

Sermon: Worshipping Jesus - Mat 28:16-20

Trinity Sunday

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The colours of church have changed into white this week; it is Trinity Weekend, and the colour of white reminds us of the complete perfection of our God. White is the combination of all colours.

Next week, for a very long season, the church will turn green - the colour of growth. Our personal growth as Christians is grounded in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

God created us; the Son redeemed us; the Spirit is at work in our lives.

The Gospel of Matthew ends with the commandment of Jesus to go into the world and to make other people into his followers. That is what the Christian life is about. Being his disciples, his students.

1. All power in heaven and on earth

After His resurrection Jesus had asked His disciples to go to Galilee for meeting Him there. So the disciples had walked from Jerusalem to Galilee. And there the disciples saw Him. Matthew, himself one of them, gives us an eyewitness account.

Most of the disciples who saw Jesus immediately bowed down for Him. That is the meaning of the Greek word used by Matthew. This is the bowing down that servants do in reverence when meeting with their king, but it is also the bowing down in worship of small creatures before their God.

The translators of our Bible decided that this bowing down of the disciples was really worship of people overawed by God. They fell down in adoration of their Lord who had conquered death, the Lord of life.

Muslims reject worshipping Jesus as 'shirk', the greatest sin in Islam. 'God does not have companions', they say.

Some of the disciples did not worship Jesus either; they were doubtful. 'How can we worship Him? Is He not human, after all? Is this not idol worship? Should we not worship God alone? Do our Scriptures not tell us to only worship God Almighty?'

We have to commend Matthew for honestly describing the doubts of some of the disciples, but Jesus took these doubts away. He *wanted* His followers to believe in Him and worship Him as God. That is why He approached them.

Just as He comes close to us when we are in doubt - as long as we are honest in our quest for Him, He will help us see Him as He really is.

Jesus came closer, so that they were totally sure it was Him, and by coming closer He actually *confirmed* that worship was the right thing to do. And then His words took any remnants of doubt away.

Our Master addressed them with the majesty proper to God only: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

The authority of Jesus claims here is the main theme of the Gospel stories. His teaching was with authority. His miracles showed His might. He even had power to forgive sins. His resurrection also showed his authority – even over death, that awful enemy.

Jesus claims to be almighty. Omnipotence is an attribute belonging exclusively to God. It belongs to Jesus also. 'All authority is mine'.

Some people like to point out that Jesus says that all authority in heaven and on earth *has been given to Him*; His Father had given it to him. So, some argue, the Father is higher in divinity than Jesus. As if Jesus is a sort of lesser god.

But think of this: God the Father has in eternity shared all power with his Son. In eternity: This means there was never ever a moment in history or outside history when the Son did not have power equal to the power of the Father.

Those who have problems to accept that Jesus and his Father are essentially one, should try to explain how there can be a God almighty and a Jesus almighty at the same time. It is impossible for two separate *Almighties* to exist... except if they are absolutely one in divinity.

During his life, Jesus was careful not to reveal his full glory. But now, after His resurrection, He is totally open to his disciples. "I am almighty", He says to those who still doubt while others worship Him.

2. Go, make disciples of all nations

After Jesus established that he should be worshipped as the one with all authority in heaven and on earth, he tells his students to make disciples for Him of all nations.

But Should Jesus not have pointed to God and to the laws of God of the Old Testament? He wants to bind the nations to himself and to his own words... Is this not blasphemy? Yes it is, if Jesus is less than God. No it is not, if Jesus, the Son of God, is one with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Just as Jesus had spent all his time and energy to bind His own group of disciples to Himself, so He now asks of those disciples to go and teach and train all nations.

In our instant-cultures where we expect all our desires and needs to be met right now, it is good to remind ourselves that the best coffee is not instant coffee but coffee that is properly made, with a filter... or coffee slowly brewing on a fire in a small pot.

Making disciples and being disciples is time-consuming. It is not a matter of a one-time decision; it is hard work. In his book *Matthew and Mission* (1988, 2003) Martin Goldsmith, says:

In the postmodern emphasis on anti-intellectual spirituality this emphasis on teaching and learning sounds old-fashioned, but God demands the use of the mind.

Jesus spoke of teaching and learning *all* that he had commanded during his lifetime. We really have a lot to learn in the process of being His students. And we need this balanced diet of *all* he taught. Not just those parts we happen to like about Jesus at the expense of what we do not like so much.

Mere *mental* understanding does not make us good followers of Him. It is an important part of the picture, but only a part.

Truth learned must also be practised. It must be appropriated by heart, mind and will in a lifelong process.

Interesting is that Jesus does not tell them to teach the people and then *also* to make them obey the words of Jesus. It is about *teaching to obey*. The teaching in the church is not for satisfying our intellectual curiosity about God – it is for making us better worshippers, better followers, better in obedience.

The beginning of the process of being disciples is baptism. Jesus says here that this baptism must be into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. That sentence needs some attention.

Baptize *into the name...* for Jews this expression immediately reminded them of the name of God. The name they did not dare to pronounce because they were afraid that they would not show Him proper respect and lightning would strike them. It is the Hebrew name Yahweh.

Baptize into the Name. The one name of the One God. And Jesus continues: into the name – singular of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The one God, the God of Israel, Yahweh, is a singular being, one God, but He consists of three persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Now imagine that the three persons who Jesus mentions in this one sentence, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are not intimately united in one Godhead. That they are actually in essence three separate beings. That it is about God the Creator, and Jesus, well, part of creation, and the Holy Spirit, a sort of vague power... is the baptismal statement of Jesus then not blasphemous? Or just ridiculous?

If Jesus and the Holy Spirit are not one in divinity with the Father, baptising in the name of those three is just as silly as organizing a football tournament and announcing that the three participants are Manchester United, Umm Muhammad the vegetable seller around the corner, and electricity.

The baptismal formula Jesus uses, suggests equality in essence between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Nothing less. Martin Goldsmith, I quoted him before, says:

With the triune confession at baptism the believer is taught that right from the outset of the Christian life, all three persons of the trinity are equally to be worshipped, loved and served.

To baptize in the name of this Triune God means that the person who is baptized is placed in the community of Father, the Son and the Spirit. That is the environment for our growth. In that community we learn to be truly obedient to all Jesus has commanded us.

The community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit decided that the Son should go to the world for the well-being of mankind. And to those who have been made participants in the eternal dance of love of the Trinity, Jesus says: Go and make others into my disciples...

3. I am with you...

How in the world can we do this? Well, Jesus promises His disciples, his church, that in this process of being disciples and making disciples, He will be with us. That is why He has send us His Spirit.

Without His presence with us, what hope do we have to be his followers and to make new followers? How can we ever be His students, obey Him, serve Him, and draw others inside the same circle of students of Jesus? We need Him to be with us.

His promise to be with us is, by the way, another strange one. Should he not have said: 'God will be with you...' or something similar? But Jesus promises his own presence. And this promise is even stranger because Jesus promises to be with his disciples, with us, at any time and in any place.

Only God is omnipresent. How can Jesus then claim to be omnipresent, except if he himself is God.

The Gospel of Matthew began with the baby Jesus, who was called Emmanuel – God with us. And now, in the end of the Gospel, Jesus again promises to be with us. God with us.

We must be careful though. Jesus promises his presence in the context of making other people into His disciples and in the context of mission. He promises to be with the people who leave the comfort of Jerusalem to go into the world for the sake of the Gospel.

The Christian church must never degenerate into a comfortable club for the like-minded. It is always called to discipling, teaching, evangelism.

It is not enough to enjoy fellowship in our own congregations in the hope that we attract the nations by our life and worship. We must also go to those nations, in accordance with the clear demand of Jesus. Go, and help other people to find God through Jesus Christ, and to become his students just as we are.

To people involved in this ministry, our Lord says: "I am with you always, everywhere."

Conclusion

The lessons for us? First, become a participant in this love-life of God, and become a student in the school of Jesus Christ. This has begun with your baptism, but it is a process that never stops.

Let us study God's Word much, personally and in the community of the church, in order to worship and serve our Lord better. He gave his Word - and especially the Words of Jesus - for us to obey. Obey them all.

And go, speak with friends, with family, with neighbours, and draw them into the circle of light, into the school of Jesus Christ.

Let us in the green season ahead of us, grow more mature as followers of Christ; and He – almighty God- will most certainly be with us as we follow Him - AMEN