

Father, Son and Holy Spirit...

... Who is for us? Who are we for?

A reflection given on Trinity Sunday, 7th June 2020, by the Curate, the Revd Tim Kelly in the Online Service

Matthew 28:16-20

"Who is with us? Who is for us? Who are we with? Who are we for?" With the recent events and demonstrations in America and worldwide, there's been a lot of discussion about what it means to show solidarity with others. One dictionary definition of solidarity is that it means unity or agreement, a feeling or action, especially among those with a common interest; mutual support within a group. This definition perhaps helps us this morning as we think afresh on the nature of the Holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There's unity within the relationship of the Trinity. And by God's design and plan, a drawing-in of ourselves into that relationship and the commissioning of ourselves to draw-in others. And through all of this, there is comfort, compassion and hope for a weary world.

I asked at the beginning, "Who is with you, who is for you?" One of the side effects of the current lockdown and pandemic can be crippling loneliness. I've heard a number of reports this week that spanned the age range from primary school-aged children right through to the over 70s, of people who feel alone and cut off by the current arrangements, whether that's not being able to meet and play with friends at school or meet with others for a simple face to face, coffee and chat. And although there are virtual means of meeting together, for many, it just doesn't feel the same as physically being present with one another. When we feel all left on our own, the answer to that second question 'who is for you?', may also feel simple: 'nobody'.

However, as we gaze upon the Trinity this morning, we can see that when we bring the three persons of God into the picture, there are some different answers to these questions.

In today's passage, Jesus declares that all authority on heaven and earth has been given to him. Although it says some disciples doubted or hesitated as they tried to comprehend this truth, for the Gospel of Matthew, it is the culmination of the account he has told. In the first chapter of this gospel, we are told the name of Jesus:

'Emmanuel, God with us'. We now see that infant baby clearly taking his throne, the incarnation of Jesus, the Son, shows us that God is with us: the sending of Jesus by the Father shows us that God is for us; He loved us too much to leave us on our own; heaven and earth have to be reconciled. It reveals that we have a God who isn't simply going to maintain a safe distance. Instead, the creator enters directly into the world he created, and as we celebrated at Pentecost, the gift of the Holy Spirit shows us that God doesn't just want to somehow be nearby, He wants to dwell within us.

The tight-knit relationship of the Trinity was already introduced to us earlier in Matthew in the occasion of Jesus's baptism, in chapter three, verse 16: 'And when Jesus had been baptised, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'" There's solidarity, a unity of love, purpose, action and support within the circle of the Trinity.

Through the unfolding pages of the New Testament, you can see that this tight-knit circle has been widened. We're not called to simply stand and admire the bonds of this nuclear family from afar: through the driving force of the Father's love, the grace and action of the Lord Jesus Christ, and then the bestowed fellowship of the Holy Spirit, we are drawn into the circle, drawn into this family.

But I also asked at the beginning, "Who are we with? Who are we for?" Have we simply been drawn into a holy huddle, a holy huddle with the Trinity and a holy huddle with our fellow Christians? Well, there may be times when we need to recognise the warmth and support of that embrace for ourselves. But just as we are drawn to the divine mountain-top moment with Jesus, we are also then sent out. The 'come with me' is quickly followed by 'go to others'. When he says, "Go and make disciples of all nations."

I am reassured that we're told that some of the disciples were confused or hesitated. They, like us, were struggling to get their heads around the human and divine nature of Jesus. They are standing, like us, with one foot in the earthly realm and one foot in the heavenly realm. If you ever find yourself feeling torn between these two worlds, perhaps this helps you too. They are struggling as good Jews who believe in the one true God, to understand what it means for all authority to be given to Jesus. We too

might struggle to understand how this can be a world where Jesus rules when we see so much that is not right.

But perhaps the answer lies in the cliffhanger-like ending of Matthew: this isn't, in fact, the end; it's just the turning point. Jesus started something and he's now asking us, his disciples, to join with him as part of the family of God with him and with each other, in completing what he started. Jesus said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind; to let the oppressed go free to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

Jesus had a manifesto, a mission; his disciples are called to be his apprentices, to do as he did. When Jesus asks us to make disciples of all nations, he isn't simply asking for intellectual assent, he's asking for active participation in his mission. When we pray, 'Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as in heaven', we are aligning ourselves with the mission of restoring God's righteousness to the Earth.

So who is with us? Who is for us? The revelation through the three persons of the Trinity tells us God was and is for us, and that God is with us and has made it possible for us to be with Him in a way that is closer than breathing.

But who are we with? Who are we for? Just as God is with us in union with Him, He calls us to be with others; just as God is for us, in union with him He calls us to be for others.

Reading Texts

Matthew 28:16-20

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshipped 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, baptising 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."