

TRINITARIAN TWITTER

Sermon, June 11, 2017 (Trinity Sunday)

Texts: Matthew 28:16-20; II Corinthians 13:11-14

For most of human history, a "tweet" has been the sound a bird makes. However, today, and especially under the current presidential administration, the word "tweet" has taken on a whole new meaning. Let me offer a quick disclaimer: I don't tweet, but I do know enough to know that a tweet is an online message created by a user of the social network called Twitter. You can create a "tweet" message using a computer or a mobile phone. Once published, the tweet will appear on the Twitter home pages of all the users who are following you (*which can potentially number in the millions*). Likewise, your Twitter home page will display the most recent tweets of the users you are following. Each tweet is limited to 140 characters (*letters, punctuation marks, and I think spaces all count*), which means you must choose your words carefully, packing as much meaning as you can into your allotted character limit. (*As you may know, there is no limit to how many tweets you can post, so if you really have a lot to say, you can publish several tweets in a row.*)

Well, if Jesus had a Twitter account, today's Gospel reading might qualify as an official tweet.

The context for those verses in Matthew is the risen Jesus with the eleven disciples on a mountain in Galilee. Matthew records that when the eleven disciples saw Jesus, they worshiped Him, but some doubted. It could also be translated, "*they had some doubts.*" They had seen Him heal the sick, feed the hungry, give sight to the blind, cast out demons, and now they see Him alive after having been brutally killed and buried in a tomb, but still they had some doubts. Imagine that: After all they had seen, the disciples still had their doubts ... which, by the way, should be somewhat comforting to all of us who gather here week after week to worship Jesus; like the disciples, all of us bring our doubts and other difficulties into worship with us. And that's OK! Jesus gives His doubting disciples some comforting but concise assurances, and He gives His doubting disciples something constructive to do ... this is a sermon in itself, but quite often the best dissipater of doubt is diligence, putting what faith you DO have to work!

Jesus gives them this tweet: "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given unto Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you.*" (*actually, that's 187 characters, but it might be 140 in the original Greek!*) And since He's over His character limit on the first tweet, He "posts" a second tweet; words just packed with extraordinary promise and hope, "*And lo, I am with you always, even to the close of the age.*" (*that's 49 characters.*) In these two tweets, Jesus succinctly summed up just about everything concerning (1) who He was, (2) what He wanted His followers to do, and (c) all He had promised.

In our Epistle reading, the apostle Paul also gives what might qualify as a tweet. At the close of these two letters to the Corinthian church, Paul tweets, "*Finally, brothers, goodbye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.*" (*Again, that's a bit over the tweet limit by about eleven characters; but again, maybe it's fewer characters in the Greek ... I didn't take time to check.*) Then Paul posts a follow-up tweet, which you may recognize as the familiar Trinitarian benediction I often use at the close of worship. "*All the saints send their greetings. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*" (*That's 123 characters.*)¹ Prior to his then unique, but now familiar, benediction, Paul's final tweet to this congregation in Corinth gives five basic appeals, each worthy of a sermon in itself:

1. AIM FOR PERFECTION. In other words, Paul might be saying, "*Yes, I know nobody is perfect; yes, I know none of us can ever achieve perfection; yes, I know we live in an imperfect world, but **stop using all that as an excuse for not trying!** Aim for perfection!" At least when you aim for perfection, you come a lot closer to it than if you don't aim for it at all! And with God's help, you just may find you can come closer than you think!*
2. LISTEN TO MY APPEAL. This is probably a reference to the entirety of his letters, underscoring that he is not just mouthing sanctimonious words, he's not just saying all this just because he's a religious professional, he is not just doodling his pen to provide fodder for someone to fill a twenty-minute slot in a worship service down the road somewhere ... these words are about crucially important matters! **Listen up!**

¹ *The following was edited out at the last minute due to time constraints: "These 'tweets' are the assigned lectionary readings for today, for in them both Jesus and Paul speak of the Trinity. Today is Trinity Sunday, the one Sunday of the church calendar we commemorate a distinctive, yet somewhat mysterious, doctrine of Christianity rather than an event, a teaching that differentiates Christianity from every other religion on earth. The Trinity is a concept we will never fully grasp this side of eternity; we are finite creatures trying to comprehend an infinite God, so there are by definition limits to our comprehension. Yes, we worship God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit; as we just sang, 'God in three Persons, blessed Trinity.' But we don't worship three Gods. God is One. God is Three. God is Father. God is Son. God is Holy Spirit. In Christian math, one plus one plus one equals one! Our God is one God, as stated in those familiar words from Deuteronomy 6:4: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.'"*

3. BE OF ONE MIND. Have one main common purpose, strive toward one common goal ... which he reiterates elsewhere is to have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus. Be of one mind by trying to think like the one mind of Jesus, by aiming to please Him; by trying to honor, emulate and imitate Him in all you do.
4. LIVE IN PEACE. In other words, do whatever it takes (*within reasonable and moral bounds*) to live at peace with each other, which sometimes does involve making personal sacrifices and/or doing things you may be reluctant to do, and/or deferring to other's idiosyncrasies, and/or tolerating differing points of view on what are really non-essential matters. A few years ago I was reading a C.S. Lewis book and came across the line (*and I quote from memory*), "Oh for peace sake will you just stop doing that?" Note, it was not "for Pete's sake," which I suspect may be a distorted Americanism that mangled another perfectly appropriate English idiom. The idiom is this: There are times when we ARE to do or say or tolerate certain things simply for the sake of *keeping peace*, for the sake of living in peace with each other ... again, within reasonable moral/ethical bounds. It's roughly similar to, "Oh, for goodness sake." There are things we do or say simply for the sake of promoting, endorsing, encouraging goodness, and for the common good; we do that "for goodness' sake."

So, #AimForPerfectionListenToMyAppealBeOfOneMindLiveInPeaceANDKissEachOther

The fifth appeal in the tweet is Paul encouraging the people in this church at Corinth to greet each other with a holy kiss. He also wrote a similar exhortation to the church in Rome, "Greet one another with a holy kiss" (Romans 16:16) and also to the church in Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 5:26). Paul wasn't the only one to talk about kissing in church. Peter wrote, "Greet one another with a kiss of love" (1 Peter 5:14). To be clear, this wasn't to be a lascivious kiss of passion; it was a gentle kiss of filial affection. The very word used here for "kiss" in the Greek is "filamati," which has the root prefix that comes from "fileo," which everyone from Philadelphia knows means "brotherly love." They were encouraged to give each other a kiss of filial affection, a family kiss, which was entirely appropriate because the early church understood itself to be a family. They were brothers and sisters in Christ, and they took that very seriously and quite literally. They took care of one another, like family. They looked out for each other, like family. They made sure the widows and orphans were provided for. They worked hard to be tolerant of each other. One person's problem became everyone's problem; one person's cause for celebration was a cause of celebration for them all. They weren't perfect, but they aimed for perfection in this, just as Paul exhorted them to.

Some of you may remember when we looked at this passage years ago I asked, "How many of you remember your first kiss?" (I also remember with fondness the late Dr. David Burge sitting in the front pew as his hand shot up in response!). I then suggested none of you did. Your first kiss probably came from one or both of your parents soon after you were born. We kiss one another within families to show our love and affection. We kiss one another within families to demonstrate we ARE family. And we kiss one another within families partially because it is almost impossible to stay angry or alienated from someone you have greeted in such a manner. Well, the holy kiss reminded the first century church who they were called to be: They were called to be the family of Jesus Christ, called first to love Jesus, then to love each other as brothers and sisters, and then to go out and love the world for which Christ died! If we love Christ, our next job is to love one another, to care for one another, to watch out for each other, to realize our actions affect one another for good or for ill, to encourage each other in love and affection to grow in love, wisdom and stature, and to aim for perfection in this and all matters of faith and life.

To tie in with our Lord's "tweet" recorded in Matthew, one might say the watchword of the first century church was "Kiss and Tell." The "kiss" was the filial "family kiss" Paul urged, and the "tell" was what the kiss communicated about that community ... that it was a loving family, a holy family, a family that transcends racial and ethnic and generational boundaries, a family united in faith in the Lord Jesus Christ Who told them to "... go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you." In short, He told His family members to go out by word and example and bring others into the family! By the way, when we baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, that is not some sort of formulaic incantation; it is a *naming* rite. We welcome the person being baptized into the Family, giving the person the Family Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the name we all bear, the name of Christian. And from that day forward we aim to raise and treat that person as a member of the family, which is what we are to do as a church.

One final thought: When we speak of the Trinity, we normally use the order of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Paul's Trinitarian benediction switches this order a bit, he puts Jesus first, perhaps to better express how we personally experience the Divine. "May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." Jesus Christ comes first. For it is through the grace of Jesus Christ, through His life, death and resurrection, that we may come to know the love of God and then go on to enjoy the family fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Don't worry, I'm not going to require we kiss each other; you can relax. It's believed the heartfelt handshake or gentle hug became the equivalents of the holy kiss sometime during the sixteenth century. But the principle remains: Greet and treat one another like family, for that is who we are. Testify to your affection for one another. As you might do in a kiss, look each other face to face, eye to eye; don't ever go behind each other's backs. Respect and honor each other as family, as equal heirs of the grace of God, and thus demonstrate to a watching and love-starved world "... the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit." Amen.