

June 11, 2017  
Holy Trinity Sunday  
Matthew 28:16-20

“But some doubted.” We tend to breeze past those words in verse 17 of our Gospel text. We call this section the Great Commission of Jesus Christ and it is loaded with all sorts of great news for sinners.

First off, this is the resurrected Christ speaking. The victory is His. He has gone to the cross with mankind’s sins and risen from the dead, leaving those sins behind Him in the tomb, powerless to damn us.

Jesus declares His authority over all of creation and beyond. He is commanding that the word of His victory go out and be proclaimed into all the world that more and more would come to believe, be baptized and be saved.

And of course, He gives the promise that those who love Him are never alone. “*And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*” This scene is nearly all good news by, in and of Jesus.

“But some doubted.” And these aren’t strangers who are doubting. This is the eleven; the ones who were called by Jesus and who have been with Him for nearly His entire ministry! They were told time and time again by Jesus that He would be crucified and then rise three days later and they know this has now indeed taken place! When Jesus appears to them here they rightly worship Him! And this isn’t hero worship or king worship or something like that. This is God worship, the kind the devil asked for way back when tempting Jesus in the wilderness.

So these eleven are recognizing Christ as the risen Messiah of God and worshipping Him...but some doubted.

They don't disbelieve, as Thomas did for a while. But some are of two minds when it comes to Jesus. The Lutheran Study Bible footnote says "they had a hard time absorbing the events that had transpired." But isn't that a little too kind? They were looking the risen Christ right in the face, but they were still doubting if He and His resurrection and His promises were true and could be trusted.

I look at this and I really struggle trying to figure out if this is Law or Gospel. I mean, just a few weeks ago I gave a sermon that was all about "Don't doubt!" The Word of God is that He is Risen! It's true. Don't doubt. Shouldn't we rail against these guys, of all people, blessed to see the risen Christ with their own eyes, and yet they doubt?

But then I pause and consider that this is Holy Trinity Sunday; a day when we use fancy terms like "unity in the divine majesty" and "three persons in one God" and "neither confusing the persons nor dividing the substance" in a silly attempt to get human words to wrap the conception of a God that is infinitely beyond our comprehension. And really, confronting the risen Christ is faith really is an encounter with the Trinity Itself!

To see the Son is to know there is a Father; a Father who chose to sacrifice His Son that His created humanity that turned against Him would be saved. To see the Son is see that He humbly and obediently was on board with that plan all the way into our very humanity itself...and then too and through the grave! To see the Son and believe it's true and that the promises behind Him forgive your sins—sins that you repeat time and time again and failures in faith too numerous to track—that is faith only the Holy Spirit can give. To encounter the risen Jesus is to encounter the unfathomable person and unfathomable love of God. And I guess a natural reaction is to doubt, to be of two minds. Your worldly nature want to deny Him. But your new, God-given, sanctified nature believes and receives the gifts of His kingdom.

There is Law here. “Don’t doubt” is an exhortation against temptation.

However, “but some doubted” is more so Gospel here. It’s Gospel because Jesus knows they are doubting. He knows they are doubting but He doesn’t stop to rebuke, chide and punish them. He keeps speaking. He keeps speaking the Gospel promises despite their doubts.

*“All authority on heaven and earth has been given to me.”* Jesus is in charge. Your incomprehension and doubts? They aren’t stopping Jesus. You’re not in charge. So stop doubting and put faith in Jesus...but doubts or no, the God and man who died to save you is ruling the earth and heavens!

*“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...”* And doubts or no, Jesus wants you. You’re His and you’re loved by Him and He wants to use you to make His love known to the whole world...or at least the parts of the world in which He places you. Your doubts don’t disqualify you from His kingdom or from His service.

*“...baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...”* Oh yeah, your doubts aren’t getting in the way of His salvation. Christ’s baptism is to be gifted to all nations, lots and lots of people, doubting people. The faith, life and salvation of Christ is going out to people despite their doubts, and it is saving them, by the working of God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Holy Baptism does what it does, despite the doubts.

*“...and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”* Jesus commands His Word of salvation be proclaimed...even by doubters! Again, the Holy Spirit is at work through the Word and He can do His work on the doubting! Seriously, He can do His work on the outright denying and disbelieving! He can do it even if the one speaking the Word isn’t sure of all the details, doesn’t have all the answers, and is maybe sometimes doubting the Word himself!

Ultimately, this is one of the most incomprehensible things about the incomprehensible Triune God—He works to save really, really lousy people. He works to save doubters and deniers and sinners. He loves the unlovable, and He loves to save them, even though not a single one on them deserves it and not a single one of them ever comes to Him of their own accord. Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, above and beyond us in power, majesty and righteousness, comes to us to die for our redemption, and continues coming in Word and Sacrament despite our continued sins, despite our doubts.

So folks, on Holy Trinity Sunday I wouldn't recommend you waste a whole lot of time trying to figure out why God does what He does, why He allows to happen what He allows to happen. He has made clear what He has done for you in Christ. He has redeemed you, made you a disciple, claimed you in Holy Baptism and still comes to you abounding in love and forgiveness. That's enough.

Don't doubt Jesus. And if you do, well, turn back to Him in your doubt and ask His forgiveness. He has authority over all things. He's bigger than your doubt. In the glory of the Father, by the blood of the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit, your doubt stands forgiven. Get over it. Amen.