

BIBLICAL REFLECTION

for Trinity Sunday (7 June)

Matthew 28:16-20

The "Great Commission", as it is often referred to. Today's scripture, providing the final words of the writings of Matthew, a gospel that tells probably the most elaborate and detailed version of Jesus' life and ministry. So it seems right and proper that the 'punchline' of this work should have the imagery it does. We know who He is, we know where He is going, we know what to do. Or so it would seem.

And from this extract, a vision of the imagery of what we now call "The Trinity". Not content with one God, aka the Hebrew teaching, we had to produce another – a more human-looking one, in Jesus of Nazareth; and then, not so convinced by that one either, we dreamt up a third version called the Spirit. Of course, this reads somewhat contentiously, but think about it: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," what precisely is that saying to us?

I have no idea how early theologians battled with the concepts of those formative days, but the history books certainly load our lives with a rich – if complex in parts – tapestry of thoughts and ideas, some of which became enshrined in scripture, in early writings, and in the annals of that same history. Apparently, that all culminated in the great synods of the fourth-century, and the formation of the creedal teachings, and suddenly we had the answer: one God, three dimensions, all interlinked, all inseparable, all equal, all relevant, all necessary, all required. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have suddenly become one and the same being.

Trinity Sunday acknowledges this. It is the 'bridge' moment between the end of Jesus' story at Pentecost (albeit that we have turned the clock back a bit for today's scriptural benefit), and the 'rest of our lives' as it were, illustrated by the interminable "Sundays After Trinity". Once we get fed up with those (twenty-plus weeks), we start the whole business of 'Who is God?' off again, with the launch of yet another Advent Sunday – and the rest, they say, is history! Repetition abounds, and the cycle of spiritual life turns once more.

And it turns in the knowledge that we do, indeed, have this three-fold God firmly planted in our lives – and it turns because we enjoy that sensation, and do not want it to be a mere point in history. Our faith is stimulated constantly by the sheer presence of this notion. We might look back and reminisce about taking our 'O'- or 'A'-levels (or whatever!), but I doubt if many would want to endlessly keep repeating the exercise, however much they might have influenced the path of life thereafter. In our faith, though, we do want to revisit and renew; we do want to be re-inspired, re-motivated; we do want to re-encounter, to re-learn. That is why there is endless repetition; that is why we potentially grow. And we do so because, in engaging with faith continually, so we engage with God continually, and our lives are thought to be improved as a result.

This is why I find the phenomenon of folk desiring to start that process (i.e. seek Baptism), yet fail to move beyond its mechanics (i.e. never come to Church again), quite bizarre. Why would you want to align yourself to some 'oddball' being, quite alien in nature, at a particular moment in time, and have no idea why you are doing it, what you plan to achieve by it, or why you are bothering? Why would you want this strange mysterious power inflicted upon your new-born baby? There is a hint of logic in a more mature approach, perhaps personal choice when older, but why when it means literally nothing to an infant psyche or the adult influences that surround such?

When the great creeds were formulated – "I believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty; I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God; I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life" – they were there for a reason. They were there to proclaim the power and majesty, the rights and authority, the scale and the drama of it all. They were there – and continue to be there – to proclaim to an uninformed, uneducated – and perhaps uninterested – world that God was indeed a Being with a capital 'B'. He was God. He is God. His fulfilling power can and will transform life with new dimensions that are often beyond comprehension, yet intimately received. This God is no passing phase, providing amusing social distraction on a Sunday morning – this God has the ability to ingrain Himself on the very lifeblood of the individual. This is the God we should be experiencing at ours and others' baptisms. And He is here to stay!

The "Great Commission" makes this abundantly clear. "I am with you always, to the end of the age." Comforting, albeit alarming. Here is Jesus, reckoning to be alongside the disciples for always. The hope is that they were excited and stimulated by such news; Matthew's gospel ends now, so we have no 'chapter twenty-nine' to reveal all. But we have 'us'. We are here, we who have been touched by that three-fold baptism, we are in the present – and we have the spirit of the disciples to ensure all continues, all remains alive, all feels right. We may slip a few times – we may even realise that we do not fit into God's plan anymore – but the hope is that the seed planted does evolve, does mature, does blossom. Perhaps that is why babies are dragged against their will to have water thrown all over them by eccentric clergy? [Rest-assured, it will soon end!] Who can say? But seeds planted – as any "Gardeners' World" fan will know – can only germinate if given the right conditions. And those conditions require a response to today's Commission.

"Go out into the world and become that world. Bring alive the great teachings of history, bring alive the encounters, the hopes and the promises, as best you can. Go out and be my people." We are asked to do nothing more than simply breathe the Breath of God, and in doing so, bring to the world the beauty of it all. Three dimensions, all playing their part; three dimensions, all relevant; three dimensions, all uniquely powerful. And one God.

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