

Matthew 28: 16-20

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 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, 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28: 16-20, 2017

This festival in which we lift up our belief in the Holy Trinity would naturally include this gospel lesson.

It is the passage that most clearly presents a doctrine of the Trinity as undeveloped as it was when Matthew wrote Jesus' words.

But there is more going on here.

This passage speaks directly to the worshiping community. Look at how it starts out.

“Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him they worshiped him;”

and the text says “but some doubted.”

Well, does that mean those who doubted didn't worship? It sounds like it.

We look at the original text to try to get some clarity and we find something a little strange.

The word “some” doesn't really appear in the original Greek text.

What is there is the Greek word *de* which means *but* or *and*.

Now, this may sound like a petty distinction at first, but look at how it changes the translation of the verse. It now reads,

“And seeing him they worshiped and they doubted.”

Those who worship, even in the very visible presence of the resurrected Jesus, are also those who doubt.

They are one and the same.

Our Adult Sunday School class did a study of a book by Mark Allen Powell entitled *Loving Jesus* a couple of years ago.

and in that book he says this about our passage for today:

*... I want to note that the word **some** is not actually found in the Greek Bible. Why is it in the English version? Well, Matthew uses a particular construction here that allows translators to think that the word **some** could be implied. He also uses that construction in seventeen other instances, though no one ever seems to think the word[**some**]is implied in those cases. It could be implied here, but why would it be? I asked a Bible translator that question one time and got the following response: "The verse wouldn't make sense otherwise. No one can worship and doubt at the same time." I invited this fellow to visit a Lutheran church. We do it all the time. [p. 121]*

This place where we gather to worship God is also a place to which we can also bring our doubts about faith and about God.

Whether worshipers and doubters are two groups of people, or a description of the whole group, or what goes on in the heart and mind of one believer,

Jesus gives the same Great Commission to them all -- to the worshipers and doubters.

However this verse is understood, it illustrates that the separation of the wheat and weeds that Matthew talks about in Chapter 13 has not yet occurred.

Both worshipers and doubters are present in the community even as it worships.

Worship may be the essence of spirituality, at least for some. But worship ... can sometimes be superficial.

In Matthew 15, Jesus tells the Pharisees that they worship God with their lips while their hearts are far from God.

The Pharisees, of course, are often the fall guys in this Gospel and they seem to stay in trouble all the time.

Still, say what you will about the Pharisees -- the one thing they never do is *doubt*.

They are always certain about everything.

"God said it, I believe it, that settles it" is what they would say.

It never occurs to them that they might have overlooked something or misunderstood something.

As a result, they are often wrong where it comes to Jesus, but they are never in doubt.

The lack of doubt does not make them or any of us right.

By contrast, disciples of Jesus worship and doubt at the same time -- and Jesus doesn't call their worship superficial.

It might be going too far to say that doubt is a good thing, but I don't recall a place in the gospels where Jesus rebukes anyone for it.

And so the disciples have worshiped Jesus in their doubt, and he goes on to give them his command.

He commissions them to carry on his ministry in the world, and that is where we run into this Trinity thing;

make disciples, baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and teach; these are the calling of all disciples.

When the disciples met Jesus on the mountain his purpose was not to give them a lesson on the Holy Trinity.

That is something we have taken out of the conversation as part of the evidence for our understanding of the nature of this God we believe in.

And this is something we always struggle to comprehend, and I certainly am not able to bring clarity to that for you today.

What I can say is that this Trinitarian understanding of God gives us a fuller grasp of the nature and character of God.

Let me put it this way.

If when we baptize we leave out any one part of the three natures of God, then we don't have a full picture of God and God's work and relationship with us.

If we baptize in the name of the Father only we deny the work, suffering, death and person of Christ, and the ongoing life giving activity of the Spirit.

If we baptize in the name of Jesus only, we miss the person of God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, and God's ongoing work in our lives through the Holy Spirit.

What if we baptize in the name of the Spirit only?

We then miss the awesome creativity of God the Father and the work of Jesus that has saved us from sin and death.

In our baptism we are immersed in the whole being of God
whether we understand it or not,

and thanks be to God for that,

for in that we are immersed in the being of a God who
is communal and loving.

We become a part of one God in three persons whose sacrificial
love spills out into the world and all it's creatures

so that we may be a people who love, respect, honor and
care for one another in a way that our love spills out into
our neighborhoods and communities

in tangible, beneficial and beautiful ways;

in creative, redeeming and life giving ways.

And so our calling is to go, make disciples, to baptize and to
teach all the world.

While this sounds like an impossible task there are two
things we need to keep in mind.

If we accomplished that in our own neighborhoods and
community God would be well pleased.

AND

We must remember Jesus' parting words in this passage:

"I am with you always, to the end of the age."

You are not alone.

You are not alone to carry out your calling.

You are not alone in all the things going on in your life.

You are not alone when you doubt that he is with you.

God is always with you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.