**The Will Be Done**

“The Lord is with you.” This is said to flesh and blood people like you in me in two of today’s appointed readings from Scripture. First the prophet Nathan says to King David, “The Lord is with you.” Then, the angel Gabriel says the same to Mary, the mother of our Lord. But as it turns out these words are truer for Mary than they are for King David. Without question, the Lord is an ongoing presence in the lives of both individuals, but the Lord is only with or for what Mary intends to do. This is how goes sometimes. God is with us, in the sense that God is our constant companion and guide. But God is not always with or for what we say or do. When taken together, baptism and worship are reflective of this dynamic.

As to baptism, when St. Paul discusses the sacrament in the sixth chapter of Romans, his basic message is that through baptism “the Lord is with us.” The apostle says baptism joins us to Christ forever and ever. We’ll die and rise with him until rising is all there’s left to do. St. Paul says much the same thing in the 8th chapter of Romans when he with great eloquence and impact writes that absolutely nothing can separate the baptized from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Again, the basic message is that thanks to baptism, the Lord is with us through thick and thin and this continues even after death. Through baptism, a relationship begins to which the Lord will always be faithful. But will we reciprocate? Will we honor our relationship with Lord as much the Lord honors it? These are open questions which bring us to another set of words very closely related to the words “the Lord is with you.”

The words I have in mind are “the Lord be with you.” This second set of words is familiar to us thanks to traditional Lutheran worship. When things are done traditionally, the words “the Lord be with you” are sometimes used to introduce and invite prayer and they’re almost always used to begin celebrations of The Lord’s Supper. Think: The Lord be with you. And also with you. Let us pray. Think: The Lord be with you. And also with you. Lift up your hearts. We lift them to the Lord. Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. It is right to give our thanks and praise. We know this stuff, but our readings from 2nd Samuel and Luke give us the opportunity to understand it even better.

Let’s start here. The words “the Lord be with you” are worship words and this is definitely a part of what our readings from 2nd Samuel and Luke are ultimately about. A good bit of these readings is about worship; about when worship does and does not happen. This is particularly obvious when it comes to our reading from 2nd Samuel. Initially encouraged by the prophet Nathan, King David intends to build a temple for God. In his view, it isn’t right or salutary for God’s house to be a dusty tent that moves from place to place. Worship, King David reckons, requires something more marvelous and majestic and magisterial. But God doesn’t allow this grandiose understanding of worship to stand for every long. Through the prophet Nathan, God quickly lets it be known that a dusty tent will suffice just fine for now. Worship isn’t about the grand gesture, God says, any more than it’s about pious pomp. Worship is about living our lives God’s way rather than our way. It’s a revelation that brings us right back to how the words “the Lord is with you” and “the Lord be with you” are similar, but not the same. When we use the words “the Lord be with you,” we communicate that there’s a conditionality to worship that the words “the Lord is with you” simply don’t capture.

Whether it be at church or in our day-to-day lives, worship is not about doing whatever we want, whenever we want, however we want. Worship is about bowing down before the Lord as wise men from the east once did. Worship is about submitting to the Lord as Mary does in our reading from Luke when she says, “Here I am, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your word.” Worship, and worship does include all of our lives, is about being people whose words and deeds proclaim, “Thy will be done on earth too!” But of course, this doesn’t always happen. Again, there’s a conditionality to worship that the words “the Lord is with you” just don’t capture. To give voice to this conditionality, you need the hopeful hesitancy of the words “the Lord be with you.” Maybe this prayer we’re about to lift up will prove to be pleasing to the Lord. But then again, maybe not. Maybe this celebration of the Lord’s Supper will find us experiencing the crucified and risen Lord who’s always there to be experienced. But then again, maybe not. The Lord be with you. We hope it happens, and it certainly can, but there’s no guarantee it will. This is “the Lord be with you,” as opposed to “the Lord is with you.”

This helps to explain why the words “the Lord be with you” also appear during traditional celebrations of baptism. Just before water is poured into the font, just before that water is blessed, just before someone is baptized, the officiant says, “the Lord be with you.” Someone is about to be adopted by God the Father; the most faithful of all fathers. Someone is about to be joined to the death and resurrection of God the Son. Someone is about to be blessed with the indwelling of God the Spirit. All of this is going to happen. There’s no conditionality about it whatsoever. But will the Holy Trinity’s baptismal grace produce the desired effect? Will it lead to a life of true and genuine worship? Will the Lord be with or for all, or at least most, of what this new member of the Church goes on to say and to do? Maybe. Maybe not. The person baptized may more often than not prove to be a King David who puts their will before the will of the Lord. Then again, the person baptized may more often than not prove to be a Mary whose words and deeds proclaim, “Here I am, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your word” There’s an uncertainty here that the hopeful hesitancy of “the Lord be with you” captures a whole lot better than the certainty of “the Lord is with you.”

And one final time, when is it that our worship actually is true and genuine? Mary gets at this when in our reading from Luke when she describes herself as a servant of the Lord. True and genuine worship is a ministry of service. True and genuine worship is a ministry of subordination; a ministry of submission where the will of the Lord wins out every time. We worship aright when we do it God’s way, not the world’s way. We worship aright when we serve the aims and ends of God rather than our own aims and ends or the aims and ends of some group that tries to steal away the worship that belongs to God alone. As St. Paul put its so succinctly in the reading from Romans we heard earlier today, we worship aright when our aim and end is to glorify God by being Jesus people; people who serve him and not some other lord. And so, all throughout our lives, let’s be asking ourselves, “What would Jesus do?” Asking that question and implementing what we hear back in prayer, study, and fellowship with other Christians is the best way to ensure that our worship both in and out of church trades in the hopeful hesitancy of the words “the Lord be with you” for the certainty of the words “the Lord is with you.” Amen!