

“Echo of the Trinity”, 2 Pentecost (A) – 2017

By Tim Hall, 18 June 2017

Genesis 18:1-15, 21:1-17; Psalm 116:1, 10-17; Romans 5:1-8; Matthew 9:35-10:23

We celebrated Trinity Sunday last week... God creator, Christ redeemer, Holy Spirit sanctifier. I ran across a cartoon in the New Yorker magazine this week that I found apropos given this theological mystery... Jesus and one of his followers are sitting on rocks, probably in one wilderness or another. Jesus says to his disciple, “Everyone wants to know what Jesus would do. No one ever asks how Jesus is feeling about his complicated relationship with his father!” So New York.

Trinity Sunday is traditionally considered the culmination of the first half of the Christian year. From the first Sunday of Advent, through Jesus’ birth at Christmas and the season of Epiphany that follows, when we focus on ways to spread Christ’s light in the world, to Ash Wednesday and Lent, when we turn our thoughts inward, exploring our own faith, prayer life, and commitment, to Christ’s passion during Holy Week and his blessed Easter Resurrection, the seasons advance smartly along. Four Sundays of Advent. 12 days of Christmas. 40 days in Lent. 7 Sundays of Easter. Pentecost 50 days after Easter Sunday. Trinity Sunday. Phew!!

Now we’re into that season “after” Pentecost. And we will be for quite some time... until Christ the King Sunday, sometime around Thanksgiving. So finally it’s time to relax. Right??? Probably not, given Jesus’ commissioning of his Disciples in today’s reading from Matthew and what that means to us. But this season does have a different feel to it. Not as rushed. We’re not continually getting ready for the next big event... and then the next one... and the next one. We’ve got time to regroup a little bit. Refresh. Recharge. It may be just a coincidence, but I like the way this season after Pentecost always commences here in America around the same time as high school and college commencements and the start of our summer vacations.

But before we say goodbye to Trinity Sunday, let’s take a quick look at our reading from Genesis this morning. We’re beginning a 10-week review of our Abrahamic ancestors: from Abraham and Sarah to Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah and Rachel, and finally on to Joseph. There will, no doubt, be many interesting stories. When we see Abraham this morning he’s relaxing under an oak tree to escape the heat of the day. We can all relate to that in this heat, right? Then, all of a sudden he looks up and sees three men standing near him. Where did they come from? Should he be frightened? They seem to have magically appeared. Abraham recognizes them not only as spiritual beings, but

as God himself. Abraham has grown pretty close to God after God called him from the city of Ur to start a new nation.

And here, in his recognition of God in these strangers, is where the connection from Trinity Sunday moves forward into the season after Pentecost... We can view this as another instance of God in three persons, blessed trinity. So what does Abraham do? With great excitement and energy he dashes from one task to the next, preparing a meal to serve to these strangers, in whom he sees God, himself. And that's the first takeaway point of this homily... we should look for God in everyone we meet and those we already know and always be excited and energetic in serving them. The second is in Sarah's amused reaction to the announcement that she will have a son... and the eventual fulfillment of this promise. God is faithful and can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.

In last week's readings we read from the opening chapters of Genesis where we saw God as creator of the universe. And then we saw Jesus, in the closing verses of the Gospel of Matthew, commission his disciples as his final corporeal post-resurrection act, telling them to "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."

Now in this morning's reading from Matthew we see Jesus commissioning his disciples again, but we have jumped back to a much earlier time in Jesus' ministry. Whereas the disciples last week were being sent after bearing witness to Christ's resurrection, here they are being sent after bearing witness to an incredible display of Christ's healing and redemptive power.

You see, chapters 8 and 9 follow on the heels of the Sermon of the Mount... three chapters of pastoral teaching where Jesus introduces the New Age that he has come to proclaim. After coming down from the mountain, the crowds follow him witnessing miracle upon miracle performed for those who show great faith in him: Healing a leper, and the centurion's servant, and Peter's mother-in-law; crossing the Sea of Galilee where he cast out evil spirits from a crazy man; sailing back to Capernaum where he healed a paralytic man; calling the tax collector, Matthew, to follow him and then dining at his home; healing the daughter of a synagogue leader and a woman that had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years, just by her touching his cloak; giving sight to the blind and voice to the mute.

So it shouldn't be a huge leap of faith for the disciples to take confidence in their abilities to do as Jesus asks them... no, implores them... commands them (and us). He's told them about the new age and demonstrated the power in believing. And while he

tells them that it will not always be easy, that they will face many challenges along the way, they need to keep pressing on and never give up. There are some unusual and hard to fathom pieces of advice in Jesus' words... do not go to the Gentiles or the Samaritans; be wise as serpents, the Son of Man will come before all the towns have been visited. But we don't have time to dive into those this morning. The point that I take from Jesus' words and that I'm emphasizing this morning is that if something looks like failure, move on. Try again. I've equipped you to do this hard work and it's important. In the words of the popular song, no matter the challenges, just "pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and start all over again."

I know we've all faced times where we've felt that our efforts are in vain. For me, it's been time and time again. But I take heart and renewed courage when I revisit the word, when I see others acting as Christ's hands and feet in this world, when I remember the incredible world God created and the awesome sacrifice Christ made to redeem the world... to redeem you and to redeem me.

We may be surrounded by terrible and appalling events... war, starvation, beatings, rape, murder, forced slavery, deceit... cruelty of so many kinds. But we are also witnesses to joy, love, laughter, care. Look for it around you. Just yesterday morning a St. Peter's mission team left for Guatemala... twelve faithful people looking to extend Christ's hand of healing and love in the world. And per Jesus' advice, they make their base with servants who are worthy, a haven from which to do their work. And so many other mission teams across our country are heading out this summer. But I'm especially heartened by those that put themselves in harm's way every day in all seasons of the year, taking their mission right into the heart of evil. What courage and faith they display.

As we live out our Christian faith, which we need to practice daily, in this season after Pentecost let us take God's promise and Christ's words and deeds to heart, drawing strength and conviction to act courageously in this hurting world. What could that look like here at Good Shepherd? Church dinners. Music programs. Community picnics. Anything to help demonstrate our faith to our neighbors.

Like Abraham, we must look for God in all people. And we must remember that Christ told us, "what you do for the least of these, you do also for me" and act accordingly. Be brave, show compassion, have faith, keep trying. And in so doing we will be furthering God's kingdom here on earth and great will our rewards be in heaven.