

Go Make Disciples

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. "But, this is Trinity Sunday," proclaims the preacher. Even so, 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? We really just want to know that God is God and that God somehow knows who we are, where we are, what we are doing, and what we need.

What we want to know is what Jesus meant when he told us to go and baptize people in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Does it mean we are joined with God, the very powerful, mysterious, God the Father Almighty, the Maker of heaven and earth," the God that is larger than what we can see or understand and is beyond our logic and reason? Does this mean we are joined in the very work and person of Christ the redemptive work of Jesus, who is God in human flesh? Does it mean we are joined to the ongoing activity of the Holy Spirit, the presence of God with us today? 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." This is the meaning of Jesus' instructions!

You cannot go out into the world, according to Jesus, without all of who God is. 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 for us who sit 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; nor is saying the words "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" somehow magical. 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.

Making students of Christ and immersion into the fullness of God go hand in hand. We cannot make ourselves or anyone else a student or intern of Christ without the work of the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit is dependent upon what and who Jesus was and is. Christ keeps pointing to the Father. So therein lies the power. It is in the fullness of God, to which we are attached as students.

Maybe Trinity Sunday only offers us the entire being of God in a relationship that we do not deserve but can celebrate having. It is a day to celebrate the One to whom we belong, in life and in death, through the gift of our baptisms. It is a day the students pay tribute to the Teacher! **Steven**

P. Eason

But we were not just baptized, but were instructed to go and make other disciples. In the ultimate act of Matthew's gospel, Jesus meets his disciples in Galilee—the land of the Gentiles (4:15)—gives them final instructions, and promises them the same empowering fellowship with God that he has.

Earlier in his ministry, Jesus sent out the Twelve and gave them the authority, or power (10:1, *exousian*), to cast out unclean spirits, heal the sick, and proclaim the good news that the kingdom of heaven had 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 widens the audience—from Israel to all nations—and added teaching to the charge of *all* of his followers.

These instructions reveal an assumption that, on the face of it, is pretty amazing. The disciples are to do what Jesus had been doing and with more far-reaching effect. They could do these things only by the same power (28:18 *exousia*) available to Jesus. It was the power of Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in whose name they were to baptize disciples from all the peoples of God's creation. Jesus had been given that power, and he promised them that he would be with them to the end of the age (v. 20). It was in their relationship to him and his to God that they would access the power to heal, proclaim, and teach.

God exercises powerfulness by giving; God nourished Jesus and creation by communicating God's own reality to them. In the strength of that sharing, when Jesus met the coercive power that threatened to take his life, he did 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. In so doing, Jesus "exposed

the pretense of satanic power"; that is, "dominative power was exposed as impotent, as unworthy of our awe and reverence." When we understand 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. He promises his presence and a power that does not coerce but serves and persuades. **Stephen B. Boyd**

Jesus gave us this Great Commission. He said in essence...I died and rose again so that you might have a living hope... I died and rose again so you will trust in God... I died and rose again so that you will believe and know that God is the guardian of your soul... I died and rose again so you will be the people of God... I died and rose again so you will believe you are blessed... I died and rose again so you will believe God cares for you... I died and rose again so you will be equipped by the Holy Spirit to do your ministry...now go make disciples of all nations, not just your friends and family, but tell everyone! Remember that you do not go alone.

Garret Keizer, a minister in Vermont, tells of conducting a worship service in his little church. Only two people show up for the service, but Keizer nonetheless lite the candle and said the prayer. "The candle sputters in the half darkness," he wrote, "like a voice too embarrassed or overwhelmed to proclaim the news: 'Christ is risen.'" He goes on:

But it caught fire, and there they were, three people and a flickering light in an old church on a Saturday evening in the spring, with the noise of the cars and their winter rusted mufflers outside. The moment was filled with ambiguities of all such quiet observances among few people, in the midst of an oblivious population in a radically secular age. The act was so ambiguous

because its terms were so extreme: the Lord is with us, or we are pathetic fools. **Thomas G. Long**

So it is always with the church. We are a small community, we have a little faith, we have only a small understanding of who God is, and we go into the world with everything Jesus has taught us. But we go knowing that the Lord is with us and all authority has been given to Christ, who has given it to us. Go in his strength, go in his power, so in the Spirit to make disciples!

Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year A, Volume 3: Pentecost and Season After Pentecost 1 (Propers 3-16).