

Trinity

15 June 2014

Exodus 34:1-8; 2Corinthians 13:11-13; Matthew 28:16-20

God with us.

Two of our readings this morning are short, but full of powerful messages. Paul has come to the end of his letters to the people of Corinth and he is taking one last go at trying to get them to stop tearing themselves and each other apart. And Jesus, now risen, is commissioning and sending the disciples off to continue to spread God's message.

Matthew has Jesus going to an unnamed mountain, and for Matthew unnamed mountains are often associated with revelation of divine authority and presence. Jesus tells the disciples he has been given 'all authority in heaven and earth', and then he sends them out into the world to take that authority, which is God's, and baptise in the name of the Father, the Son and the Spirit. Jesus reassures them he is with them always. They stand with Jesus here on the mountain 'on the edge'; they are called to be people 'on the move' yet also people 'rooted in place'. They are standing in what could be called a 'thin place', grounded in the knowledge of Jesus; rooted in the story and land of their origins; yet they have been called to go 'out'.... they are in that unexplainable place of 'being on the edge', on the edge of the known and the unknown, even the unknowable.

And in the middle of this story, we also see the human side. When Jesus met with the disciples their response was tinged with two different emotions. They worshiped Jesus, but yet they doubted. Here was Jesus, who they had seen crucified, they had seen him dead on the cross, they had seen him placed in a tomb, and yes some of them had seen the empty tomb, but now he was here with them, standing among them..... And they

worshipped and they doubted. But the word which is translated as doubt, *διστάζω distazo*, is only seen twice in Matthew, here and in chapter 13 where Peter was walking on water, both are occasions of worship and doubt mingled together. But the word is more accurately understood as 'being in two places at the same time'. The disciples can both worship Jesus, and hold doubts as they stand in this 'thin place' on this unnamed mountain, with Jesus who was dead yet now is not, who has called them to go and announce the salvation bought through the death and resurrection of Jesus and bear witness to both the end of a broken world, and the beginning of a new creation.

Matthew bookends his gospel with worship and doubt. He begins his gospel with the profound mystery, this child Jesus is Mary's son, yet not Joseph's. And in Joseph's confusion he is ready to run away, but God tells him to stay with the mystery, stay with the confusion because in the midst of this confusion will be the arrival of the One Joseph is to hail as 'Immanuel', 'God with us'. And so Matthew's gospel starts with 'God with us' and ends with 'God with us'. At both ends, minds are addled, hearts are troubled, they worshiped, they doubted. As it was for the early Christians, so it is for us today. But Jesus is with us, and through him we get engulfed in the full Trinitarian mystery that is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In the middle of worship tinged with doubt, Jesus is with us and promises his abiding presence to the end of the ages. Doubt, or being in 'two places at the same time' does not disqualify us from being in the presence of Jesus. In the middle of our doubt Jesus is with us, and brings to us the fullness of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and invites us to go forward, to move to that 'thin place', to move into ministry as we share and witness to the name of Jesus and his gospel to the ends of the earth. It was not easy then, it was not easy for Paul and the people of Corinth, it is not easy for us

now. But we return to the promise that through baptism into the Triune God; the Jesus who holds out this promise and prospect of new life promises to be with us. Always.

Paul's plea to the people of Corinth comes at the end of some harsh words by him. He has challenged them, he has chastised them. In the passage immediately before today's reading, Paul calls on the Corinthians to 'examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves'. And he tells them, 'when you do you will discover Christ does indeed speak through me'. He then softens his message, 'finally, ... farewell', 'finally ... rejoice', once again our greek translation does not do justice to the word, *chairete* χάρητε means more than farewell or good-bye, it is 'rejoice'. He is assuring them that even though he has been tough on them, they are still loved; they are still his beloved brothers and sisters in Christ. Then Paul gives them four imperatives, keep doing these things. 1. aim for perfection – put things in order, repair what is broken, restore what is lost, *mend your ways*; 2. listen to my appeal – don't turn a deaf ear to me, do what I have been saying; 3. be of one mind – I know that you are both Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female, and that means you have differences of opinion, and that is good. But *be of one mind about 'the truth', about the Gospel*, have the same mind as Christ; because if you can achieve that, then you can 4. live in peace; and that had been hard for the Corinthians up to this point, so Paul pleads for the last time, *live in peace*. After these quickfire imperatives, Paul asks them to greet each other with a holy kiss; what today we would call a 'two-handed-hand shake', because to shake someone's hand you have to have empty hands yourself– no weapons, so greet each other with open hands, with openness; and he finishes with the promise of what will happen if they can achieve it all, 'the God of love and peace will be with you'. God freely gives us God's peace and love, but to

receive it we must be prepared to do what he commands. A gift may be freely given, but it is not received if you do not take it. If the Corinthians can do all that Paul is asking them, they will actually experience what they already have; they will know the presence of the God of love and peace because they will actually be doing the will of God.

What about us. Where is our 'thin place', where are we in 'two places at the same time'. Are we able to 'aim, listen, be of one mind, live at peace' and 'greet each other with a holy kiss'.

Paul finishes his letter with that well known benediction, which slightly alters our Trinitarian order. For the early Christians, the cross of Christ was the center of their thought about God, through the death and resurrection of Jesus they had come to know God as Father through the Spirit. They understood God's love through the cross; they knew their fellowship with the Father and Son was produced by the Holy Spirit. This is how they had experienced the working of the Triune God in their lives and in their history.

Paul invited the Corinthians to live by the grace of Jesus, the love of God and the communion of the Spirit, that invitation is for us as well. He is calling us to do some hard things, things which are not possible under our own strength, but they are possible with God. God is with us. We may not have it in us to achieve all this, but God does. The work of the Triune God guarantees us that we can do what we must do; the Triune God is our only hope for doing what we ought to do and finding full life.

Jesus' statement to the disciples, 'I am with you to the end of the age' is a message to us also. Jesus is with us because the Father has sent him, he died in obedience to the Father, he was raised by the Father, he spoke, not his own message, but the message of the Father. By baptism we have been

born anew by the Spirit, Jesus is with us through the power of that Spirit. By his Spirit we are able to bring the message of the Gospel to all we meet; by his Spirit we are able to use what the Father has given us for the well-being of others.

And so let us all say together the grace that we find in this letter from Paul; The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now and forever. Amen.

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St Paul's Anglican Church
Ipswich*