

Trinity Sunday (A) – June 19, 2011
Saint Stephen’s Church, Wimberley, TX
Matthew 28:16-20
Go!

It was an *earthquake* that got her going. It was April 18, 1906 when the big one hit San Francisco. Dorothy was eight years old and had just moved across the country from Brooklyn, NY to Oakland, CA. She wrote later in her diary: “The earthquake started with a deep rumbling and the convulsions of the earth started afterward, so that the earth became a sea that rocked our little house in a tumultuous manner.”

Dorothy was the third child of four. She shared a room with her baby sister, who was sleeping in her arms when the earthquake hit. From the fog of sleep, she saw her father rushing her two brothers toward the front door, and commanding them, “Go!” Her mother raced into her room in the next moment and took the baby up into her arms and exited the same way – leaving her alone in that brass bed. Did they expect her to follow?

As an adult, Dorothy would say that she never escaped the noise of that big bed rolling across the floor and the fear she felt riding upon it. Also, she would admit until the end of her life it was on that night, upon that bed all alone, when the earth beneath her became an ocean that she first felt God, stalking her in the dark.

When the light of day returned, she ventured outside to see thousands of refugees fleeing San Francisco in boats to seek safety and shelter in Oakland. The people of her new town were going out to help them – every one of them. “The men put up tents, contrived lean-tos, the women were cooking and lending their spare clothing. Dorothy felt the confusion, loneliness, and fear drawn out of her by what she saw.”

“While the crisis lasted, people loved each other,” she wrote in her autobiography. “It was though they were united in Christian solidarity. It makes one think of how people could, if they would, care for each other in times of stress, un-judgingly in pity and love.”¹

The Dorothy of whom I am speaking is, of course, Dorothy Day, the co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement and the untiring champion and friend of the poor, the homeless, and the laborer. It was in the earthquake that she felt God say go! She returned as a woman to the streets of New York and upset many a politician and prelate with her avid non-violent action and advocacy of the poor. Her world had been shaken by God and she spent her life – only dying in 1980 at age 83 – shaking others up.

¹ Paul Elie, The Life You Save May Be Your Own: An American Pilgrimage (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2003),3-4.

To end up in the middle of the Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Ghost – can be *unsettling*, earth-shattering stuff. There's nothing else to do but go! I can't help but recall the terrifying call Isaiah received that reverberated all about the Temple:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.' The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke.

And I said: 'Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!' Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, 'Here am I; send me!'

It is more than coincidental that only in the version of the Gospel story we read today – Matthew's version – that an *earthquake* heralds the first Easter: "As the first day of the week was dawning (while it was still dark), Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake..." (**MT 28:1-2**) The resurrection of Jesus is not greeted with pastels, white shoes, and painted eggs – but by the ground becoming a veritable sea under their feet. Christians in every age – from John, Peter, Mary, and Paul to Dorothy Day and onto us – are to be "shaken...and not just stirred!" Did you note what the disciples did when they first saw the risen Lord Jesus on the mountain? "They worshipped him." The Greek here, according to Bill Scheel is "They fell on their faces" in fear (**MT 28:17**). I'll say shaken!

Matthew's community is a case in point. They are feeling on the fringe of things. Matthew's church is a Jewish-Christian fellowship living in Galilee. Ever since Paul set out preaching all across the Mediterranean and the Jerusalem Temple was flattened by the occupying Romans, Jewish Christians are the odd-people-out. The sea of Gentile Christians is growing by the day. The Jewish-Christian community is shrinking. They are in danger of becoming a precious people, just holding on remembering the "good old days."

But the gospel writing in their community ends by starting an earthquake under their feet. "Forget precious," Jesus seems to say. "Never mind being outnumbered." "Ignore your paralyzing fear – and go!"

“Go **where**. Do **what**,” they ask. “Go make disciples of all nations.” In other words, cross over the thick boundaries of your race, class, comfort, and geography. “**How** do we do that?” seems the logical question rising up from that hesitant community. “Baptize them and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you” (MT 28:19-20). “**Why** those two things?” they query. Jesus wants them to see that God, the Holy Trinity, is the actor in all of this. God reaches out to save in baptism. It is not nearly as much our decision for God as it is His for us...like God reaching out for an 8 year-old on a big bed in the dark. After that there must be a measureable transformation of life. They must learn and imitate the life of the incarnate Lord, Jesus – become themselves the Trinity exposed. Jonathan Edwards, a preacher during the Great Awakening in our country, said, “When transformed, we begin to love the things Jesus loves.” How’s that for a seismic shift in our lives?

Surely this Jewish crowd will realize that this is Israel’s deliverance at the Red Sea all over again. God hears the cries of a disparate, unimpressive people kept captive by the mightiest, most cultured, and advanced nation on earth – Egypt. God saves them in dramatic fashion through the *waters* of the Red Sea. Once safe from their oppressors, God leads them to the Holy Mountain where He gives them the core of his teaching – the Ten Commandments. As saved people must be a changed people – a people on the go! Of course, the road leads us into the wilderness. Who knows where the Father, Son, and Spirit will take us next?

Dorothy Day was at the end of her rope at age 29. She had exited two common-law marriages, had at least one back-alley abortion, and was known as the girl “the gangsters admired.” In short, she was miserable. But then one of Dorothy’s sweethearts, the playwright Eugene O’Neill, the Nobel Laureate Playwright (*The Iceman Commeth*), while in a drunken stupor – recited all 182 lines of Francis Thompson’s “The Hound of Heaven” to her at 4 AM.... *I fled him, down the nights and down the days/I fled him, down the arches of the years/I fled him down the labyrinthine ways/Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears/I hid from him...* It was then that Dorothy Day felt the *earth shudder violently* beneath her feet again. She walked right into Saint Joseph’s Church, the oldest Catholic Church in Manhattan, and then she walked right out those doors onto the street to live amongst the poor whom she would serve for the rest of her life.

What will it take for us to feel the ground *shift beneath our feet* so that we step beyond the formidable boundaries of our egos and go!