

June 4, 2023
The Holy Trinity
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
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Matthew 28:16-20 (Genesis 1:1 – 2: 4)

THE GREAT CO-MISSION

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Last Sunday we celebrated the Day of Pentecost, the beginning of the Christian Church, when proceeding from the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit was poured out onto the Christian Church, enabling Jesus’s disciples of all times and ages to proclaim His Gospel message of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Today, we celebrate the Feast of The Holy Trinity, focusing our attention on the Creator and Sustainer of the Church’s life: God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. While Holy Scripture does not contain the word *Trinity*, it does contain the *doctrine* of the *Holy Trinity*.

The Bible names all three persons of the Trinity individually, by themselves, in many places. Oftentimes, two Persons will be named together. But in today’s Gospel text we hear the only place in Scripture where all three Persons are referred to as One. Jesus confesses what has been true from before the foundation of the world – there is only one “*Name*.” He says to Baptize in the singular *Name* that belongs to:

“... *the Father and... the Son and... the Holy Spirit.*” (Matthew 28:19)

The Holy Trinity, three Persons who find their unity as one Divine Being called God. One God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the substance. It is the eternal truth of the nature of God. There is only one true God and He is the Trinity. Anyone who worships someone who is not the one true God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is worshipping nothing other than an imaginary false god.

Just as the word *Trinity* is not found in the Bible, neither are the words: *The Great Commission*. Yet, almost all English versions of the Bible have these words inserted as the heading for our Gospel text in Matthew 28. What Jesus describes in our text is indeed the mission of the Christian Church. He teaches us God’s divine formula for making disciples: baptizing and teaching all that Jesus has commanded. (cf: Matthew 28:19–20) However, many people misinterpret Jesus’ words as personal marching orders that each and every Christian must accomplish by their own strength. [sarcasm on →] They say: “*You must GO and be God’s missionary. GO and sell all you have and make every attempt to make disciples. Jesus has done His part and ascended into heaven. Now it is your turn to GO. The rest is up to you.*” [← sarcasm off]

When one focuses too narrowly on the greatness of the *commission*, he or she loses sight of the even greater “*co-mission*,” that is, the combined, cooperative, and perfectly coordinated mission

of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus words in our text are not chiefly about the commission, but God's mission.

The Church's mission is rooted in God's mission as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Church's mission flows from God's mission. The Church's mission finds its source and power in God's mission. The real key to the Church's mission, therefore, is to understand and confess and rejoice that the first and greatest *missionary* ever is God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The mission of the Church begins in the heart of God the Father, the God who so loved the world that He seeks, He gives, and He sends. His love began prior to the creation of the world. In our Old Testament reading we hear the creation story in which all three members of the Holy Trinity are present and active. (cf: Genesis 1:1–2; cf. Jn 1:1–2) The account does not personally name Jesus, but St John's Gospel tells us that:

"2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made." (John 1:2–3)

God's creation was perfect.

"... [He] saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good."
(Genesis 1:31)

God gave mankind everything that he needed. But mankind fell into sin, destroying God's perfect creation, poisoning all mankind with sin. But God shows that He was active in mission from the very beginning, saving all mankind from their sins. (cf: Genesis 3:1–21) Once Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, God could have stopped everything right there. He could have destroyed all things and went back to existing wherever He was before creation. He could have came up with a ***"plan B."*** But God is love, and out of His unlimited love, He sticks with His ***"plan A."*** He seeks, He gives, and He sends. He sought out Adam and Eve who were hiding in the garden so He could hear their confession and give them forgiveness of sins. He promises the woman that from her offspring, He would send a Savior to crush the serpent's head which is the first Gospel word recorded in the Bible. (cf: Genesis 3:15)

Salvation in Christ is not ***"plan B."*** It was ***"plan A."*** It is ***"plan A"*** that all mankind live and that God be known in him. (cf: Weinrich, John 1:1–7:1, Concordia Commentary, 6, f.n. 17) St Paul unpacks this in his letter to the Ephesians, where he says that God:

"... chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world..." (Ephesians 1:4; cf: 1:3–14)

Over and over again, the Bible portrays God the Father as a seeking God, a giving God, and a sending God. The Father seeks lost sheep, a lost coin, a lost son. (cf: Ezekiel 34; Luke 15) Because of God the Father's seeking, having love for the lost:

"... he gave his only Son... ...into the world... in order that the world might be saved through him." (John 3:16–17)

The mission of the Church begins in the heart of God the Father and centers in God the Son, Christ Jesus. All of Holy Scripture is God's story of salvation in Christ. He is the promised Messiah sent by the Father to reconcile the world to Himself by His life, death, and resurrection from the dead. The Father did not seek to carry out His mission to save the world by the sheer

force and power of His divine will. His missionary plan depended on the willing cooperation of His Son, who was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and was made man. He was and still is very God of very God and yet at the same time He is fully man. By His life, He perfectly satisfied all the demands of God's Law. He was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, being crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. (cf: Acts 2:23) St Paul teaches us that:

“For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.” (Romans 5:19)

Jesus has atoned for your sin and the sins of the whole world. He suffered the wrath of God for you and all people. By His sacrificial work, He crushed the head of the devil, and opened heaven's gates for all who believe. By His resurrection from the dead, He secured His victory over sin, death, and the devil. Among all of the false gospels and doctrines of the world:

“... there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

“... whoever believes in [Jesus] should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

The mission of the Church begins in the heart of God the Father, centers in God the Son, Christ Jesus and is empowered by God the Holy Spirit. Just as the Father sent His Son and the Son humbly and lovingly accomplished the will of the Father, so the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit as the third *missionary partner* in God's great plan of salvation.

Pentecost was not the first time that God the Holy Spirit arrived on the scene of God's mission. He, too, was active in creation. (cf: Genesis 1:2) He spoke by the Old Testament prophets. (cf: Acts 2:16 – 35) He was made manifest at Jesus' Baptism. (cf: John 1:32) He filled and empowered the Church on Pentecost. (Acts 2:33) And He continues to empower God's people today to confess and profess that:

“... Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:11)

The ongoing work of the Holy Spirit is vital to God's missionary efforts. Through God's Word and Sacraments, the Holy Spirit:

“... calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.” (SC, art. ii, par. 6)

The Holy Spirit is the Lord and giver of life. Without Him, no one could believe in Christ, confess Christ, or bear witness to Christ. Because of the Spirit's work and presence in your life and in the Church, it is your joy to confess Christ and Him crucified to lost and condemned sinners, even in the face of hostility. The Spirit is with you and dwells in you to empower you for work in God's mission. (cf: Acts 1:8; John 14:16)

Finally, the mission of the Church which begins in the heart of God the Father, centers in God the Son, Christ Jesus, and is empowered by God the Holy Spirit, is also your mission and mine. It is only when we recognize our Triune God as the first and greatest missionary that we can properly understand the Church's role in God's mission and appropriately participate joyfully and confidently in that mission.

Of course, not everyone is called to Baptize and teach, but you have a share in God's mission according to the various vocations and stations in life in which He has placed you. Who knows? Perhaps He placed you there for such a time as this, (cf: Esther 4:14) that you share the Good News of salvation in Jesus. (cf: Colossians 3:18–4:1) He has equipped you with the appropriate and needed gifts, each according to your ability. (cf: Romans 12:1–8; 1 Peter 4:10–11)

The Lord has called the Church into existence and He carries out His mission in and through the Church despite its many imperfections. And although the gates of Hades will not ultimately prevail against the Church, (cf: Matthew 16:17–19) still, out of those gates will pour hostile forces and ideas. Opposition, persecution, and coldness of heart await all who confess Christ crucified for the salvation of the world. Take heart in Jesus' promise in our text as He says:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” (Matthew 28:18)

“... behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)

Jesus' command to make disciples is based upon the work and promise of Christ. The work of making disciples is rooted in His authority to save. Ultimately, making disciples is not in the hands of mere weak and sinful humans but is in the hands of Christ. The Church will not go out alone as she baptizes and teaches. Jesus will be going with her. In that sense, although the Great Commission is, on one level, Jesus' command, it is a command to which Jesus commits Himself. He will undergird and accompany the mission every step of the way. (cf: Gibbs, Matthew 21:1–28:20, Concordia Commentary, 1640–1641)

Praise God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for His great, gracious, and ongoing missionary work, begun before the beginning of time and continuing in and through you and me as we work for the mission of Christ's Church.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.