

Trinity Sunday - Ben Wayman

Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Psalm 8; 2 Corinthians 13:11-13; Matthew 28:16-20

The difference between Protestants and Catholics, the joke goes, is that a Protestant says, 'What's the least I need to believe and still be a Christian?' whereas a Catholic says, 'This is great! You mean I get to believe all this stuff?'

If there's any truth to this joke, the disciples were a mixed bag. On the one hand, when the eleven saw the resurrected Jesus for the first time, 'they worshiped him.' But on the other hand, 'some doubted.' It's consistent with Matthew's standard description of the disciples as those of 'little faith' to see them as both doubters and worshipers. In fact, the only other place in the New Testament where this word for 'doubt' appears is the only other place in Matthew where the disciples worshiped Jesus—in chapter 14, when Jesus walked on water and rescued Peter, whose doubts had sunk him in the lake. For Matthew, the disciples' worship is always accompanied by doubt. But Matthew shows us that worship absorbs their doubt.

What should we make of this mixture of worship and doubt in Matthew's gospel? Three things can be said. First, the two coexist among the disciples. Second, in today's account, Jesus makes no mention of their doubt at all. And third, Jesus sends these same worshipping and wavering disciples out on the central mission of the Christian faith. We can conclude from all this, I think, that God is not too concerned about doubt.

Today is Trinity Sunday. If the doctrine of the Trinity has never taxed your beliefs, you haven't thought about it long enough. And maybe you've not doubted the Trinity because you've been busy doubting all sorts of other stuff about the Christian faith. Take the resurrection, for example. Today's passage from Matthew happens on the heels of Jesus' resurrection. In the preceding story, Matthew relays the plot of the Jews to cover up the resurrection by bribing the soldiers to say the disciples stole Jesus' body from the tomb. When Matthew says, 'This story is still told among the Jews to this day,' he notes this for the sake of his own community who, 50 years later, are having their own doubts about the resurrection.

But what's odd about the fact that the disciples doubted is that they do so while standing face to face with the risen Jesus. They were *there*. If there was ever a time where doubt should be totally eliminated from the faith equation, this is it.

But, Matthew tells us, some still doubted.

And that's because Jesus' resurrection is hard to believe. But it's no harder to believe than that God is with us. And the belief that God is with us is no harder to believe than that God is Trinity. All of this to say, Christianity taxes our belief.

Today I want to suggest that Christianity is hard for us to believe because we too easily believe in all the wrong things. But the good news is that God has given us worship.

Worship is the antidote to doubt. Or more accurately, worship absorbs doubt. Worship is the practice of bowing to God even when we don't understand God. We need worship because worship frees us from thinking that our beliefs are what are most important. They're not. Whether or not we believe in resurrection or Trinity or even God has no bearing on their truthfulness. So worship gives us the words and actions to live in the world as it truly is, even if we can't believe it. Let me unpack this a bit, in light of our readings today.

The more I read Paul, the more I am convinced that he is a master improviser. He's an improviser because he's among the first graduates of Jesus' school of discipleship (albeit with an honorary degree). As one of the first graduates, Paul is living out what he sees to be the implications of cross and resurrection. We can see Paul's improvisation in his letters to the Corinthian Christians.

Today's reading from 2 Corinthians is the end of a correspondence in which Paul has written at least 4 letters. 1 and 2 Corinthians are all that's survived from Paul's lively communication with the Corinthians. What both of these letters make clear is that Paul thinks that Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection have radically changed what it means to be God's covenant people. For Paul, the gospel hinges on the fact that Jesus has suffered, died, and been raised from the dead; this changes everything. In 2 Corinthians, for example, Paul shows how Christ's death and resurrection make possible new creation. This new creation is only possible, though, because Christ has reconciled us to God and has given us the mission to reconcile with one another as well. So for Paul, God's new covenant people are a people who are united – both to God and to one another. And Paul insists that this union has nothing to do with being Jewish, or being male, or being free, but has to do with a whole new set of possibilities that are now open because of what God has done in Christ. For Paul, improvisation is the only way to live because *everything* has changed.

But for the Christians in Corinth, it was hard to believe that anything had changed. In fact, it was much easier for them to believe other rival missionaries whom Paul labels the 'super-apostles.' According to Paul these super-apostles were persuading the Corinthian Christians to believe a false gospel. I should point out that these rival missionaries were *Christian*. Make no mistake: you can preach Christ and still be preaching a false gospel. So the Corinthian Christians have been swayed by these false apostles and have come to doubt Paul's gospel. In 2 Corinthians Paul is trying to win back the Corinthian Christians who have found his gospel too hard to believe, and so it is all the more important for us to pay attention to how Paul addresses these doubters—because then we can get a sense of how Paul addresses doubt in the Christian life.

As I said, today's passage from 2 Corinthians marks the end of Paul's correspondence with the Corinthian Christians. It's important to note that the closing of Paul's letters get to the guts of what he wants to convey to his churches. In 1 Corinthians, for example, Paul ends with, 'Let all that you do be done in love' (1 Cor 16:14), which nicely sums up the letter. And here in 2 Corinthians, Paul focuses on peace and reconciliation to address the doubts that the rival missionaries have generated towards Paul, the gospel, and even

among the Corinthians themselves. What's particularly helpful about Paul's call to peace and reconciliation is that he gives the Corinthians a concrete action—a liturgical action—for actually accomplishing it. *Greet one another with a holy kiss*, he says. In other words: be reconciled. Commenting on this holy kiss, the early Christian preacher, John Chrysostom, says this:

What is a holy kiss? It is one that is not hypocritical, like the kiss of Judas. The kiss is given in order to stimulate love and instill the right attitude in us toward each other. When we return after an absence, we kiss each other, for our souls hasten to bond together. But there is something else which might be said about this. We are the temple of Christ, and when we kiss each other we are kissing the porch and entrance of the temple. (Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians 30.2)

So a holy kiss is a gift God gives us to transform both the giver and the receiver. A holy kiss remakes our relationships and the very way we see each other because through it, we place our lips on the face of Christ and receive Christ's embrace in return.

At St Paul's, we practice this holy kiss in our passing of the peace. If you want to learn how to pass the peace, walk up to Roger McPeak and let him hug you. Then pass it on. The passing of the peace is the time that we reconcile with one another, whether we want to or not. And if we go on with it and pay attention, we embrace Jesus himself.

Worship is full of these kinds of practices. Take the Apostles' Creed, for example. In a moment we will say the Apostles' Creed, and we will say it whether or not you happen to be believing it today. So worship is a gift to all of us with little faith. Worship is big enough to absorb our doubts and help us speak and do the truth, even if we have a hard time believing it.

Today's First Testament lessons are another gift that places our doubts in proper perspective. Psalm 8 is basically a commentary on Genesis 1. Psalm 8 sings of the stewardship given to Adam and Eve in the caring for God's creation. Both Genesis 1 and Psalm 8 are songs celebrating God's creation. Old Testament scholars have called Genesis 1 a hymn and suggest that we read it, "as an exclamation of praise." For example, Walter Brueggemann states, "The possibilities of a choral recital will present (and have presented) themselves to those who are musically or theatrically oriented."<sup>1</sup> I'm not one of these people, and so I appreciate Professor Brueggemann's pointing out that I need to *sing* Genesis 1 in order to understand it. Genesis 1 and Psalm 8 are gifts to us, then, because they help us treat the creation account not as a doctrine to doubt, but as a hymn for worship. I wonder how our conversations about creation and evolution

---

<sup>1</sup> Walter Brueggemann et al., *Texts for Preaching: A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV – Year A*, 338. See also Fred Craddock et al., *Preaching Through the Christian Year*, 301: "Both in its tone and contents, Genesis 1 is a highly liturgical account of the beginning of the world...The refrains in particular lend a cadence if not rhythm to the account that could easily be chanted. Although the contents concern God's creation of all that is, there is a particular liturgical focus on sacred time."

change if we began singing Genesis 1 as a hymn rather than treating it as a page from a science textbook for our scrutiny.

Psalm 8 also speaks of God's foes, enemies and avengers. Just because God is the Creator does not mean that there are not people who oppose his rule. If we are honest, we should place ourselves as the sometime opposition to God's rule. That's because God's ways are so strange and so foreign to our own that either by way of our doubts or by way of our rebellion, we resist God's rule. For who with any sense would propose, as the Psalter does, that the simple songs children sing would be able to overcome our resistance to God? This is the power of worship. In a moment, our children will remind us that everything the world tells us about money is not true. They will sing to us with their feet and their smiles (and sometimes scowls), that the wisest use of money is to give it back to God.

We worship a strange God. We worship a God who says and does things that we would never have imagined. We worship a God who accomplishes his most important work with children. We worship a God who trusts us—doubts and all—with making disciples and baptizing the whole world in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. And perhaps strangest of all, we worship a God who entered this world as a baby—crying and crapping and all—much to the horror of our Muslim friends. This baby would become an adult and be betrayed, killed, raised from the dead, return to the very people who betrayed him, and promise to be with them, and us, forever—to the very end of the story.

But in the end, it really is not God who is strange. It's *us*. The Christian faith taxes our belief because it concerns *God*, and not ourselves or what we would expect of God. And that's good news. Our doubt reassures us that we worship a God who is *revealed* rather than created in our own image. In this sense, doubt and worship work together to lift our eyes from ourselves to the one God who loves us perfectly in three Persons. Worship is the gift God has given us to see that God is indeed with us, even when we have a hard time believing it. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.