

May 26 2013

Scripture Lesson ~

II Corinthians 13:11-13

Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

Matthew 28: 16-20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some 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.’

Sermon *But Some Doubted*

Go, therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the name of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to keep all things whatever I have commanded you. Behold I am with you all the days until the completion of the age.

And I want to tell all of you that I translated that from Greek in Seminary. That is the only thing I ever translated from Greek in Seminary, but I did. These are powerful words, I think, that conjure up images in the minds of many of us of Jesus’ ascension into Heaven from a sort of high cloudy mountain. Then the scene from a Cecil DeMille movie follows with vast numbers of dedicated disciples marching down the mountain two by two with single minded goals of immediately heading out for the far reaches of the globe to convert the nations of the world to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And yet what we often picture as grand and glorious was in reality pretty humble, pretty small at least at the outset. All of this, in fact, hardly seemed possible a couple of months earlier. Because, just prior to this morning’s Gospel

lesson, Jesus after his resurrection meets up with two women in the garden surrounding his tomb. One of the women, of course, was Mary Magdalene and the second is simply referred to as that other Mary. Of course the two women are surprised and they are afraid and they immediately fall down and worship Jesus. But Jesus does not permit this and instead instructs them with these words, “Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee and there they will see me”.

Now things looked pretty bleak to the disciples by the time they made their way to that appointed meeting place. The eleven remaining disciples, according at least to Matthew’s Gospel, had not yet even seen the risen Jesus, and taking only the word of what they might have considered hysterical women the fact that Jesus had risen from the dead. And I am sure, too, that a couple of the key questions were going through their minds on the way to the meeting place as well. Did in fact did Jesus desert them for good or was he really waiting for them on that mountain? If he wasn’t there what could they hope to accomplish without Jesus? It is no wonder then upon seeing Jesus risen from the dead at an appointed mountain, they fell down and they worshipped him. Matthew ends the sentence with these words, but some doubted. But some doubted. After the first time, I saw the word doubt, in this passage red flags flew up all over the place. And yet after looking at it more closely I don’t believe that doubt is meant as a negative description here at all. If we are truly honest with ourselves as Christians we must admit at some measure of doubt hides itself within each one of us on every single day of our lives. The reality of life is, we are imperfect and our vision of faith is often clouded day by day. Even when our faith remains strong in the midst of adversity God’s way still often seem very mysterious to us.

Jesus’ followers saw him raised and alive that day with their own eyes but still belief in this reality comes slowly. Maybe some saw him but considered the news to be really too good to be true. Others may have seen him but still denied that it was truly the risen Jesus. Whatever the case, it is not necessarily true that doubt is the opposite of faith. In fact I would go so far as to say doubt is an essential part of our search for faith. The disciples could hardly doubt something which they at least could not consider to be possible. If they doubted God maybe it meant that they had already caught a glimpse of the divine.

We need not fear doubt then for there is faith in honesty in doubt. In the company of the disciples then you and I approach Jesus as they did so many years ago. In fact, we also worship God here in this place today and yet we still have occasionally unavoidable twinge of doubt which leaves us as it did the disciples wondering about our faith. One on hand if God is really there, on the other hand how in the world could we ever hope to do God’s will without the presence of

Jesus, God's son right here with us on earth. Some of us here today perhaps recently lost loved ones and others of us have friends or family members who are ill or we might be ill ourselves. At times like this it is very difficult not to wonder where God is the midst of our loss and in the midst of our suffering. Others of us are experiencing a time of joy in our lives but these joyful times can leave us with a feeling of emptiness sometimes as well. One of the most exciting things in the world is to see a young person graduate from high school or college or to begin new job or to be the one leaving home for that first time. These things can also leave us feeling a little bit lost and alone too, sometimes.

Then there is retirement, also something that presents new possibility (Micki knows this better than anybody right now) and yet those some old doubt same old fear come to visit us in the midst of that change as well. And there is still some question as to where God fits into the future perhaps of our retirement. Still others of us not concerned how much where God is in our lives as to whether we will have the strength and the courage to follow God's will right here and right now. Those of us in this situation might be running on difficult economic times in our business or in our family finances. We might be thinking about changes of jobs or might be contemplating making that life commitment to somebody that we might love very much. Wondering what aspect of church life which perhaps to involve ourselves or what we might want to put little bit more in the offering plate on Sunday morning. I would even bet good money on the fact that there are some of us today that are having strong doubts whether it was worthwhile to pull ourselves out of bed to come to church this morning.

In all these cases, doubt shows itself in the form of fear and indecision and complacency. We feel the need in these times that we need God's guidance, help and support strength and God's power to make the right decisions to do the right thing in life.

But you know Jesus never rebukes or turns away anybody who is honestly searching for faith. In fact Jesus' words in the Great Commission at the end of our Gospel lesson are an excellent witness toward the ways in which God works so diligently to answer the doubts and questions of our faith. When we question as the disciples must have whether God is really there when we are lost, lonely and hurting, I think that Jesus answers us with same words of comfort that he gave the first disciples. "Lo I am always with you with the close of the age". And when we wonder if we can do things alone without Jesus in our midst the Great Commission can help us here too. Because immediately proceeding with Jesus words of comfort are the same uncomfortable and challenging words that we began our sermon with today." Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations and baptize

them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and teach them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

You know Jesus understands and comforts us in all our times of doubt and he never considers those times the reasons for our inaction or our indecision for very long. The day Pentecost that Jesus is always with us if not in earthy form, in the form of God’s Holy Spirit and these words of comfort and challenge from Matthew’s Gospel give us a perfect example in the way which Holy Spirit can work in our lives and which the disciples eventually are in a type of experience on the day of Pentecost. The meaning of the one Greek word for the Holy Spirit is prevalent in the New Testament is Paraclete and I think that word Paraclete has a twofold function of the Holy Spirit; to comfort as Jesus comforted his disciples in their time of loss and suffering but also to challenge as Jesus challenged his disciples in the Great Commission. I think if we will remember the dual role of comfort and challenge which Jesus sent Holy Spirit in our lives we will be able to join as St Paul reminds us in the benediction at the end of 2 Corinthians as Micki read for us shortly ago. And the gift of grace gift, of love gift and the gift of community as God as the Trinity the Creator, Son and Holy Spirit brings to our midst today. Comfort and also challenge. I invite you to remember these words-as Jesus walked with him throughout the course of this coming week.

Together we say Amen