

**Morning
Trinity YA**

**7 June 2020
Downing Place United Reformed Church**

Sharing Together

Matthew 28:16-20

The four Gospels describe the life of Jesus but end in different ways. Matthew's Gospel ends with a final appearance of Jesus to his close friends on a mountain in Galilee – we are not told where, other than that it was the one to which Jesus had told them to go. Here he tells them to go out and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Whenever we baptize anyone in church, those are the same words that we still use today.

What does making disciples mean? It means telling people about Jesus; asking them to follow Jesus for the rest of their lives; and living in the way that Jesus taught us to live. Ever since then Christians have been doing that. In the past many people from Downing Place and the churches that went before did that, particularly in China and India.

Today we do not need to go a long way to find people who don't know much about Jesus. We can find them here in Cambridge – perhaps indeed among our own friends. If we want to be friends of Jesus, we also should do what he told his friends to do – to make even more friends of Jesus by telling other people about him. That is a task, not only for today, or this week, but for the rest of our lives.

Genesis 1:1-2:4a
Psalm 8
2 Corinthians 13:11-13
Matthew 28:16-20

May I speak in the name of the living God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I have chosen two texts this morning:

God saw everything that he had made, and indeed it was very good (Genesis 1:31).

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you (2 Corinthians 13:13).

Today is Trinity Sunday, and it is a festival day in the Western Church.. The attempt to celebrate the Trinity in the West in the ninth century failed, and it was not officially recognised in the Roman Calendar until 1334, by a decree of Pope John XXII. In England, however, it became a popular feast-day because it marked the day when Thomas à Becket was consecrated Archbishop of Canterbury in 1162. It therefore became a way of marking the fact that the Church was not subject to the crown; and several dedications of churches to the Holy Trinity date from this time.

Trinity Sunday has also always been very special to me. On this Sunday – liturgically speaking, the date was actually 12th June – sixty years ago I preached my first sermon in public worship at the end of training as a local preacher. Somewhat precociously (as I had not yet even taken my A-levels) I chose to preach on the Trinity; and so I shall today. But I shall begin, rather strangely you may think, by questioning the first of my two texts, from Genesis 1: is everything that God made very good? This question is prompted, of course, by the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Both the media and politicians have readily likened the tackling of COVID-19 to fighting a war; doctors and nurses have been described as those on the 'front line'. And the front line has moved from hospitals to Care Homes to treating dementia patients, according to journalistic fancy. Even some Muslim Imams in the Middle East have used the language of *jihad* (holy war) to describe the situation. But when I watched the descriptions on BBC News of the Royal Free Hospital in Tower Hamlets the other week, I realised how simplistic such a description was. What we were seeing was teams of highly professional people working to the best of their ability in the task of healing, sometimes successfully, at other times not. When I was very small, I had two life-threatening ear infections; today they would never reach the life-threatening stage, but that shows the improvements in medicine in seventy years. If we are tempted to wonder, as clearly some do, whether COVID-19 is the creation of a good God, then I will say categorically that the God that created situations that could give rise to contagious disease also created humans with brains and skill to tackle those diseases successfully. I also suspect that it will be discovered that the spread of this virus will in due course be discovered to be one of the consequences of human misuse of God's creation.

As biologists have learned more in the last 150 years, they have become aware that the natural world is finely balanced. They have also noticed that when this fine balance is disturbed difficulties occur. Some of you may have heard of the effects of reintroducing beavers into the south-west and northern uplands of this country, after they were hunted out of existence in the sixteenth century. The dams they make have helped to slow down the speed of rivers, and reduced flooding downstream. More controversially there have been trial reintroductions of wolves into places where they are known to have lived for hundreds of years, restoring a 'natural' balance between predators and prey –

no vegans there. Some, however, think that the human or economic cost of such experiments is too high. Do we then know better than God?

The world of microbes and viruses is at present beyond our grasp in terms of seeing creation as wholly good, and really deserves a whole sermon, which is for another day. But we need to ask, Good for whom? or Good for what? Nor should we fall into the trap of invoking God to explain the aspects of the created order, which we cannot at present explain. Perhaps this question is a clue to the need for a kind of cosmic redemption of humanity, through the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. It is a risky course; because it can make the crucifixion of Jesus look like a way of clearing up the creator's mistakes, or aspects of creation that went wrong.

Why then does Paul speak of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ – the Son of God – in redemption? The answer comes in 2 Corinthians 8:9. 'You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich'. By assuming human flesh through the incarnation, Jesus became one of us in a supreme act of self-offering: that is grace, a 'generous act' as NRSV translates it.

What then is the place of the Holy Spirit? In my first sermon sixty years ago I suggested that we might see the Holy Spirit as the love, which holds the creator (Father) and redeemer (Son) together. Nowadays theologians would call this an 'economic' understanding of the Trinity: each person of the Trinity is understood primarily in terms of the function they perform. It is a minimalist understanding – though very ancient. Today I see the Holy Spirit as the dynamic energy of God still at work among us: the understanding of God is transformed from a static set of relationships to a communion of persons. Through the Holy

Spirit God creates, and God redeems. The Spirit brings the Word of God to life in us, through our worship.

When we say the Grace together, as we usually say ‘the fellowship of the Holy Spirit’. But to speak of communion in the Spirit involves a process of constant movement and change. What might otherwise be regarded as random change may be seen as God’s action in the world through the Spirit. The role of the Holy Spirit is particularly vital for our understanding of Holy Communion. As we say the words that Jesus said, ‘This is my body given for you’, ‘This is my blood shed for you’, through the Spirit God’s power transforms bread and wine sacramentally into the body and blood of Christ for us. Communion depends, not on *our* power of imagination, or *our* memory, but on God’s action for us in a decisive moment of salvation.

It is therefore ironic that we so often use ‘the Grace’ to end a meeting. It is not an ending, but a beginning. The Grace is pushing us out of our comfortable meeting to act on what we have decided, with the Spirit’s guidance, to show that God *is* still active in our world, regardless of the COVID-19 virus, regardless of wars without and within, confident that God as creator, redeemer and sustainer, is with us and for us.

To that same God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be glory for ever. Amen.