

Worshipping God Together

Call to worship

Minister: Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth
Worship the Lord with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.
Know that the Lord is God.

**All: it is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.**

MP 628

Tell me the old, old story

Opening prayer and the Lord's Prayer

The Bible says: "To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven". Let us pray:

Great God,

may we be open to finding you in new places.

May we lay aside all that complicates faith

and find you in the everyday:

in bread and wine,

in water and table,

in words of hope and longings of peace.

May we find you in each other,

just as we are.

God beyond our imagining,

creator, lover, empowerer, persuader,

help us to see the possibilities, to go on searching

your inexhaustible, stunning universe,

till our minds are stretched,

and our hearts filled,

by the wonder of your love

and we see that for you, nothing is impossible,

and for us much is possible.

Then come, Lord,

take our hands and lead us to do your work,

where your name is known,

and where your name is not known,

because you are love,

and we must care indiscriminately.

We ask this in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray:

ALL: Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever. Amen.

MP 528

Rock of ages

Reflecting on God's Word

Reading: Matthew 28:16-20 (NT page 1001)

Reader: Jennifer Sutherland

Background to the reading

I will now explore the text of our reading to understand it better:

Where was Galilee?

Galilee is the region of northern Palestine that is situated between the Litani River in modern Lebanon and the Jezreel Valley in modern Israel. Galilee constitutes the area in which Jesus conducted the major part of his ministry. His youth and early ministry took place in Nazareth in Lower Galilee; much of his public ministry was located at the northwestern end of the Sea of Galilee, at Capernaum, which was known as Jesus' own city. This, then, was the region in which Christ grew up—at Nazareth, in the limestone hills of Lower Galilee.

In Jesus' time Galilee's chief cities were Capernaum, Nazareth, and Tiberias - the capital. Jesus' apostles were from here, and His ministry was mostly at the north and west end of the Sea of Galilee, using Capernaum as His center. Both Jews and Gentiles still made up the population, with the northern section more Gentile than the southern and having more contact with Greek and Roman culture.

The mention of the mountain in our reading is not irrelevant. The mention of mountains in Matthews Gospel plays a very important role. He

connected the events in the Old Testament with those in his Gospel. God always revealed Himself to his people on or from a mountain. It was important to say to his Jewish congregation that God did reveal himself not only to Moses and the people of Israel, but to Jesus as well. And unlike Moses Jesus did not die. He appeared again after His death commanding his disciples to go out into the world and proclaim the good news of His salvation.

When Jesus spoke to them He made it very clear that He got the authority from God the maker of heaven and earth. The entire Gospel of Matthew stresses the authority of Jesus Christ.

“Making disciples” was the sort of thing rabbis would do, but Jesus’ followers are to make disciples for Jesus, not for themselves.

Disciples are made here in a twofold way namely:

- By baptizing them. Why? Because baptism was an act of conversion - used for Gentiles converting to Judaism, usually reserved for woman converts.

- By teaching His commandments to them. In those days rabbis made disciples also by teaching them, but this only applied to Jewish nationals. The idea of making Gentiles “full” disciples would have been quite shocking to Matthews readers. No rabbi would ever make a full disciple of a Gentile. Why? Well they regarded Gentiles as being unclean and not worthy enough to come in God’s presence.

Baptism was a once-for-all, decisive initiation into Christian community while the second implied a life-long task.

Jewish literature only called “God” omnipresent while Jesus made the same claim that he would always be with them. This, coupled with his being named alongside the Father in baptism confirmed His godly nature.

Matthew was saying to the people of his time and all the generations to come that the resurrected Jesus left a message for His followers to go out and proclaim His Gospel of love, acceptance and mercy to everyone. He also made it very clear that Jesus will be with them always and ever.....

Sermon

The text for the sermon is: ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.

Many people today are doubting that God exists. Our reading this morning brings this “doubt” in perspective. It is not a new phenomenon. We read that when Jesus appeared to them, there were some of them who were full of doubt.

But what does “doubt” mean in its original context? And is it the same emotion that we experience?

It comes from the Greek word διστάζω *distázō* which can mean twice, two ways, to be uncertain, to hesitate, to doubt, waver. It is a figurative word taken either from a person standing where two ways meet and not knowing which to choose (inclining sometimes to one, sometimes to the other), or from the quivering motion of a balance when the weights on either side are approximately equal (when first one side, then the other, seems to be predominate). In our context the verb that was translated as “some doubted” should rather be translated “they hesitated”. To get the answer to this reaction, would only be speculative. They could have hesitated because they were in shock - Jesus was now “resurrected” and talking to them. They might have wondered how it could be possible. It did not fit their current expectations of the end time: all the dead were to be raised together!

According to Wikipedia doubt, is a status between belief and disbelief, it involves uncertainty or distrust or lack of sureness of an alleged fact, an action, a motive, or a decision.

I think the best way to describe this feeling of doubt or hesitance is to compare it to someone who is running a race. Runners of any race often reach the point where they wonder whether they can keep going. They hit the wall. They doubt or are hesitant in making a decision to finish the race. Their muscles burn with pain; their strength is gone. They feel defeated.

I think the same is true of our lives on this earth.

Sometimes the business of this world can change our focus. Instead of running with God we think we will manage on our own. Then before long

we start to doubt, waiver, hesitate about God, his church, and the essence of life. Other times ill health, broken relationships, hardship, suffering or challenges can make us to doubt whether God is still in control and whether the church on earth can really make a difference. And yes when bad things do happen to good people, the first thing we do is to “doubt” the Wisdom of God, His grace and mercy.

The thing is in any race, there are a number of key supporters to help the runner to reach the finishing line. There are the couch who spend hours of teaching and coaching. There are the dieticians to make sure the runner eats the right food. There are the medical staff helping with the unexpected small injuries during a marathon. There are the family members and friends to cheer on the runner. There are those who make sure that the runners get enough water. But after all it is up to the runner to commit him/herself fully to the successful completion of the race. He/she will not manage to complete any race successfully without any practise, hard work, commitment and sacrifice.

The same is true when we run the race of faith. We need to practise – reading our Bibles, commit ourselves to daily prayers. We need to get spiritual coaching and help which is freely available through me and the elders. We need to have a supportive spiritual family which in this case is this congregation who will not judge us when we get tired and “ready” to give up. We need other people of faith to share with us their trails and tribulation. Often we think that we are the only ones to doubt because of our own circumstances, reasoning that if we only have someone else’s life, faith and circumstances all “doubt” will disappear.

It reminds me of the great story I once heard.

There was this town who was known through the reputation of its citizens. They moaned about everything and anything. They were never satisfied with nothing and they always wanted more. So one day the local councillor issued a decree whereby he invited all the townspeople to bring one bit of clothing that they were not satisfied with - to the Marketplace. After a week with the pile of “clothing” getting higher and higher, he issued another decree whereby he invited them to come and pick from the large pile clothes that they liked. The funny thing was that everyone just took their own clothes back! Why? Well it is when we you start to look around and see that other people have much worse “clothes” than yourself, that you appreciate your own. In fact it is only your own clothes that can fit you.

Maybe it is time to look around and see that there are others that also are “hesitant” and doubtful, that it is not me that feels this way. Maybe then we must not hide from God, his church or the world. It is then that we must go and fetch our own “clothes” or doubts and run the race of life with God, knowing that He will be with us, always and ever.

So, come, you who have much faith and you who have little, you who have been here often and you who have not been for a long time, you who have tried to follow and you who have failed. Come, not because it is I who invite you: it is our Lord. It is his will that those who want him should always meet him here! Come and let us all run the race of faith together supporting and helping one another as brothers and sisters in faith. We need to spend time with God and the spiritual family, his church on earth, we need to read his Bible as often as we can, and we need to talk to him wherever we find ourselves. And above everything else, we need to proclaim Jesus’ authority on this earth above all other things through our words and deeds. If we do this, we will be able to run and finish the race of faith! And please dear congregation may the Lord help us all never to judge or exclude other people from the presence of our resurrected Lord and Saviour
Amen

Responding to God’s word

Our offerings are given for the ministry and mission of the church while we sing “**Our eyes have seen the glory**”.

Prayer of thanksgiving: Sarah Finegan

Let the weak say I am strong

Benediction receive the blessing of God and go in peace:

Go into the world in peace: Have courage; Take hold of what is good,
Never pay back wrong for wrong, Let compassion be your companion,
And forgiveness your constant friend; Keep the fires of the spirit burning,
Seek always what is best, And keep the faith.

The blessing of God almighty,

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

Be with you all Now and for evermore **Sung Amen**