

Always, Until
Matthew 28:16-20
June 7, 2020
First Presbyterian, Luling

Today is Trinity Sunday, the only Sunday in the church calendar that is an observation of a doctrine rather than an event. And so this Matthew passage is chosen for Trinity Sunday because it is one of only a handful of places in Scripture that mention all three persons of the Trinity together at one time. And it's a familiar formula for us, the one that is used most often, particularly at baptisms. "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." That Trinitarian formula that we use at baptism is why this Scripture passage is in the lectionary today.

But that's not what caught my ear this time. What stuck out to me this time is the next verse, the closing verse of Matthew's gospel, what he has been building up to for 28 chapters: "And remember, I'm with you always, to the end of the age." Except I'll confess that in my head, it's in some other translation, in which that preposition is translated "until," so in my head it's "I'm with you always, until the end of the age." And that's where I got the sermon title. So please excuse my reliance on the Bible in my head instead of the one in front of my face.

I don't know about you, but that verse stands out as a great comfort. "I'm with you always, until the end of the age." Watching and listening and reading the news these last few months, one might begin to suspect that it's the end of the age. Some age, if not THE age. Or maybe the beginning of another. Things are certainly different, that's for sure. And some things are the same. Jesus is here with us, always.

Matthew starts off the gospel with the angel coming to Joseph, telling him that Mary is going to have a child, which fulfills Isaiah's prophecy about the child named Emmanuel, which means "God with us." And in chapter 18, Jesus assures the disciples, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there with them." (v. 20). And then closes the gospel with the same promise. Taking all that together, it sure seems like this is an important message. God is with us.

The way the Greek is written, if you want to translate the words in the exact order they appear, it is "I with you am."¹ Remember that "I am" is the best

¹ lectionarygreek.blogspot.com

translation we have of the holy name of God, revealed to Moses at the burning bush. And so when Jesus says, for instance, “I am the bread of life” in John, he’s intentionally alluding to God’s name. And so here also. Including the “I” isn’t grammatically necessary (like “yo soy” in Spanish) but provides both emphasis and this allusion to Jesus taking on God’s name.

And right there in the middle of God’s name, what do we find here at the end of Matthew? “With you.” It’s part of God’s very being, Father Son and Holy Spirit, to be with us. Always, until the end of the age.

It’s undeniably wonderful to know that God is with us, that Jesus is with us, that the Holy Spirit is with us. Sometimes we can feel that presence and sometimes we can’t. That “you” in there is plural, though. And Jesus may be saying that he is individually with each one of us, but that’s not all he’s saying. The plural you means that Jesus is promising to be with us, with all of us together. Jesus is in solidarity with us.

And if we want to know what that means, then we need to look at how Jesus interacted with people, with those he was with, while he was alive. This is the Jesus who tells us about the shepherd who went to look for the one lost sheep, the most vulnerable one. This is the Jesus who heals people. This is the Jesus who says, “Blessed” are a whole bunch of unlikely people. When Jesus says he is with us, he means with the part of “us” who need him the most, who have the least power and clout, who get overlooked and left out, who are oppressed and abused and taken advantage of, who are manipulated for others’ gain. This is the Jesus who, during his life, was with all of humanity in such a way that he made the powerful so angry that they crucified him.

That’s what Jesus means when he says he is with us. It’s not idle words. It’s not sentimental mushy-ness. It’s not a slogan that we pull out when we want Jesus on our side of an argument. Jesus is with us, and we can find him with those who are the most vulnerable and powerless. In fact, when we see those who are vulnerable and powerless, that’s where we’ll see Jesus.

I’m about to do the thing where I compare Jesus to my dog again, fair warning. Daisy is almost always with me. I’m the one she comes to sit next to, when we’re all four scattered about the house. I’m the one she wants to be next to at night. I’m the one she follows from room to room. I’m her person. I don’t always want to be her person, but she is always with me anyway. But there’s an exception. If someone else in the family is hurt, or upset, then Daisy sticks next to them and will not budge. Daisy just knows someone is crying, she doesn’t judge the reasons for the tears, she just can tell they need someone to be with them.

And if in Daisy's eyes, someone is hurt in body or spirit, she's with them. You see where I'm going with this, right? Jesus knows far better than Daisy, if someone is hurt or in danger or vulnerable, and Jesus promises to be with them, with us, always.

That promise is sure, because it's part of Jesus's very self. "I with you am."
"I am with you always, until the end of the age."