

Reading: Matthew 28:16-20

One of the TV programmes that reappeared recently was “The Waltons”. I must confess that during lock down I watched an episode. Something I never noticed about it as a kid was that every time they sit down to eat there is always an empty seat at the end of the table. This is of course so that the camera can zoom in without John-Boy's head getting in the way. It also has the effect of feeling like there is room at the table for us, the viewers.

Today is Trinity Sunday, a day where we honour the triune nature of God. One of the most loved images of the Trinity is a 15th century icon by Andrei Rublev.



In Rublev’s icon, as in “The Waltons”, there is a seat at the table for you and for me. The picture invites us to find a place in the meal and the conversation of the Father with the Son and the Holy Spirit. In fact, one book I was reading suggested that the little red label just below the icon was for a mirror. This had the effect that when you looked at the icon you saw yourself as a part of the Trinity right there at the table - a bit like Zoom. You see the other faces and you see yourself. On this Trinity Sunday I want to suggest that the Trinity can be understood as an invitation. As we worship God, as we gaze on the love of God, we are being drawn into that love which is at the heart of God. No longer are we to be strangers to God. The magnet of God’s love is calling us, and we find a place at the table.

In our Matthew Gospel reading Jesus is giving the disciples their final instructions. These are the closing verses of Matthew’s Gospel. Remember how it all started. Jesus was a vulnerable baby, a human child. Now he has been given all authority over heaven and earth and he is giving that authority to us.

We can be left in little doubt that our mission is for **all** people. In fact, the word **all** appears no less than four times in a couple of verses. Jesus has **all** authority. He sends us to **all** nations to pass on **all** that he has taught, and he will be with us for **all** time.

The Vicar gathered the children around her feet for the kids talk. “Who is the most important person in all the Bible?” she asked. Johnny put up his hand, “Lo,” he said. This wasn’t the answer she had wanted but she asked, “So Johnny, why is Lo the most important person in all the Bible?” “Because Jesus said Lo, I am with you always.”

But the point is worth making. There is no time or place or person outside Jesus’ reach or care. There is nothing in all Creation which can separate us from God’s loving. Jesus invites all people into his caring embrace.

On Sabbatical I travelled to Sabah in Malaysia and visited the huge Anglican church of St Patrick’s. What began as a small expatriate parish now has thousands attending every week. They asked me to preach a sermon (in English fortunately) and then the sermon was translated into **all**, notice that word again, **all** the languages of the congregations. I did my thing in the mostly English-speaking congregation and then went over to the main church to hear my own sermon preached back to me in Hindi. It seemed to go on much longer than I remembered it and the people were having a good laugh. So, I said to the vicar afterwards, “It’s good the jokes translate so well.” “Oh, they don’t. That’s what everyone was laughing at.” Anyway, carved into the back wall of the huge auditorium are these words, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” These words are known as the Great Commission. And if ever a parish lived up to their mission statement St Patrick’s was it. They had grown exponentially to include many thousands of people.

I heard one speaker say: “To tell the church to grow is like telling a car factory to produce cars - it’s what we are here for.”

But it all begins with a living and intimate relationship with God. It all starts by taking our seat at the table. When we come each week to the table of the Lord we are being invited to a loving, intimate relationship with God. When we pray, we are placing ourselves into the loving presence of God. Prayer is simply allowing yourself to be held in the loving presence of God. An intimate friendship with Jesus is the end goal, it is also the beginning point and it is every step along the way of the Christian journey.

Henri Nouwen puts it like this: *Jesus invites us to abide in his love. That means to dwell with all that I am in him. It is an invitation to a total belonging, to full intimacy, to an unlimited being-with.* An unlimited being-with.

Legend has it that when Jesus ascended into heaven the people in heaven were shocked to see his terrible wounds and how much he had suffered for us. “Lord,” said the angel Gabriel to Jesus, “Do all the people on earth know how much you suffered for them and how much you love them?” “Oh no,” said Jesus “only a tiny handful, but they’ll tell the rest.” Gabriel looked confused. He knew how fickle people are. He knew how forgetful they are. He knew how prone to doubt they are. “But Lord what if those people begin to doubt you? What if they get so involved in their lives that they forget to tell others about you? Or what if the people they tell forget to tell others? What’s your back up plan - just in case.” Jesus looked at Gabriel “Oh, I’ve thought about that, but I have decided against a backup plan. This is my only plan. I’m counting on my friends.”

Twenty-one centuries later Jesus still has no other plan but us, his friends.

Jesus’ invitation is still the same as it was all those centuries ago. Come find a seat at my table, come and be my friend, come and have a life-giving intimate relationship with me and all the Trinity and then you will want to tell people I love them.