



“Remember, I Am With You”

Pastor Andy CastroLang

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Scripture (NRSV):

Matthew 28:16-20

The Commissioning of the Disciples

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.”

Sermon:

Trinity Sunday, o no! There are dear people around me today who find the notion of the Trinity untenable, unnecessary, confusing. One God, three persons...o please! Famous author, Flannery O Connor is known to have said, “Father confusing, Son confusing, Holy Spirit confusing...the whole thing is confusing”. And she was a Roman Catholic, so that took some guts to say!

If you want to dig into this ancient theological controversy, (as Pastor Jan is sure to do once she gets to Iliff seminary!) you will of necessity dig into the language in which this doctrine was formulated. You will dig into the competing views of early Christians as they spoke of God the Creator, Christ the Redeemer, the Holy Spirit the Sustainer.

But friends, we are not gonna do that today, and not because I am chicken...I am not. I enjoy a friendly dialogue about the essence of the Trinity and the nature of the Triune God as much as anybody.

Instead, let's talk about the need for God at all. Our culture seems chock full of people these days who have no need of God, one in three, three in one, or anything else. They have no need of any god...Zeus, Odin, you name it.

Their world seems to run along without any holy mystery, any transcendence, any numinous experience at all. There seem to be some with no ache in their hearts, no curious doubt in their minds, no awe that causes them to stop and simply be stunned by the brilliance of it all.

I feel for them. They live, I think, an impoverished experience. Many social anthropologists and others call human beings, "meaning making" creatures. We find power in story, we find meaning in creation, in our life experience, in birth, in death, in stardust, in heartbreak. We look around and wonder.
We look around and tell a story.

Inside us is a mystery, and all around us are more mysteries. It is awe-filling, humbling, and it makes us question, talk, create art, create stories...

This, my dear people, is what some of us call, "God".

The divine, within and without. Actually, the Holy Mystery, in which we are immersed, as a fish is immersed in water. (Thank you, Karl Rahner, sj)

We are so wholly immersed in the Mysterious, Tremendous, Glorious, Numinous, Holy, that we miss it and say it is not there!

We are washed in the presence of the Divine as fully as a baby is washed in amniotic fluid before it is born. It is that baby's world.

God, the Holy, the Awesome, the Darkness that we cannot pierce, the Light that we cannot see...is in us, around us, through us, with us. Our world.

And when someone does want to try to speak of God's nature as Trinity perhaps it is simplest to say it the way St. Augustine did: the roots are wood, the trunk is wood, the branches are wood. One tree, all wood, and yet, still beautiful and endlessly various. A Sequoia, a date palm, a baobab, an elm. A bristlecone pine, a pinon, the ancient ginkgo tree.

God, in us, around us, through us; with us, beyond us. All beautiful and all various and still "all wood", all God.

The Celtic prayer called "The Deer's Cry" speaks of God above, below, before, behind, in our words, in our thoughts, in our living, in our dying.

When I rise in the morning, when I sleep at night.

The psalmist in 139 says,

Where can I go from your spirit?

Or where can I flee from your presence?

⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there;

if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

⁹ If I take the wings of the morning

and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me,

and your right hand shall hold me fast.

¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,

and the light around me become night,"

¹² even the darkness is not dark to you;

the night is as bright as the day,

for darkness is as light to you.

When we return to this brief ending of the gospel of Matthew, this is what we learn.

The disciples now recognize Jesus as more than their teacher, now he is understood to be one with God. That is why they "worship him" in vs. 17.

You don't worship people, you worship the Holy One, the Mystery, the Numinous, the Transcendent Creator, the ever amazing and creating One.

The disciples realize that Jesus is more than a teacher, he is God among them.

And Jesus takes upon himself the Divine Name, "I Am". He says to his companions, "Remember, I Am with you, always, to the end of the age".

None but God can be in all, through all, beyond all; not bound by time or matter.

Yet assuredly, that is what Matthew is telling us about Jesus.

Jesus is one with the Holy One, the Transcendent and the Immanent God...in us, through us, beyond us, around us.

And though we might, the disciples might, experience Jesus as "gone away", Jesus is not. God is not ever gone, therefore, Jesus is not.

That very essence of our humanness, that "meaning making" capacity within us to seek God, is also born of God, is also Jesus, is, as some like to make their nice 3-in-1 Trinitarian formulas...the power of the Holy Spirit, which is also God.

So, the resurrected Jesus can say, "I am with you"...always and forever. Time and distance, and the space-time continuum cannot limit the one who creates and sustains it...and though we don't see a person, we feel Mysterious Presence still.

We feel, and we make meaning in our lives because of this Presence. And this, too, is God, and some call it the Holy Spirit.

Dear ones, if this has given you a headache, I apologize!

I stand before you floundering with words for that which is beyond words.
I stand with you, trying to make sense of that which is beyond common sense.

You and I, all of us together...we may be like someone blind...touching as much as we can, but unable to comprehend the whole, which we cannot see.

Yet, like the blind...our senses are sharper than ever...and they encourage us with more, mysteriously more...

For...in my heart, in my soul, in my life, in all its ups and downs...I sense God is there. Even when I feel God is NOT present, when I ache with a deep-down loneliness...I admit that my understanding is small.

And then, I can only trust in the promise of presence, of being held, of being known and loved.

This I do, even in the dark, even when wounded, even when confused.

I trust the messages of my senses, of my spirit set in this creation, and of my intellect, (yes, even the notion of the Trinity!) when they whisper, or shout, at me. When I pay attention!

They say that these words were found after WW II, inscribed on a wall of a tunnel where people were being hidden from Nazi's in Cologne Germany:

"I believe in the sun, even when it is not shining.

I believe in love, even when I cannot feel it.

I believe in God, even when God is silent."

Jesus' parting words, "Remember, I am with you...to the end".

These are words of utmost comfort, and words of courage and power.

May you find what you seek, in the great I Am.

May you experience, body and soul, even a tiny bit, of the Holy Mystery!

Beyond all names, all definitions, may you know that you are held: in the arms of Love.
Amen.