

Go Therefore

Scriptures: Gen. 1:1-2:4; Matt. 28:16-20

Trinity Sunday

Last week was Pentecost, the end of the Great 50 Days of Eastertide. Today we celebrate Trinity Sunday on the Church calendar. When a church follows the lectionary, which we've done for most of the last decade with the exception of various Advent series over the years, we're able to focus on holy days that have been celebrated through the ages. Today is one of them. Known as Trinity Sunday, it's a day when we pause to focus on the mystery of the Triune God we serve. It's tempting to let the teacher in me expound on the Doctrine of the Trinity. I've wrestled this week with prepping the sermon, because that doctrine is so central to our faith, and the life of the Church – and I'd love to talk about it, and give a plethora of examples to try to help us understand the Divine Mystery better than we do now.

Rather than using all sorts of imagery to try to metaphorically explain the divine dance of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, I think instead, I'll just say, as John Wesley once said. "Bring me a worm that can comprehend a man, and I will show you a man that can comprehend the Triune God." Our glorious God – Father, Son, and Spirit – is too far above us to accurately understand, and so awesomely magnificent that even if I had words to attempt it, I couldn't. The Holy One centers Himself, in each Person of the Godhead, in relationship. In a nutshell, that's what the Trinity is about – that our God is the God of relationship, and the Restorer and Sustainer of relationship. And so today, I want for us to examine what it means to be relational in our dealing with God, and others. If you have a Bible, or Bible app handy, turn with me to Matthew 28:16-20.

Read Matt. 28:16-20.

I want to back up to one thing here – the concept of Trinity. You won't find the word "Trinity" anywhere in the Bible – it's not there. It's an idea the ancient church mothers and fathers came up with after copious time spent in study, prayer, and loving discussion – including sometimes heated disagreement. But throughout Scripture, we hear evidence which points to it. Jo read earlier that "the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters," (Gen. 1:2), and "God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness,'" (1:26). Jesus refers to it in verse 19 of the passage we just looked at, in what's come to be known as "The Great Commission," where He says, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Pay close attention to how Jesus says it. "in the name of..." He doesn't say in the "names" of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He says "in the name of..." because God is One. John Wesley calls this, the "Three-in-One God."

The Great Commission

Our Gospel lesson today comes after Jesus has been resurrected on Easter morning, and before His ascension into Heaven. The core of this Gospel lesson is the Great Commission. It's the principle behind everything the followers of Christ do. Our faith is based upon following His direction, and this is it. That's a pretty loaded statement, I know. Put another way, we live and act the way in which Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, would have us do – not because some sage saint put together a code of conduct, a book of discipline, or a list of doctrines in an attempt to make this a better world. We simply follow God in and through Christ.

What's that mean? We don't get to call ourselves a Christian, and then disregard His word. That's what the Church, generally speaking, has done. You know, West Ohio Annual Conference met this week, in Dayton. Like most things in this life, it was bittersweet. There were many things we heard down there, some of which I won't get into during our time together this morning. I do want to say a couple things – observations, really. First, one thing that Bishop Palmer pointed out – he is a great preacher – one thing he said, I think is spot on, is that generally speaking, the Church needs to repent.

Turn, if you will, in your United Methodist Hymnal to page 12. Look what the liturgy for *A Service of Word and Table II*, says under "Confession and Pardon." I choke up every time we say this. "Merciful God... We have failed to be an obedient church. We have not done Your will, we have broken Your law, we have rebelled against Your love, we have not loved our neighbors, and we have not heard the cry of the needy." Friends, it's the truth. You know, I got some flack back in 2021, after I'd finally gotten licensed to be your local pastor. After John retired in June, 2020, I filled in as what's known as a "supply pastor" in the United Methodist Church.

A supply pastor is not authorized to conduct any sacramental duties of the Church. I wasn't licensed until February, 2021. You may remember back in those days, we had monthly Communion services, and I would preface everything by saying that an authorized clergy person of the Church had blessed the elements before the service. That was the only way we were permitted to do it. So during my licensing interview, the district committee on ministry quizzed me on the Sacraments. I didn't grow up Methodist – so they told me to use the liturgy, and not skip through it to the Last Supper reenactment. I listened to them. I caught flack for that. I was told by a few people, "this is too Catholic," and "this isn't how we've done it." Well, as they say, "different strokes for different folks." I like it, I'll keep using it, because it puts me in a closer relationship and a better understanding of the depth of God's love revealed through Jesus Christ for me. I know that the confession and pardon piece is uncomfortable – it is for me, too – because I know I fail, I don't live up to the high calling Christ has for me in every moment of every day.

Living into the High Calling

But friends, we're doing better than we were. We're doing better than we were a year ago, in regards to being an obedient church. We're doing better about living into God's will for us, loving our neighbors – even those who may have green or purple hair – and responding to the cry of the needy. We're doing better in living into the high calling Christ has for us. In the months and years ahead, things will change. Change happens. But friends, God is on the throne. He takes great care of us! And that's about all I'm going to say for now, with regards to Annual Conference. I'll let Larry Ludlow, our lay delegate and SPR Chair talk more with you about this annual conference session at another time.

The mystery of the Triune God isn't a decorative thing to our faith – it's the essence of God, revealed by Christ Himself. So it's not optional, and it's not something folks who disagree have a right to put to a vote. And look, there were disagreements. Look how our passage opens. "Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go," (verse 16). See, here they are, back in their hometown. In the familiar, probably in that mindset of, "this is how we've always done things," right? You know the rest of that phrase? Sometimes, people say, "and we aren't going to change." So, they stick their heads in the proverbial sand. And we see that, too, all around us.

Well, notice what we're told next. "When they [the eleven disciples] saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted," (verse 17). They worship Jesus, "but some doubted." That's interesting. They see He's resurrected. He's proven He's capable of doing everything He said He could do, but they doubt. We don't know who in the passage is doubting, maybe it's Thomas, right? Doubting Thomas. Or maybe Peter. Maybe it was all of them. I did a little research on this, because I don't have a Greek Bible, and if I did, I couldn't read it, anyways. The word used for "doubt," has less to do with unbelief, and more of a reluctant, wavering, or hesitant meaning.

Freeze!

One of the commentaries suggest that the apostles are worshipping Jesus, and kind of "freeze." Things are happening so fast, they just can't process what they're experiencing. And so, Jesus comes to them – as He often does to us, in our times when we "freeze," and meets them where they are, lifting them through relationship with Himself to a new, and higher focus. The gift Jesus gives to these "wavering" disciples is a gift He gives to His wavering, sometimes reluctant followers yet today.

He knows us to be people who know we are completely dependent upon Him – we know this – relying on the promise that He is with us always (verse 20), through the presence of the Holy Spirit in us – we heard about this last week at Pentecost. He knows we get overwhelmed with the bitter, and the sweet, things which make us waver. God's promise, is our solution for human wavering. Seeking Emmanuel – God-with-us

– in every circumstance, doing what Christ teaches us to do, and living in everyday communion with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we can turn our wavering into times of discerning. When we can't figure out what to do – when we “freeze,” we can pause, think, and seek God and His wisdom – in prayer, in Christian friends, in acts of Christian service. “Freezing” isn't a sin, folks, it's a gift to truly “practice what we preach,” or as Jesus says it best, “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you,” (verse 20a). It's an opportunity to deepen our everyday, living relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Daily Examen with the Lord's Prayer

I want to close this time in prayer, specifically a type of prayer known as the daily examen using the Lord's Prayer. It's a time where we and God, in the silence of our hearts, hearing phrases of the Lord's prayer, interspersed with questions, are able to connect what we know in our heads, what we know in our hearts, and the Holy Spirit living within us. And at the end, I'll invite you to pray that prayer once again with me.

So let's take a moment to get quiet before God. “Drop Thy still dews of quietness, till all our strivings cease; take from our souls the strain and stress, and let our ordered lives confess the beauty of Thy peace.”

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.” How have you attended to God's holy presence in your life? Where and in what ways were you especially aware or unaware of God?

“Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as in heaven.” In what ways did you seek God's will? In what ways did you succeed or fail in allowing God's yearning for the good of all His children to rule your attitudes and actions?

“Give us today our daily bread.” What is the bread, physical and spiritual, that sustains you and for which you are grateful to God? What did you do with bread beyond your needs? With whom did you break bread or share your bread?

“Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.” Did you forgive those who offended or harmed you? What steps remain to restore the peace? Whom did you harm, and what actions did you take to make amends? What steps remain?

“Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.” Where were you tempted? How were you tempted? In what ways did you fail? In what ways were you delivered? What did you learn about your limits and where to find the strength you need?

“For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are Yours, now and forever.” Give thanks to God for divine blessings and bounty! Name the blessings of today, and give them to God. Spend time in prayer praising God and rededicating your life to walking with Christ. Amen.