

“For The Common Good”

2 Corinthians 13: 11-13

Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell.

Put things in order, listen to my appeal,

agree with one another, live in peace;

and the God of love and peace will be with you.

Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,

and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

Matthew 28:16-20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee,

to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority

in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,

baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son

and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey

everything that I have commanded you.

And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”



The Umami of Faith

Matthew 28:16-20

2 Corinthians 13: 11-13

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I.

Today's scripture readings beckon us to consider the big "wind-down" of Christ's terrestrial experience. Or, said another way his, "Exit Stage Left." Which, depending on your pop culture perspective, is a reference to either Hanna-Barbera's cartoon character Snagglepuss, or the second album from the Canadian Rock Band, Rush (or both).

We first understand this wind-down of Christ's time on earth as corresponding to the impartation of the gift of the Holy Spirit to equip and sustain the church through whatever was to come after him until his promised and prophesied return. Second, the idea of a winding-down inherent in our own life cycles which bespeaks the linearity which governs us all (or so we believe). Though each of today's scripture readings is quite brief, both have much to say to us, one objectively and the other subjectively, as to the idea of "winding-down" (or, exiting stage left).

II.

In Matthew 28:16-20 we receive an *objective* perspective. Jesus authoritatively states, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and (this new fangled thing called) the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." "Remembering," says Jesus, that, "I am with you always, to the end of the age."

For a great many people (if not most) the whole idea of faith is rather nebulous and something of a gray area. Even within any one particular religious tradition we can find a significant degree of variation on the theme. Moreover, when it comes to the totality of the world's religions there is an *enormous* spread as to the meaning and understanding of "faith." Really, though, the truth of one's religion (any religion), and the resulting faith of any one individual, is actually *stunningly* straightforward.

III.

While few ever make a comparison between religion and mathematics (and it's underlying logic) having to muster one's *own* faith rather than merely echo institutional orthodoxy tends to allow for the ability to cut to the proverbial chase. Though the first part is implicitly implied rather than explicitly stated, Matthew 28:16-20 is, in essence, an "If/Then" statement; also known as a conditional statement. That is, a specific condition dictates a particular action (or inaction) based on whether that condition is believed to be true or false. A conditional statement is made up of two main parts: the hypothesis (which is the "if" part) and the conclusion (which is the "then" part).

To reformulate this morning's Matthean passage as a conditional statement it would read, "*If* you believe Christ to be the Messiah (and all that entails) *then* go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you."

IV.

Understood in this way, there is not nearly as much wiggle room to faith as first imagined. Objectively speaking, faith is what it is, or is not. You either do it, or you do not do it. Faith is simply as simple as that (though it is rarely simply easy). Of course, implicitly implied in every conditional statement is the negative corollary. That is, "*If* you do not go and make disciples of all nations, *then* (evidently) you do not believe Christ to be the Messiah."

Beyond this, the subjective *application* of one's faith is almost always enmeshed with these underlying objective perspectives. Meaning, we are able to utilize our much heralded "free will" to choose for ourselves how we will manifest our faith with corresponding results.

An example of this can be seen in today's other text, 2 Corinthians 13: 11-13. Here, the Apostle Paul makes a final appeal to the Corinthian congregation, "*Put things in order, agree with one another, live in peace.* Regarding faith, then, there is *what* we do or *should* be doing (objective) but, also, the arguably more consequential decision as to *how* we will go about doing it (subjective). Of course, how we "do" our faith or live out our faith functions conditionally as well. Paul says, "*If* we put things in order, agree with one another and live in peace, *then* the God of love and peace will be with us."

V.

Recognizing that everything I have just said is fairly abstract and, quite probably, unnecessarily cerebral, let us express the relationship between the objective and subjective aspects of our faith using taste as a loose analogy. Note, this will be but a shallow dive as I am really out of my wheelhouse in such culinary matters.

There are four universally recognized basic tastes which combine to create the complex flavors we experience, and which function as evolutionary signals to guide our nutrition and avoid toxins: sweetness, sourness (or acidity), saltiness, and bitterness. These we liken to the *objective* characteristics of our faith. To these is added a fifth element, umami, which represents the *subjective* aspect in our analogy to one's faith.

VI.

Translated from the Japanese as a "pleasant savory taste," it describes the deep, meaty flavor that lingers on the tongue. Umami, or so I have read, is triggered when tongue receptors detect glutamate, a naturally occurring amino acid. When foods rich in this amino acid are eaten, specialized taste receptors bind to them, signaling "savory" deliciousness to the brain. The taste was isolated and named in 1908 by a Japanese chemist who identified glutamate as the magical ingredient in savory seaweed broths.

The most interesting thing about umami, though, and the reason for interjecting this analogy, is the *synergistic* effect it has on how we taste and enjoy *other* foods. Apparently, umami flavor amplifies greatly when glutamate combines with other naturally occurring compounds called ribonucleotides(!?!). The chemistry of it aside, umami is a "force multiplier" used to make the rest of the dish come alive and deepen which results in a flavor experience which is *greater* than the sum of its parts.

VII.

In the very same way, the Holy Spirit is the umami or force multiplier of our faith. It allows a subjective faith experience which is greater than the sum of the objective parts of that faith. The Holy Spirit only ever makes itself known to us experientially or subjectively. The Spirit is what lifts scripture off the page that it might come alive in our every day lives. The Spirit is both the

means *by* which and the conduit *through* which we use our free will to express our faith. The Spirit is the ground-game by which we go about doing all the objective things our faith dictates we should be doing. Now that we are aware of this primary and powerful ingredient of our faith, it is important we understand where it fits into the formula known as the Trinity.

On Pentecost the church celebrates the Holy Spirit being gifted to the church as a means of equipping the body of Christ to fulfill God's plan for this world. The Sunday after Pentecost (today) is Trinity Sunday, a day we articulate the role the Holy Spirit has in the Godhead, and its relationship to God the Creator and Christ the Redeemer, as the other two persons in the Trinity.

VIII.

It is important to understand that the word "trinity" never appears anywhere in the bible. The Trinity, then, is a construct. It is an idea that human minds have envisioned to try and understand a God who, ultimately, is beyond human comprehension. In other words, we are winging it here to a certain extent (God forbid we ever let on).

The Shorter Catechism, from our Book of Confessions (Part I of the Constitution of the PC USA) asks in **Question #4: What is God?**

A: God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. (Well, that clears it up.)

Question #5: "Are there more Gods than one?"

A: There is but one only, the living and true God. (Might have heard that somewhere else before, go on.)

Question #6: How many Persons are there in the Godhead?

A: There are three Persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same substance, equal in power and glory. (Oh! Ok....yeah, I get it now - NOT!)

IX.

The notion of the Trinity is perhaps the most difficult and mysterious theological concept with which we grapple. In many ways, here in Matthew 28 we begin our tumble down the rabbit hole. "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the son, and of the Holy Spirit.*"

Now, we are not going to figure out the Trinity here this morning, that much I can guarantee you. That said, we need to recognize that the *idea* of the Trinity is one we need to keep exploring. Like the concept of faith, many people are confused about the idea of the Trinity. Folks find it nebulous and seemingly nothing *but* a gray area. If, however, we can figure out the differences between the cup sizes at Starbucks, we have got what it takes to at least *begin* to get a grasp on the Trinity. Like our faith, the Spirit is stunningly more straightforward than we might have ever imagined. We simply need to subtract 2 from the 3 leaving us with the 1.

X.

For most people, believing in the idea of a God as Creator who brought our world into existence is not much of a stretch. How else did we come to be on this wondrous and verdant planetary orb so utterly rife with both the sweet and salt of life? We taste the sweet as we watch the sun rise or set, or hear our own breath catch as a new baby comes into this world, or marvel and wonder as we sit and sigh watching children at play as we relish each day as if sucking on a sugary hard candy.

We experience the salt-laden sweat roll off our brow as we keep hand to the plow and make our way through this world to provide for ourselves and for those we love. We feel the streaks of salty tears fall down our cheeks as we abide those who suffer, hold the hand of those about to die, and cry for ourselves as we come to understand the limits of our own time and place within the creation.

XI.

A bit more challenging to understand and accept is the office of Redeemer, and the belief in the *need* for a Savior who brings salvation to the world. Typically, such a belief involves a two stage process consisting, first, of one understanding the *need* for redemption and, second, faith in the existence of one who actually possess the power to accomplish the redeeming which so desperately needs doing.

Such a belief begins with an honest accounting of the current state of the world first brought into existence by the Creator but which, now, has been degraded by the sourness of sin and the bitter bile of the woe which has been

wrought by having been separated from our Creator and estranged from the creation. To come to believe in a Savior means a prior admission that there is something about us which is so fundamentally broken, at a cosmic level, that it is beyond our ability to fix ourselves. Hence, help must come from somewhere *beyond* ourselves; that is, from a Savior.

XII.

Having removed the first two of the three offices of the Trinity, what remains is the one office known as the Sustainer. That is, the Holy Spirit, the fun and funky umami of our faith. The Holy Spirit is what brings the magic, and the mystery and the mystical to the otherwise pretty straightforward proposition that is any religion. The Holy Spirit is the force multiplier of our faith. It is that which plows the road, leads the charge, greases the wheels, and gets things done. The Holy Spirit is that savory and satisfying feeling we receive which demonstrates to us that God truly is at work in the world and in our lives. The Holy Spirit is the parting gift and going-away present for a world so loved by God (the Creator) that the Son (the Redeemer) gave his life so that whosoever believed in him *through* the Spirit (the Sustainer) would come to have eternal life. (What a rush.)

Moreover, *if* we come believe *then* we might enjoy both the salt and sweet of this life while also coming to understand and accept the sour and the bitter. Amen. (Or, as Snagglepuss would say, “Heavens to Murgatroyd!”)