

SERMON FOR TRINITY SUNDAY 4 JUNE 2023 AT SOUTH NEWTON PC (based on Matt 28:16-21; and partly on Isaiah 40:12-17 & 27 – end & 2 Cor.13:11- end)

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of all our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight, O God our strength and our Redeemer. Amen

The Holy Trinity - our mission statement

It's quite likely that many of you will be familiar with the term 'mission statement', having worked perhaps for organisations that preface their aims with a statement of purpose and aspiration. When I worked for the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, any change at the very top would bring about a rash of strategic meetings and away-days when we would mull over how to word a new mission statement. Possibly not the best use of tax-payers money! Yet it was considered important enough for even the internal Departments to be asked to come up with their own. What, we may ask, was the point? The main point was to give the many and quite disparate arms of the Agency a shared corporate identity, one that would motivate and reassure us through a common purpose.

And that for me is what Trinity Sunday is about and I'll try to explain why by looking at the three persons of the Trinity, beginning with God. Sometimes groups of people lose their shared sense of identity and purpose, and that's what has happened in our Old Testament reading from Isaiah. The Israelites are disillusioned, captive in Babylon and convinced that their God has forsaken them. They have lost their homeland and their Temple; their distinctive identity as God's chosen has been worn down by years of living under foreign rule. But Isaiah reminds them of God's greatness as omnipotent Creator, one who "does not faint or grow weary", but who gives strength to those who continue to have faith in him, "the everlasting God". We hear an echo of those words of reassurance in the final sentence of Matthew's Gospel, when Jesus says: "and remember I am with you always, to the end of the age". That is exactly what people want to hear from their leaders - that they are committed to supporting them for the duration.

Turning to Matthew, we come to the the second person in the Trinity, Jesus the Son of God. In the passage we hear about what is often referred to as the Great Commission. Let's start by taking a look at that word

commission. One meaning is the authority given to a person or a group to undertake certain tasks or functions. It stems from the Latin *committere*, which is made up of *com*, together, and *mittere* to send. Our reading today forms the very last verses of Matthew's Gospel and sees the disciples being commissioned by Christ, sent out into the world to continue the work that Christ had begun. Earlier in the Gospel, three days after his crucifixion, Christ had sent the women at the empty tomb to tell the disciples to meet him at Galilee. The disciples needed considerable trust to make that journey on the say so of those women. But they went and were rewarded with the sight of the risen Jesus. Their reactions were, however, mixed. Some worshipped him, "but some doubted". Jesus, the head of what was to become a newly formed Church, was faced with a disparate group, indeed, very much like the people in any organisation - some totally committed and others hesitant, needing reassurance and motivation. And Jesus proceeded to give them just that, reminding them that his authority comes from God, for trust in the source of authority is crucial. Later, after ascending to be with his Father, Jesus fulfilled his promise to send an advocate, and last Sunday we celebrated the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Permeating our readings today is a strong sense of God's authority and eternal presence, manifesting itself in the Gospel passage through his Son Jesus, and made possible through the Holy Spirit. The task Jesus commissions the disciples to undertake is to make all nations followers of Christ, with baptism the sign of their commitment. This calls to mind Christ's own baptism. There, "the Spirit of God descended like a dove" and God's voice "came from heaven (and) said 'this is my Son, the Beloved'". At the river Jordan, we are in the combined presence of God the Father, of his Son Jesus, and of the Holy Spirit - the Holy Trinity. As Jesus sends out his disciples in our reading today, he says they are to baptise "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit". Those words evoke authority, eternity, and strength. What a mission statement! And it is one that Paul took up at the end of his 2nd letter to the Corinthians, our third reading for Trinity Sunday. In that letter, he exhorts the Corinthians to live in peace and harmony with one another, bringing them together in communion and fellowship, with these words that we have come to know so well: "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of

God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you". Their mission is to be united in their faith. Those words give them a sense of shared purpose, along with the motivation and reassurance to help them achieve it.

I find today's readings, on this Trinity Sunday, tremendously motivating and reassuring. As a member of the corporate body of Christ's Church on earth, I draw strength from the words of the Grace. The identity of the Christian Church is marked not just by its head, Jesus, but also by the Trinity, the everlasting presence of the three in one, in whose name we undertake our own missions in life, whatever they may be. Christians throughout the world invoke the Trinity in the Grace, blessings and prayers. In doing so we gain confidence to follow the ultimate authority, through the Son and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Our mission statement, the words that unite, motivate and reassure us, is not one we are constantly looking to replace or even tweak. Like the authority they represent, they are to inspire us, for ever.

In the name of Christ, amen.