

## **TRINITY SUNDAY 2020 (Matthew 28:16-20) – ‘the end and the beginning - living agents of God’s life-changing love’**

Now, if what *Gill* has just read to us was a novel or a film, we would all be waiting for the next instalment - ‘St Matthew’s Gospel Part 2’... or more imaginatively maybe (and for those Star Wars fans amongst us..!), ‘Return of the Disciples’, or ‘The Disciples: A New Hope’!

Because although these are the last words of Matthew’s gospel, these final verses that bring Matthew’s gospel to an end actually herald a new beginning..... especially for Jesus’s disciples..... for them, life is just about to start!

I would even suggest that when people search for the meaning of life – this is it!

Because all that these disciples have experienced with Jesus in the last 3 years.... all that Jesus has said and done, all that He has shown them and been whilst with them... has all been preparation for this moment... a catalyst for this new beginning that now lies ahead..... For with these final words Jesus launches them into their whole life purpose, to be *living agents of God’s life-changing love*.

Because that *is* the remarkable truth of this ‘great commission’, as it is often referred to, that Jesus leaves his disciples with at the end of Matthew’s gospel.

As author Tom Wright reminds us, when Jesus says to his disciples (v 18) that ‘all authority in heaven and on earth are his’, he is not

claiming that the world is already as he intends it to be..... but that everything is now in place, to take it from where it was – under the rule of not only death, but of corruption, greed and every kind of wickedness - to the place where Jesus wants it to be - under the rule of his life-changing love.

That, is the plan - God's grand plan from Day 1!

And it is for these first disciples, and all those who follow Jesus afterwards, to be agents in taking forward this plan.....

And what an important reminder that is for God's church today.... in the circumstances we find ourselves because of the Covid virus.

I was suddenly reminded during the week how just before the pandemic struck Britain, the diocese had been focussing on our dwindling finances, and possible closures of church buildings and reduction of clergy..... And then, just a few weeks later, all church buildings have had to close and finances are now even further stretched.....

And I find myself thinking that in the wonderful way God has of bringing good things out of bad, He is now using this whole situation to really speak to us; to say:

'Re-focus..... beloved children, re-focus..... I've told you I will provide for your every need, do not worry about finances, do not be anxious about material things – *trust me*..... and get back to basics.... Get back to what you, the apples of my eye, have been called to be – 'living agents of my life-changing love'.....

Our church buildings are special, sacred places in which God's presence can be felt in a wonderful way, and the services we hold in them likewise. But Jesus told His disciples to 'go'.... and meet with people where they are, bringing the good news of God's love by reflecting it in the way Jesus showed us - loving, caring for, and having

a mutual respect for all of God's creation, and working to be at one with every single part of it.

However challenging these times are, we, as God's church, as His body, have been given new opportunities to care for our community, and to reach them with the good news of God's love. Though the end of open church buildings and corporate worship continues to be painful to us, it has actually heralded new and imaginative ways of coming together as part of a wider community – including the beginning, of on-line outreach on a much grander and creative scale.

And the reality is that even when churches are allowed to open again, services and worship will not return to how they used to be – not immediately anyway.... But I wonder, are they meant to be...? Or is now the time to react in a new way to these final words of Jesus in Matthew's gospel, to 'Go.... and make disciples'..... rather than wait for people to 'come'.....

Endings, though painful in many different ways, can be a springboard to new beginnings..... No better example is found than in the Christian faith.

I am reminded of Jesus's own words in John's gospel (12:24) when He says to His disciples:

*"Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."*

He was of course using this image to refer to His own impending death – knowing that His death would lead us to new life..... into a new beginning and a better way of being..... a way of being that God has always desired and created us for, where we are in communion with Him, and *with each other*..... a way of being that Jesus Himself exemplified – where power is not founded upon weapons of destruction in the form of domination, suppression and

oppression, but with the weapons and power of selflessness and truth in the service of love – respecting, caring, sharing, defending injustices, addressing prejudices, and embracing all as one.

We are living in an amazing part of history at the moment, with the effects of Covid-19 effecting our whole world in life-changing ways ..... but maybe this gives us, especially as Christians, the opportunity to look afresh at how things used to be, how they have become during these times, and to truly seek God’s will in how He wants us to go forward, and lead us into something new in our calling as *living agents of His life-changing love ....?*

With the assurance of course that this is something we do not do on our own, but with and in and through Jesus Himself. For as His final words promise us:

“I am with you always, to the end of the age”

There can be no better promise, no better encouragement! For you, for me, for every single one of us...

Through all that we face in our lives, and especially in these times where Covid-19 has changed our world..... we have Jesus’s promise that He will be with us through everything ..... Indeed, He *wants* to be with us through everything if we will let Him.....

So I pray today that we may know the strength and the joy of the risen Lord Jesus, that we may lean on Him and not be fearful of endings, but be excited about the hope that new beginnings can bring, especially when we face them in the strength and guidance of the One who loves us more than we can ever imagine.....

Because the story is not ended..... although one chapter or scene ends, another one begins; and just like those original disciples, we all now have our part to play as *living agents of God’s life-changing*

love in 'The Greatest Story Ever Told' (to quote another famous film)  
.. God's continuing story whose end is an eternal one with Him in  
His perfect home called heaven.

*Amen*