



Banyule Network of Uniting Churches

Sunday 7 June 2020

Trinity Sunday

To Live, Learn and Love as Children

Matthew 28:16-20 (cf. Ps 8, 2 Corinthians 13:11-13)

Graeme Gibbons

St Matthews Gospel asks us to put away our microscopes and our study of viruses for a few minutes today and get out our telescopes and look to the heavens.

Today is Trinity Sunday. What does that mean. To put it in modern terms; the juxtaposition of the three modes in which God encounters us describes God as the subject and author of all the favor and love that has encompassed the world from all eternity and will continue to do so for all eternity.

God is the instant experience of love and relationship between humanity,
and more than that
in that God is also the assurance of future love
and of both love to us and from us
greater than in our present power.

Both aspects are stressed: in the son and in the spirit God comes to us totally; at the same time God remains the God who confronts us and is yet the expectation of still more into the future.

In the Hebrew language Heaven is always plural while it is written as singular in Greek. In writing this I am reminded of what Dr. Sunny Chen, the Yarra Yarra Presbytery officer for Mission said in a recent Zoom lecture on his understanding of the Greek used in the lectionary readings used for these weeks. Sunny made the point that in the Hebrew understanding there were three heavens. The first heaven is the sky and the clouds, a little like we see when we look up into the sky or what we saw on our TV screens when the American Space shuttle took off last

week.

The second heaven is the space outside our atmosphere and where that space shuttle hopes to enter - the universe including the sun and the stars. Finally in the Hebrew mind was the third heaven the top tier of Heaven; that is where God dwells or even God's self. God at home in the third heaven created the sun in the second heaven that lit up the earth.

The first verses of the Bible, the verses from Genesis that were read this morning as well as the story from St Matthew remind us that the creation of the earth began with God working from home, that is from the top tier of Heaven.

In recent days a significant number of people are discovering that a great deal can be achieved when we work from home. Creativity and world mission can be achieved from home. In our own Network thanks to Sandy, Paul, John Su and a whole host of volunteers have been responsible for furthering the mission of outreach.

What seems to be a life-time ago in 1969, Eduard Schweizer was a New Testament Scholar from Zurich, Switzerland who spent his Sabbatical study time at Ormond College providing some heartwarming lectures in New Testament studies. Schweizer also wrote lengthy and reader friendly commentaries on both the Gospel of St Matthew and the Gospel of St Mark.

His knowledge of Greek and Aramaic and Hebrew language along with his familiarity with the actual writing of St Matthew led him to the conclusion that the last verses of St Matthew, without doubt, was embedded in the life of the Jewish Matthew community. When this community told the Resurrection story they spoke only of an appearance from heaven, like that experienced by St Paul.

St Matthew's account of Jesus Resurrection gives us a very different story from what we find in each of the other three Gospels. Schweizer argued that St Matthew's account of the Resurrected Jesus encounter with the disciples was the earliest understanding of Easter. In Matthew the tomb is found by the women to be empty. Jesus was not there. The women are told to tell the Disciples that Jesus is going on ahead of them and would meet them in Galilee.

When the disciples get to Galilee, a three-day walk from Jerusalem, the disciples see Jesus suddenly without him coming into their midst. Jesus is enthroned in heaven. There is no trace of

certain, features, which appear in almost all of the other accounts: there are no references to his table fellowship with the disciples and his vanishing at the end. Instead Jesus remains with his disciples until the end of the world.

There are some unique features of this Easter account and one stands out especially. Jesus is with God and the Holy Spirit. This is a shocking story for those steeped in Hebrew tradition. This is a very significant time in the history of Israel and the Jewish people where God the Father and the Spirit God appeared outside of the Tabernacle or the Temple in Jerusalem. Even more shocking is that Jesus is present with God and the Holy Spirit. It is only here that we read of the worship of the disciples actually worshipping the Father, Jesus and the Spirit.

In January 1967 I had just completed my first year in a home mission appointment at Sorell Presbyterian Church and I was told I had to attend a Home Mission Conference at Mount Martha Conference Centre here in Victoria.

There were two conference leaders. Steven Yarnold was a minister in a Church in North Melbourne that only had a dozen members but had a large church and a property that was leased to an oil company. The Church members set Steven free to be a chaplain at Pentridge Prison. The second leader was Graeme Bucknall, Director of Home Missions who managed to find the funds to support ministers doing theological Education to start new congregation in new centers emerging around the fringes of Melbourne.

This reading from Matthew we read today was one of the major text we studied at the conference. The point they were emphasizing was how important it was to leave the exalted places like Jerusalem and our Temples and meet Jesus in places where they live and work. This kind of thinking gave me the motivation, energy and strength to return to Sorell mid week when news reached us about the Hobart bush fires that devastated the district in which I lived and worked.

I learnt from this Conference another perspective of how a disciples mission was conceived. Over the next few days and weeks I became a pastor visiting people I did not know and who came from all churches and none, whose homes had been destroyed and whose neighbors had died.

I had learnt at the conference that disciples:

are commanded to leave their comfort zones and go out into the world;
to make disciples of all peoples;
and to teach the commandments of Jesus.

Jesus was working at home in heaven with the Father and the Spirit and the Trinity had built a three-step plan for disciples.

1. They had to go: to go was a prerequisite
2. They needed to step outside their Jewish inclusiveness and make disciples from among the gentiles.
3. They were required to make learners, that is disciples who are open to the teaching of Jesus.

This was a job maker program before its time and baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the holy Spirit. Amen