

Prescott United Church Disciples of Christ
Trinity Sunday, June 7, 2020
Scripture: Matthew 28:16-20 NIV

Matthew 28:16-20 - The Great Commission

¹⁶Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

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Sermon Message "Three in One"

Today we commemorate Trinity Sunday – the Three Person in One God; God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In Matthew's gospel today we hear Jesus commission the disciples to "Baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit".

The setting of this last chapter of Matthew occurs on Easter day, just hours after Jesus is discovered missing from the tomb. Jesus suddenly appears to the women who are frantically running to go tell the disciples that their Lord has risen. He stops them in their tracks with instructions for the disciples to meet him in Galilee. Upon hearing the news from the women, the eleven core group followers obediently rush to Galilee confused and bewildered and highly skeptical.

When Jesus appears to them and proclaims that he has "all authority in heaven and on earth", they doubt. How can that be? They just saw the floggings along the road to the crucifixion on the cross. So how could this be that he has all this power and authority?

As the disciples gathered in Galilee, Matthew was trying to figure out how to get that bunch of fearful disciples/his friends to move out of their comfort zones into that frightening world¹ of Gentile populations who hadn't heard the Good News or who didn't want to hear and accept the teachings of the disciples about Jesus the Christ.

You see, for the past three years, Jesus had authorized or given power to the disciples in their ministries to cast out demons, heal the sick, and proclaim that the kingdom of heaven had come near. The distinguishing mark of this ministry was that they didn't teach – only Jesus did. So in this great commissioning we hear today in Scripture, Jesus widens the audience –

from Israel to all lands around them – and adds teaching to the charge to all of his followers – not just the core 11-12. So the disciples were to do all what Jesus had been doing but with a more far-reaching effect.¹ “Those” Gentiles – “those suspicious others” we hear of in many parts of the gospel stories, are now included along with Israelites in carrying the message to all nations.² Jesus has eliminated the boundaries separating people. All are equal.

These disciples were ordinary people. How could they accomplish such a task? The disciples were anointed with the same power available to Jesus; the power of Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in whose name they were to baptize disciples from all the lands of God’s wonderful creation. As he bestowed that power, Jesus also promised he would be there till the end of the age. It was in the disciples’ relationship to Jesus and his to the triune God that they would access the power to heal, proclaim, baptize and teach.³

A relationship to Jesus! Three weeks ago we learned in the Gospel of John how Jesus reassured his disciples about his relationship with the Father. Again, there was that promise of being there for them – “I will not leave you orphaned”⁴ meaning in Jewish times, without a Rabbi leader in their midst. And in those words of encouragement, Jesus told them, “I am in my Father. You are in me. And I am in you.”⁴

Often the Holy Trinity is shown in three intersecting circles in a drawing. We see where the Father is part of the Son and the Spirit. The Son overlaps and is connected with the Father and Spirit, and the Spirit is in with the Father and Son. All are relational. You and I, as God’s wondrous creatures, are relational to the Triune God.

But, just what is it you and I understand about this relationship? Let’s first look at what the history of Christianity would have been like if there was not a Trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

First let’s say there was only a God – no Jesus the Son; no Holy Spirit; only God. This God created the world, saw that it was good, and was done. Over the generations there was no interaction or relationship by God with mankind. Humans and animals populated; the 12 Tribes of Israel did not exist. There was no LORD God, because God originally created a cosmos and was done. His task was completed. End of story!

Or, what if there was no God and our universe was created by some scientific force. In this case, long ago a baby, Jesus, was born to ordinary parents, grew and lived a good life, was well-respected and was a teacher of sorts, however belief in a one true God did not exist in his world. He wasn’t sent to earth by a heavenly Father because his father was right there with him on earth. As this man named Jesus aged, he eventually died and was buried. There was no rising from the dead or ascending into heaven because there was no need for such actions. There wasn’t a God or a heaven to go to. There was no need for the man to be crucified to fulfill any prophecy or to carry out a divine Father’s will, because none existed. And most

importantly for us, there was no sacrifice on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins and no salvation for our everlasting life.

Or, what if there never was a God or this man named Jesus, but just a Spirit? A free-floating Spirit that randomly empowered people, offering encouragement in life to do better.

My friends, what if there was no Three Persons in One God? What if our world had known only one aspect of my scenarios? It is scary for me to think that without the Father, Son and Holy Spirit we would not have Christianity! Christianity was developed by the early followers of Jesus, who taught that the only way to the Father was through himself, Jesus. Our world is in a mess right now, and it is frightening for me to entertain any kind of idea of no Trinity!

So when I asked a few minutes ago about what we get in return for this relationship with the Holy Trinity, I believe that the benefits are astonishing and limitless! All throughout our lives, we get to know, love and live in our Creator, our Redeemer, and our Sustainer. God exercises powerfulness by giving: God nourishes the Son and all of creation by communicating God's own reality to us.³ God sent the Spirit to strengthen us in faith, courage, and action.

We are sent into our communities to invite others from neighboring towns – like from Corning, Orient, Carbon, Lenox, Creston, wherever you may live; to extend that welcoming invitation to come to know Jesus and to share about everlasting life such as to all of our Facebook friends. Think of the wide-spread coverage that means!

And more good news is that we have all the tools that we need – the words, the courage, the wisdom to speak as well as the wisdom to listen, the authority to reach out with open and inviting arms to all brothers and sisters regardless of their status or location.

Through God the Spirit, God promises us his presence and a power that does not coerce others, but rather serves and persuades.³ The Spirit is that gift from our gracious God the Father that is poured out on all of us – families, communities, churches, and the world.

So, my friends, I say, thanks be to God the Father, the Son, and the Spirit for saving a wretch like me!

¹ "Matthew 28:16-20", "Homiletical Perspective" by Thomas G. Long; "Feasting on the Word Year A, Vol. 3", Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY; pp 44. 46. 48

² "Matthew 28:16-20", "Exegetical Perspective" by Meda A. A. Stamper; "Feasting on the Word Year A, Vol. 3", Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY; pp 47, 49

³ "Matthew 28:16-20", "Theological Perspective" by Stephen B. Boyd; "Feasting on the Word Year A, Vol. 3", Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY; pp 45. 47. 49

⁴ John 14:18-20 NRSV