

Trinity Sunday . 7th June 2020.

2 Corinthians 13 v.11- end.

Matthew 28 v.16 - end

“Honest Guv - it wasn't me. I wasn't even there. And that's the Gospel truth...”

“That's the Gospel truth.” What I am saying is factually correct, just as everything in the Gospel is factually correct.

Well, of course, we would all agree that the Gospels speak important truths, but do we mean that in the sense of being always factually accurate?

Hold on to your hats everyone.....

I am not sure of the factual accuracy of every word of our Gospel reading today!!!!

Oh dear, can I feel an impending defrocking?

Let's look at that reading from the very end of Matthew's Gospel:

Jesus appears to his disciples after his Resurrection, and commissions them to *“make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit....”*

There have already been hints during the course of Matthew's Gospel that Jesus' message was for the Gentiles too – but here is an explicit command from Jesus to *“go to all nations”*. If Jesus had actually said this so explicitly to the eleven, would there have been such reluctance among them, as the first Christian leaders in Jerusalem, to the idea of preaching to the Gentiles - as we read in Acts 11 etc. When Paul and others first wanted to take the message to the Gentiles there was real uncertainty about whether they should be allowed to do so. Why would that be if Jesus had himself given them that instruction?

And then we read the following words:

“Baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..”

These words don't ring true from the mouth of Jesus either, because we know that the first Christians, those very people he was speaking to, baptised others in the name of Jesus Christ, not in the threefold name of Father, Son and Spirit. That too came later, when the Doctrine of Trinity – God in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, became the accepted way in which Christians declared their faith. So does this make Matthew dishonest? Certainly not.

Matthew was writing probably about AD 80 – 85, and he was writing about the life and death and resurrection of Jesus in the light of what he now saw around him - a young church struggling to grow in the face of great opposition, trying to find its way. He has seen the way in which the Gentile world has been open to the Spirit of God working in them through the ministry of St Paul and others, he has seen how the Church has begun to understand the impossible truth that God is perceived in three ways – as Father, Son and Spirit, and yet is still One. Perhaps that beautiful prayer with which St Paul ends his letter to the Church at Corinth around 50AD, has helped the Church to put this difficult concept into words:

“The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the Communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.”

So when Matthew came to write the final paragraph of his Gospel, as Jesus sends out his disciples to do the work of God, he expressed all that he now knew to be true of the Church's understanding of God. And he wanted to be clear that the end of his story marks a new beginning – the beginning of the Church. T.S.Elliott wrote: *what we call the beginning is often the end, and to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from.*

Matthew was not writing this Gospel as a history book but as an encouragement to the church to live and work in response to Jesus' message - to be true to all that Jesus came to bring. So he drew on other existing contemporary writings, including Mark's Gospel, and he chose the particular miracles and parables and events in the story that would help the church to see itself as the culmination of OT prophecy, and as the ministers of God's word spoken and enacted by Jesus, and now to be broad-

cast through the whole world. And this last paragraph prepares for the life and work of the church in the future.

When we look back at the past, we always do so in the light of our experience since then. When eventually the situation we find ourselves in now has passed, we will look back on this time in the light of what we have experienced. Our stories of lock-down will be affected by our experience of coming through it.

We have all been exploring a new way of living - much has been learned and gained as well as lost. T.S. Elliot suggests:

We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.

This time of lock down will end - very gradually, we will pick up the pieces of our former lives – but will we be back where we started? I think it will not be the same - we will see everything differently in the light of our experience.

Some things we will treasure more, because we had to do without them for so long. We will see beauty in things we took for granted before. We will have a greater appreciation of the work of carers and health workers, and a greater understanding of the plight of the most vulnerable in our society. The air and the seas will be cleaner because we have travelled less and lived more simply, and we will need to make choices about whether we go back to the old ways or not.

So the end of this time of exploration will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.