

Father...Son...Holy Spirit

Matthew 28:16-20

This is Trinity Sunday, but people who have cancer probably do not care. This is Trinity Sunday, but those young couples who cannot get pregnant probably do not care either. This is Trinity Sunday, but the family dealing with the wayward teenager, the couple headed for divorce, the person who has lost a job, they do not care. Does it really matter to them that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? They just want to know that God is God and that God somehow knows who they are, where they are, what they are doing, and what they need.

Let me tell you what I learned this past week about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I made a 3-day trip to Indianapolis on Wednesday. The goal was to come up with a better process for the church to discuss issues where different members may have very different beliefs within the Christian Church in the United States and Canada. What I experienced was the presence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit empowering us to do the task. Not one of us was able to do this alone – none was smart enough – none was wise enough – none was experienced enough – but together, relying on God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we were able in 12 hours of work to develop a framework for respectful Christian dialogue, a submission process, an evaluation process, and a plan to obtaining broad input as to whether we are going in the correct direction. We had unanimously agreed on the part of all six members present. This had to be God's presence and power because even in a close-knit family there is difficulty in coming to consensus.

Let me tell you about my most exciting experience of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit last week. Three of us went to the airport together and had lunch before our flights home. Usually we just talk in general and on Friday we talked about clergy spouses and

how Brenda, Jeremy and Leroy were supportive of us in our ministries, but they each had defined for themselves their level of involvement – this was their choice rather than the congregation their roles upon them. After Caroline left to go to her gate, Fernando and I had time for more personal conversation. I believe I began with statements of thanksgiving to God for being bi-vocational, that I lived an hour drive from the church, and that the elders and Rev. Jeanne were supportive to do pastoral care in partnership or when I am unavailable. In response Fernando told his story.

Fernando had been a well-established and well-paid teacher in Chicago, felt a call from God to help a congregation. He was later called to help as pastor of the church and enrolled in seminary. Life was good. However, there came a time when he and his wife needed to leave Chicago and he resigned from his teaching position and the pastoral position. They relocated to the Orlando area where they had family, but not a job. He could not get a teaching position because he had 18 years of experience; therefore he was passed over for inexperienced teachers just graduating from college. They worked in labor positions and became active in a local Disciples congregation. After a few years he heard the call the Holy Spirit and his pastor to help a community a two-hour drive away to help establish a Disciple church. The Holy Spirit had already allowed them to meet people in the community who had attested to their need. Fernando and his wife made the commute every Tuesday night and weekends and God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit; blessed the congregation and now it is a well-established group, and a blessing to the larger community. Because of the distance and health challenges, he resigned after years of service.

Later, in conversation with his regional minister, Fernando was called to a church in Tampa where God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, built a faith community from eight (8) active member to over 60 by the time they left. At a Commission on Ministry meeting Fernando was challenged to continue his education. By faith in Father, Son and Holy

Spirit, he resigned his pastoral position, left his job and moved to Indianapolis to attend Christian Theological Seminary. After graduation he and Brenda moved to North Carolina to do a hospital chaplaincy internship for a year. By faith in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Fernando and Brenda moved back to Florida seeking ministry and employment. Within two days they had rented a house, but were down to no money. Within two weeks God blessed him with a job as a hospice chaplain. Brenda spends 3 weeks each month caring for her ailing mother in Puerto Rico and is therefore unable to help financially by holding a job. Although the money does not compare to what he was making as a Chicago teacher, Fernando believes that he is being obedient to God's call his life. At the end of the conversation, Fernando told me to share his story as the Holy Spirit instructed and I learned that a one-hour commute is nothing to complain about.

At the end of Matthew, Jesus met his disciples in Galilee—the land of the Gentiles (4:15)—gave them final instructions, and promised them the same empowering fellowship with God that he had. Earlier in his ministry, Jesus sent out the Twelve and gave them the authority, or power (10:1), to cast out unclean spirits, heal the sick, and proclaim the good news that the kingdom of heaven has come near (10:7). Jesus had been doing the same things preceding this commissioning of his closest followers. The only distinguishing mark of his ministry was teaching; Jesus did it, the disciples did not. In this final commissioning of the disciples, Jesus widened the audience—from Israel to all nations—and added teaching to the charge of *all* of his followers. The disciples are to do what he had been doing and with more far-reaching effect. We do these things by the same power (28:18) available to Jesus. It was the power of Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in whose name we are to baptize disciples from all the peoples of God's creation. Jesus had been given that power, and he promised us that he would be

with us to the end of the age (v. 20). It was in their relationship to Father, Son and Holy Spirit that we would the power to heal, proclaim, and teach.

Shirley Guthrie writes, "The same God who is God over us as God the Father and Creator, and God with and for us as the incarnate Word and Son, is also God in and among us as God the Holy Spirit." You cannot go out into the world, according to Jesus, without all of that. We are baptized into the whole being of God, whether we understand it or not. We are not powerless in the world; we are not disconnected from the omnipotent God as Creator, or from the redeeming work of God in human flesh, or from the very presence of that same God in the Holy Spirit, who dwells within us and among us and sometimes outside of us. That is a tremendous gift to celebrate as people who are sitting in the pew feeling detached, isolated, alone, angry, deserted, depressed, grieving, hopeless, fearful, anxious, wounded, ashamed, and tired.

Jesus did not just send the church out to perform the ritual of baptism. The world will not be fixed by merely getting everyone wet. Saying the words "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" is not magic. The more difficult task is that of making disciples.

Disciples are students. They are like interns. Interns are watching, practicing under supervision, asking questions, making mistakes, and learning from them. Jesus said very clearly, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (v. 19a). Go make students of Christ. Put people in internships, into a lifelong learning process. That is a major paradigm shift from making church members or whatever else we substitute for discipleship. **Steven P. Eason**

We often think that if we had walked and talked with Jesus we would be brave and be obedient. However, did you hear our scripture? When the disciples see Jesus, they worship, but some doubt. There Peter, after having stepped out in faith to walk on the water with Jesus, becomes frightened by the wind and begins to sink. When he is saved, the disciples worship Jesus. Matthew chooses to make room for doubt alongside

worship in the wonder of the scene on the Sea of Galilee and in the glory of the resurrection. Like the presence of Thomas in John's resurrection account, Matthew creates space for doubting worshipers now to find themselves in the resurrection story as well.

The statement of Jesus in verses 18-20 is solid as a rock. On the basis of that authority, Jesus commissions his disciples to go and make more disciples. We not only witness to those we know, but those we consider strangers. Our command to make disciples consists of two activities: baptizing and teaching. The baptismal formula points back to the baptism of Jesus himself in 3:13-17, in which the Spirit descends on him as the voice from heaven proclaims him the beloved Son. Jesus told his followers to reenact his story in the baptism of new disciples, enfolding them in the life of God, with the Son as their Immanuel, the Father loving them as his own, and the Spirit descending like a dove to lead them out.

The teaching is to include all that Jesus has commanded. But the teachings of Jesus are not the last word. The last word is that *there is never a last word*. "Behold!" Jesus says, "I am with you." The one who is named Immanuel, "God with us," before his birth will be with us, his followers, all our days until the close of the age, when the kingdom, which has come near and reach glorious fulfillment. **Meda A. A. Stamper**

The ancient church believed that the incarnation of God in Christ revealed a God of divine power. God from eternity is relational; between the Father and Son, is always mutual self-giving. The unity within God is a "unity of love, a unity in which the identity of each party is not swallowed up and annihilated, but established. God's power, then, is not self-possessive and self-preserving like that of the Gentiles, who "lord it over" others and tyrannize them (Mark 10:42). God exercises powerfulness by giving; God nourishes the Son and creation by communicating God's own reality to them. In the strength of that sharing, when Jesus met the coercive power that threatens

to take his life, he does not protect his own identity by trying to hold on to it. He served us by allowing it to make good on its threat, knowing that his life rested not in his power to preserve it, but in God's willingness to sustain it. Jesus "exposes the pretense of satanic power"; that is, "dominative power is exposed as impotent, as unworthy of our awe and reverence." When we understood that, we are freed from the fear that causes us to hold anxiously to our lives and our possessions and are freed to love others by sharing all that sustains us. Jesus invites us into the mutuality and power of the divine life. He sends us to invite still others, from all nations. He does not leave us alone in that work, nor does he leave us powerless, but promises his presence and power. **Stephen B. Boyd**

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