (1360-1430). It is universally considered a masterpiece, both artistically and theologically. As it is based on the story in Genesis 18, it is also called “The Hospitality of Abraham.” In the story, the three angels announced the birth of the son Isaac to Abraham.¹ It is when the image of the Triune God is depicted for the first time in scripture. Here, the first thing we may notice is the circle that symbolises communion. The three figures are set in a harmonious conversation. It is expressed with looks and gestures that converge on the table - the symbol of the Incarnation and the Eucharist. The central figure is interpreted as the Son, while the Father left and right the Spirit. The common divine nature of the three is underlined by faces and youthful figures and identical, halos all the same, the colour blue (divine colour) and the sceptre (the sign of the same authority). Here one of the distinctive features is a reversed vanishing point. Where is the vanishing point, in your opinion? Marty Folsom explains:

“The icon is more than a snapshot; it is an invitation, This is evidenced by the fact that where most pictures have a vanishing point in the distance to give depth to a horizon, this image has the vanishing point at the front of the frame – a V forms the structure. The very front point should be imagined off the front of the icon, as if to include us in the meal. That is its invitational intent...that depict the triune family. This window creates an image of the connection between God’s gathered personages and the family summoned...²

Who is summoned to this table? – we, the children of God. Responding to the summons is to walk the same road that Jesus walked. But the journey is not easy – we experience doubts, and we encounter obstacles. But the risen Jesus promised that in him, ‘all’(πᾶς) will be well, which will let us – the church live as the family of the Triune God.

1. **Doubts of the believers**

Matthew 28:16-17 shows that the eleven disciples were about to be commissioned by the risen Lord. We know that Matthias was chosen to replace Judas Iscariot,³ but here we don’t see it happened yet. There were only eleven of them, who were told to return to Galilee where it all began. In verse 17, when they saw the risen Jesus, they worshipped him. Even so, some doubted.⁴ How they could not believe him even after they saw him, we may wonder. Here the word *distazo* has its root *dis*, which means “twice” or “two ways.” So *distazo* means “doubt” and also “hesitate.” When the eleven disciples see Jesus, they want to believe—and they do believe—but they are torn. We are not surprised by their reactions. Their doubts can be our doubts. When things are not going well as we have wished/planned, we may do the same thing.

Yet Jesus does not rebuke the disciples. He understands their doubt but speaks to their faith. He understands their frailty but calls them to carry on his work. Jesus chose to do his work through the original less-than-perfect disciples. It comforts us as we can be confident that he can do the same through us. Their doubts and frailty only emphasise that Jesus’ choice of ordinary people. They will carry out an extraordinary mission of

¹ “Genesis 18:1-2 – “The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. (2) He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground.”

² Folsom, Marty, *Face to Face: Volume Three: Sharing God’s Life*, p346.

³ Acts 1:12

⁴ Matthew 28:17 καὶ ἰδόντες αὐτὸν προσεκύνησαν, οἱ δὲ **ἐδίστασαν**.

God's work throughout history. To God, our ability is less important than our availability. Frail and full of doubts may we be, but we took the road that will lead us to the table prepared by God.

2. ***The word 'all' (πᾶς)***

There are four "alls" in Matthew 28:16-20.

First, all authority – as part of the shared substance of the triune God, the authority of the Father was given to Jesus. With this authority, Jesus taught and exercised in his healings and deliverances. The teacher is now revealed as the Lord of all, and he will commission his disciples with this authority.

Second, all nations: The purpose of God is to be reconciled with all humanity, which includes every nationality and race. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus' ministry was primarily limited to the Jewish people. But, here the boundaries are now expanded to include all humanity. Here, Jesus doesn't merely say to take the *gospel* to the nations, although it is implied. What Jesus here actually says is that they are to *make disciples* of all nations. What does it mean? Disciples are students or learners. As we have seen in Jesus' ministry, Jesus taught his disciples 'faith 101' till the end. They were very slow to learn. They often made mistakes. Some of them doubted still. Even so, Jesus continued to teach them, to nurture them. Making disciples of all nations means becoming messengers of God's invitation to the Table and sharing the bread of life of the triune God.

Third: all that he commanded: Of all the gospels, Matthew's is the most teaching-oriented. Scholars say that Matthew structures his gospel in five major sections of Jesus' teachings – or Five discourses.⁵ Among these five discourses, the third part of the command is to teach people about the kingdom of God through the parables in Matthew 13.⁶ It is the same work that had been carried out by Jesus, which will be continued by his disciples.

Fourth: 'always with us' - Jesus, as Lord of all, promises to be with us, the church, always, even until the final consummation of everything. This continuing, abiding presence of Jesus is a profound promise. Matthew begins his gospel with a similar affirmation in 1:23, in which Jesus is named Emmanuel or "God with us." It is primarily related to the life of the triune God in which we are the participants. With this promise, Jesus made it sure that our life as the church will continue in the triune God.

The church as the family of the Triune God

The life of the church is living God's calling here and now in response to the invitation to the table of the triune God. In our story time, we heard about the roads that the worm and Jonah took respectively. The common thing was that none of them liked their summons in the first place. The worm didn't want to leave his home. He was happy as he was. But when the task was given to him, somehow the worm became unsettled. Despite the lack of means to go to the designated place – the hill, east of Nineveh, he determined to overcome many challenges that was untold in the story. Besides, the bush wasn't prepared yet as Jonah was still running away from God. In the end, God made everything work together, including the doubts, frailties, hesitation, storms, a whale, the bush, a sultry east wind and all for good! So in your opinion, who faithfully responded to the summons of God? Also, what was the mission of the worm, do you think?

When finished eating the bush, the worm transformed into a butterfly; Nineveh was saved this time; Jonah had also fulfilled his calling and learned about the compassion of God. Everyone participated in the Lord's table by following the will of God. It is what we are doing, and will do continually as this is the road we have taken. Amen.

⁵ 1. The sermon on the mount (Matthew 5-7); 2. The mission (Matthew 10); 3. Parables for the Kingdom of heaven (Matthew 13); 4. Discourse on the church (Matthew 14-18) and 5. Discourse on End times (Matthew 23 and 25).

⁶ It includes the parable of the sower, the parable of weeds among the wheat, the parable of the mustard seed, the parable of the yeast. Jesus explained all these parables one by one so that his disciples may understand what God's kingdom was like, and what they were supposed to do the work in God's kingdom.