

## In the Name of Beloved Community

*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 they 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.”

After the Civil Rights movement and while organizing the Moral Marches, in Dr. King’s final book written in 1967 he asks an important question: “Where do we go from here? Chaos or Community?” In the book he says, “**Community, not chaos, must be the choice if a democracy is to survive the inevitable challenges to its integrity.**” He wonders who will be brave enough to step outside of our dividedness to do what it takes to form Beloved community in a chaotic society. When we read Jesus’ final words—after being resurrected—he offers his disciples a similar sentiment: “All authority has been given to me in heaven and earth. Go, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit—in the name of Beloved Community—and I will be with you until the end.” He sends them out to form Beloved Community in a chaotic world. It’s deep y’all, so let’s unpack it.

Start with that first sentence: “All authority and power has been given to me,” says Jesus. So what do we think of when we hear the word authority? Our systems have hierarchy, don’t they? In some church traditions there is a ladder—the pope has authority over the cardinal who has authority over the bishop, etc. At our jobs, there is an authority figure who gives us annual reviews and has the power to beef up our paychecks. In the household the parent or grandparent is the “authoritative figure”—which might not seem that obvious these days, but as Carlton Eversley used to say, “Parenting is a benevolent dictatorship, NOT a democracy.” So naturally, we assume that Jesus is claiming to be the authoritative figure here. Except, every time the word “authority” used in Matthew’s gospel it is *always, always in the context of a healing or forgiveness*. Jesus’ power is not an authority that demands submission, but rather an authority that empowers and liberates others! So church is to be a place first and foremost where healing and liberation is abundantly available.

Well, time to be honest: the church has not historically lived into its calling. The church has justified genocide, encouraged slavery, enhanced poverty, silenced women’s voices, emboldened bad policies, and continues to enable the traumatizing of the LGBTQ+ community to the degree that some can’t even step through a church’s doors without feeling triggered and unsafe. The church has colonized vibrant peoples and beautiful cultures. It has fraternized with empirical conquests while planting seeds of discrimination all in the name of making disciples for Jesus. Just this week on NPR, I heard about a bill trying to be passed in Uganda right now which allows for the death penalty for anyone who is LGBTQ. Now where did they get the justification for such violence? In the name of making disciples of all nations, our missionaries planted seeds of chaos and assimilation. Time to be honest: the church has not been a safe place for healing and liberation of all people.

But here's the thing: Jesus says, "Go baptize in the name of Father, Son, and Spirit." In the name of the Triune God. In the name of relational wholeness. In the name of the Beloved jazz trio. Often when we recite the Trinitarian formula we think of the Father up there, the Son down here, and the Holy Spirit everywhere. But it's not about where God is located demographically, it is about *who and how God is relationally*. God is about reciprocity, even within God's self. God is about equality, even within God's self. God is about diversity, yet still being united as one, even within God's self. So it occurred to me this week, that when we say we are created in the image of God, what does that mean? It means we are created in the image of community. We are created in the image of Beloved "they."

Did you know: that the word for individual comes from two Latin words *in* which means "not" and *dividus* which means "divided." It's a word which originally meant "not divided" "inseparable," "unsegregated." And it was a word created in reference to the Trinity. But the word changed meanings in the mid 1800's when science began classifying humans from genera to species, and species to "individuals." It also happens to be the time when eugenics and biological racism began claiming that our races had vastly different genetic makeup. When the truth is our genetic DNA is 99.9% the same! We are genetically more the same than any other species on the planet! Being an individual originally meant being a community created in the image of a God who is community. And this is what Jesus asks us to baptize everyone into!

So do you know what this means? This means we are more the image of God together, than we are apart. I am more the image of God with you, than I am without you. Turn to your neighbor and tell them "We are created in the image of God."

And when we lean into the groove of being community together, we create powerful music. We become an inspirational force where we are capable of doing anything, handling anything, healing everything, liberating everyone, speaking truth to power, doing justice in love, being crafty as serpents while remaining as gentle as doves. Overturning bad laws. Overturning racist laws. Overturning transphobic laws. Overturning hate. Overturning hunger. Overturning inequity in our schools. Overturning gun violence. Overturning anything and everything that sows seeds of chaos and division in this world. We are created in the image of a communal, reciprocal, equal, and diverse God! This is who we are! This is who we have always been!

So where do we go from here church? Chaos or community? We still have a choice today! I think we all know where we want to go. So by the grace of God and by the authority given to us both in heaven and on earth, let us make disciples in the name of peace, love, and justice, and become the Beloved Community we have always been created to be. Amen.