



June 7, 2020 Trinity Sunday
The Trinity of Discipleship
Matthew 28:18-20

This is Trinity Sunday. I have to tell you that every time Trinity Sunday rolls around, I find myself wondering what I am going to do with it. This week I was poking around on some online blogs looking for inspiration and I came across this opening sentence:

"In this time of pandemic and civil unrest, grasping the essence of the nature of the Triune God is urgent and important."

I had to go back and read it again. It was a head-scratcher. I had to keep reading. It turned out to be a long discourse about how we are connected to each other, most of which I couldn't understand. I found it best to just admit to myself that this guy was probably a lot smarter than me and I needed to do something more in my own wheelhouse on the Trinity.

Listen again to our Gospel for this Trinity Sunday:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

As Christians, we only have three things that God requires of us: love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength, love our neighbor as ourselves, and make disciples of Jesus Christ. To make disciples means to be witnesses of Christ in order to bring others into a relationship with Christ.

At the end of Matthew before Jesus ascends to the Father, Jesus' last words to his followers were not, "Go and find a comfortable church with a good fellowship time." His last words were not, "Go and sing the songs you like in worship." Jesus didn't say, "Try to do some good every once in a while." Jesus said, "Go and make disciples!"

This is called the "Great Commission." The church is the only institution in the world that exists for those outside of it. Unfortunately, many churches

don't even see it as a commission. Instead, it has become the "Great Omission."

As the church has turned inward over the last 30 or 40 years, it has lost sight of its mission to make disciples. This is one of the reasons why the mainline church is struggling to grow. The stats don't look good. The mainline church overall is not replenishing itself with a new generation of disciples. We are not reaching the younger generation. Fewer and fewer churches are bringing even one new person to Christ in one year.

What has happened? Why can't the church today be like the early church? The answer comes through something that AW Tozer said long ago: "If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the Church today, 95% of what we do would go on and no one would know the difference. If the Holy Spirit had been withdrawn from the New Testament Church, 95% of what they did would have stopped, and everybody would know the difference."

Is the Holy Spirit the driving force of the church today? If we are to reclaim the fire of the Spirit the early church had, if we are to share our witness effectively, we must get back to fundamentals--what we believe and what we practice.

- Love God.
- Love People.
- Make Disciples.

That's what the early followers of Christ did! They were not sophisticated people. They hadn't been to seminary. They hadn't read books on church growth and marketing the church. They simply made themselves available to the Holy Spirit. And look what happened in Acts chapter 2, verse 6: "Each one heard them speaking in his own language." Now this was not the gift of glossolalia or speaking in tongues. What happened on the day of Pentecost was that a bunch of people from all over the place, all speaking different languages, all coming from different cultures, heard the gospel in their own language. The good news of the saving love of Jesus Christ was communicated to them! It was clear! The Holy Spirit did it through them because they were simply willing to be used! The Holy Spirit broke through communication barriers and the gospel translated.

Now isn't it interesting that here in 2020 with all of our miraculous communication technology we still have communication problems? Isn't it

interesting that in spite of our advances in Bible translations and production of gimmicks that people are still turned off by religion and the church? It seems we are good at information but not communication.

Will Willimon wrote a few years ago, "To many outside the church, the Church is like a football huddle. You know that something important is being said there, but you can't understand a word of it, and all you can see is their rear ends."

Where is our passion and love for God and our passion and love for people? This is what translates! That's what translated at Pentecost and that's what translates today! Believe me, when you forgive when everyone else wants revenge, that translates. When you are loving when everyone else is hateful, that translates. When you don't give up on people when everyone else wants to, that translates.

There is a great debate in the Church right now on how to be relevant in this post-modern world. Because the mainline church is struggling to grow, we are falling all over ourselves trying to reach the next generation. We have meetings and seminars and workshops about this very thing. We talk about gimmicks and models and strategies. And there is a place for all that, but we need to be in touch with the world, not in sync with the world.

You know what? The Church ought to be a little strange. We ought to be a little off-kilter. If people come to the church because the values of the world have diminished them and they are looking for something different, why would they be attracted to us if we are like the world? So if we are a little odd, a little weird, that's good. It is as if we are saying, "What you are looking for, you will not find in the world!" People respond to real people who have a real love and passion for God! The gospel does not have to be dressed up, dolled up, souped up, or given a make-over. The gospel does fine by itself.

The early church knew this. The power of the early church was rooted in prayer and discernment from the Holy Spirit. If the church today made itself more available to the power of the Holy Spirit, believe me, people would notice. The church would be led to speak to the real spiritual needs of people. And when the church starts doing that, people will listen.

I like the story Wayne Cordeiro tells about a bakery he knew about. It was located in a bad part of town. The bakery was small, rundown, and nondescript. Yet at 5am every morning the aroma of delicious bread

emanated from that bakery. People would line up around the block to get their hands on that bread. That is a parable for us as the church. It is not about appearances or gimmicks; it is simply about offering the bread of life. People are so spiritually hungry that all we have to do is offer the bread of life with passion and authenticity, and they will come from all over to taste it.

Does the sweet smell of Christ emanate from your life? Are you sharing your witness? Are you letting your light shine?

The unavoidable truth is that as Christians we are called to bear witness, to testify to the hope that is within us, to tell people about Jesus--to make disciples. Now, this may scare some of you to death. But, take heart and listen closely. By the grace of God, you are able to love God, love people and make disciples. You don't do it on your own power. This is why Jesus said, "I am with you always, even unto the end of the age." Jesus is always with us, helping us and empowering us to share the good news. I know he is. As a pastor, I have heard many great sermons from the church. The church is covered in wonderful preachers.

Deep down you know there are people all around you who need the love, forgiveness, grace, power, strength and comfort of God in Jesus Christ. Give me one good reason why you wouldn't want to share it?