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Sermon: Not an Add-On
Text: Matthew 28:16-20
June 4, 2023

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“Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him, but they doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

One of my favorite lines from Maggie Smith’s character, the Dowager Countess Grantham, in the longrunning series *Downton Abbey* is this short question: ‘What is a weekend?’ For the aristocracy and nobility, at least in her caricatured form, a week day and a weekend day were no different from each other because there was no work, other than the wearing of being nobility and overseeing a vast estate. The closest we probably got for a time to this sensation was in the disruption of the pandemic where our routines were jumbled and our days melded together and our normal rhythms thrown off that it was hard to tell the difference between Tuesday, Friday, or Sunday. I am basing the historical hypothesis I am about to share with you on sheer speculation, but my impression of religious participation in the medieval world was that it was not all that different than Lady Grantham’s days of the week. There were no week days and weekends, but rather ordinary days where people went about their normal routines and there were feast days, days of holy obligation, days like Christmas or patron saint days or Epiphany or Fat Tuesday or Ash Wednesday. I am not even sure that Sundays were all that important unless a feast or celebration fell on a Sunday. That all changed as a result of the Protestant Reformation where Sundays took priority because of the many New Testament accounts of Christ’s resurrection which noted that it took place on the first day of the week. Interestingly, we know the women and disciples came to the tomb early on Easter Sunday morning, but there is no evidence that the early Christian communities met on Sunday mornings and probably met regularly on Sunday evenings. Take this example from Acts 20, v. 7: ‘Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.’ Now I am sure it is possible that Paul could

have preached for nearly 18 hours straight, but it is probably more likely that the early Christian communities met at the end of the day on the first day of the week, to commemorate Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

Our Protestant forebears wanted to reconstitute the earliest Christian practices as much as possible, and so out went feast days for the most part and in came Sundays, a day for which they also reappropriated Old Testament practices, making every Sunday a day of worship, a feast day and celebration of Christ's resurrection, and a Sabbath day, a day of rest and freedom. Even during Lent, I believe, the 40 days of obligation do not include Sundays, so technically whatever you gave up, Monday through Saturday you can enjoy briefly each Sunday for your 40 days of fasting. As overreactions often go, many Protestant based countries ignored or legally banned feast days that were more closely tied with Roman Catholic tradition, drawing everyone's focus on Sundays as the central feast days and days of holy obligation focused solely on Christ rather than a hodgepodge of feast days dedicated to local, national, and patron saints or particular feasts that may or may not have been closely related to Christ's life, death, and resurrection. As late as 1957, Christmas day in Scotland was a normal working day and did not become a holiday until Christmas of 1958. And like our school schedule that is still based on the agricultural schedule with long summer holidays so everyone could work on the farm, and the standard 10:30/11 worship start time is based on the ability of a farm life to accomplish the necessary and daily chores including milking cows, and then making it to worship. If worship started any earlier, it would be near impossible to get there in time, and if worship started later, it would be near impossible to make it back home before things started going haywire. So apologies to those affected by this worship start time. I guess if wanted to be biblically accurate, we could get started around 5 p.m. today.

All of this is prelude to this pastor's observation that there are certain Sundays in the liturgical year that have, for lack of a better word, jayvee status, and certain Sundays that have high profile status. We can probably list off the higher profile Sundays: Easter Sunday for sure, Pentecost, which we just celebrated, perhaps the Sundays around Advent and Christmas, and lucky us, this year Christmas Eve falls on a Sunday. Then there are the jayvee/harder to remember their importance Sundays: World Communion Sunday the first Sunday in October, Christ the King Sunday, the last Sunday of the church year before we begin again with Advent, usually the Sunday before or after Thanksgiving. There are other noteworthy dates that rarely fall on Sundays, like Epiphany or Christmas, which did fall on a Sunday this year, and Ascension, which occurs forty days after Easter and is therefore guaranteed to never happen on a Sunday. And then there is

today....Trinity Sunday. It almost feels like some liturgical planning committee years ago, got a committee together, and realized we needed to make note of the fact that we believe God is a communion of trinitarian persons and therefore the Sunday after Pentecost would be as good as any to acknowledge it. Even if the Trinity preceded Pentecost, not to mention Easter and Christmas and Creation for that matter, let's stick it somewhere, so why not here, before everyone goes on summer break. And maybe the fact that Trinity Sunday seems like an afterthought is indicative of its difficulty or the reduced role it actually plays in our musings about God and in our understanding of how God operates. Far from being central or integral to God, the Trinity is peripheral or nearly optional, just an add-on.

Yet our passage today from the end of Matthew seems to suggest just the opposite. Far from being an add-on, the activity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is foundation of all the we are; in the beginning, God's Word creates us and calls us to be a blessing to others; Christ lives a life of forgiveness of sins and a humanity that is fully alive; and the Holy Spirit translates Christ's redemption into every moment, circumstance, culture, and situation, giving us a vision of a beloved community where each person finds belonging, is made to know that they are all children of God, and given gifts to live lives of flourishing and self-giving. Each dimension of the Trinity is integral to God's life, and integral to empowering each one of us and the Christian community to come to know why we have put been on this earth, why we have a place, and what our lives are for in the larger story of creation, redemption, and completion in the life of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Our passage occurs at the end of Matthew's gospel; after the resurrection accounts, after Christ's appearances to the disciples and women, after Christ has told the disciples to wait for him in Galilee. And at least one of the question on everyone's minds is 'what next?' Jesus has defeated death, Jesus is risen, Jesus is on the loose, but what next for us? And the answer that we find that has its basis in our scripture lesson is that it is not enough to know something about this happening or to just stay where are or sit wherever we are and be enamored by this supernatural occurrence and miraculous event. Rather, every time Jesus gathers his community together, we are not just passive spectators or a religious audience here for the religious program of the week. As Matthew tells us, 'when they saw him, they worshiped him.' In the presence of Jesus Christ, we get transformed from spectators to participants, people who just wanted a small religious programming to people whose whole lives are re-arranged and commandeered by the triune God. We are told not just to wallow in the miracle or even

learn everything we can about Jesus, but are told to 'go.' 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.' The lesson we have to learn over and over again is that Jesus is not just for us and our own selfish spiritual benefits or our own nation or one particular gender or sexual identity, but calls us to make disciples of every nation and people, and inevitably that mission and calling will place us into circumstances that are uncomfortable and send us places we do not feel equipped to tread, but 'going' in the name of the triune God will also put people in our lives that will surprise us how much we can learn from them are enriched by them, send us to places that will make us reevaluate our whole lives, and help us to find that real treasure is not found at the end of the journey but all along the way.

One last thing I love about this passage and that is that everything about the Christian community feels just a bit disjointed and incomplete and not quite right. There are only 11 disciples not the full 12 in this encounter with Jesus; gathered in his presence, they worship when they see him, but Matthew is sure to tell us that 'some doubted.' They aren't even operating with full certainty and with nothing more than the word 'go,' this motley crew of a community are asked to spread this message, live this good news, and form community in every nation, among every people, culture, and identity upon the earth. They are not a complete set, they have no guarantees, some are doubting, they don't have their lives all together, they have warts, flaws, and baggage that cannot be hidden, and yet not only is Jesus unashamed to call them his community, he believes that even in their incomplete and messy and doubting state, they are equipped to go and to become his disciples to others. And that's not just true for those incomplete and doubting disciples hanging on for dear life in the very last verses of Matthew. That is true for you, too. Somehow, some way, Jesus Christ thinks you and me, in spite our own baggage, incomplete messy state, and our own doubts, Jesus Christ thinks we are up to the task and more than well equipped to offer his life to others in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When you leave this place, I hope you find the opportunity to do so. Or better yet, it finds you. Amen.