

Trinity Sunday 2017  
Roddy Dunkerson

## **Doubt and Discipleship**

### **Psalm 8**

### **Matthew 28:16-20**

First, let me thank you for allowing your pastor to be out of the pulpit this morning. Their attendance at our Annual Gathering is important to our shared life and we believe the gift of this Sabbath Day can be a blessing for your pastor and your church.

On my first Trinity Sunday as a pastor, a parishioner came up to me after worship and said to me “Jesus is God. I’ve never heard anyone say that before.” We had sung “Holy, Holy, Holy” which is the theme song for Trinity Sunday, so, he had sung “God in three persons, blessed Trinity!” But, the Trinity is a pretty strange and challenging concept. Scripture does not contain the word trinity and the Great Commission with which Matthew ends his gospel with the instruction about baptizing in the name of the three persons of the Trinity is a thin nail on which to hang the whole of Christian Theology.

So, I want to say that I am a little glad that Matthew included the word “doubt” in the telling of this story. Intriguingly, the word Matthew uses here he has only used one other time. In the story of Peter’s walking on water in his overly enthusiastic response to seeing Jesus walk on the water. When Peter realizes what he is doing, he begins to sink and Jesus has to grab him. When they are safe, Jesus asks Peter “why did you doubt” and the word is the word used in the story we read today when people received the resurrected Jesus “they worshipped him; but, some doubted.”

Jesus’ response to their doubt is not fire and brimstone, it is the Great Commission. Jesus launches the church into and through the lives of these doubters. We are gathered because they went and made disciples. By tradition, we claim one became a martyr for the faith across the continent west into Spain and another across another continent on the eastern edge of India.

So, is making disciples about travelling long distances and martyrdom?

Yes, and, no, making disciples is about teaching, baptizing and living the faith. But, teaching can get a person in trouble – look what happened to Jesus.

For us, what does making disciples look like?

I think that it means being vulnerable. When I try to imagine myself as being in the midst of the disciples after the crucifixion, I think doubt is just as reasonable as it would be when you find yourself walking on water. Jesus surely knows our vulnerability and about the enormous leap of faith he is asking of us.

When we see the people around us, we know that they are not waiting desperately for us to complicate their lives. Yet, as believers – even as doubting believers, we have accepted that life is more than the superficial. We have accepted an invitation to discipleship ourselves and we have come to believe that God is present in our life in powerful ways and that God’s presence is both a gift and demand. God longs for us to become the wonder that we were created to be and for us to shine in that glory.

When we see another person, it is safe to say that God also wants that person to experience wonder. We believe that “you live and then you die” is not the whole story. We believe that our lives are part of a great web of life that is intrinsically tied into the wonder of creation. The culmination of all history is in the wholeness and joy of communion with the Source of All Being. Life is not simply random chance, life is exposure to the One who is and was and is to be. There is holiness in life itself and in that perceived holiness God longs for us to recognize the wonder of eternity that is in each breath we take.

Most days that is a lot to ask.

Imagine those who had been travelling with Jesus and had set so much faith in the ministry they shared with him. After the crucifixion is there a reason to wonder that they doubted?

When we think of the early followers of Christ, it doesn't seem unreasonable to ask “Why did they ever gather together again after the crucifixion?” We should not miss the absolute failure of everything Jesus was proclaiming. This was not a victory for God, the crucifixion was the victory of a powerful empire which ruthlessly suppressed anything that was seen as opposing its control. Jesus was brutally eliminated from the picture.

Which of us have not been so overcome with events that sensing God's presence was beyond our capacity in that moment? We are like Peter on the sea, more attuned to the real danger of the moment than we are to the possibilities that are being presented to us.

And, in that spirit, we know that other people we meet are also focused on the immediate. Yet, there is a deeper life that is waiting for us if we will only let our minds and spirits focus on the God who created the world from which our life flows, the God who found a way to live among us to help us have eyes to see the wonder of creation and the God who dwells within all that is and moves mysterious between mind, body and spirit.

There are many forces in the world that close our eyes to the reality that Jesus sought to teach the disciples. And, that teaching has come through words shared over many life times to us. Someone has touched us with the story that enlivens our being.

Those gathered with Jesus at the end of Matthew's gospel wondered and doubted. The death of Jesus left them empty of hope and dissolved the power that had sprung up within them during their walks with this great teacher. In the moment of his reappearance in their midst they very naturally saw the chaos of Good Friday more clearly than the Easter of the women who first saw the Risen Savior.

Look at your neighbors and family. Do you see there the wind that causes their hearts to doubt? Remember times you have been buffeted by the chaos of life.

Jesus does not reject those who don't see beyond their fear just like he didn't reject Peter when his enthusiasm led him to get out of the boat and he began to sink into the water.

Trinity Sunday follows Pentecost, but, our story is tied to Holy Week and Easter. We are called this day to ponder our God who makes no sense to our rational minds. Creator, Christ and Spirit, one God, three persons; all our scholarship doesn't unlock the mystery of this story. And, our life often speaks of a much less mysterious unfolding of our human story.

Today, I am asking you to ponder that nagging internal sense that there is more. Allow yourself the courage to step into the place where hope refuses to be extinguished. Trust that part of your journey which has hinted at wonder and insists on possibility.

Then, having allowed that wonder to touch you, remember that those you meet need to have hope revived in their hearts also.

We are not called to evangelize in a way that demands that others come to see the world exactly as we do. Nor are we asked to convince everyone that our understanding is the whole of truth.

We are called to see that our neighbor will have times when they are caught in reasonable doubt, just as we have been. And, in that perception, we are called to dare to reach out a hand, speak a word of hope and promise to stand alongside our neighbor as they take their next step.

I think that is making disciples.

Let's be about this mysterious adventure that has been entrusted to our hearts and minds. Let us "go and make disciples of all nations".

Amen.