

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ 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." (Matthew 28:16-20)

Know the One True God

When I was college, I read a book written by a Muslim during the Crusades. Sadly, I don't remember the title or the author anymore. In fact, I only remember one thing about the book. The author was talking to a crusader knight. The crusader offered to show him a picture of God as a child. The Muslim was intrigued by this and went with the crusader into a church. Once inside, the crusader led him up to the altar and pointed to a picture. Can you guess what it was? It was baby Jesus. Then the crusader walked away convinced that he had just proved a deep theological truth – the doctrine of the Trinity. Of course, the Muslim wasn't convinced. He thought it was stupid to point to Jesus and call him God. He's not alone in that belief. John Adams and Thomas Jefferson both ridiculed the idea of Jesus being God. Taking the question in a slightly different direction, last week, Bernie Sanders attacked a nominee at a confirmation hearing for having publicly said that Muslims don't go to heaven because they don't believe that Jesus is the true God – they don't believe in the Trinity. Sanders had a real problem with that.

Today is Trinity Sunday. Whether you make a big deal out of this festival or not, the teaching it celebrates is the core of our faith. God gave us the gospel so that we believe in him and not in some false god. He often describes himself as a bridegroom and the Church as his bride. Shouldn't a bride know who she's marrying? Did any of you married ladies accidentally go up the best man and marry him on the day you walked down the aisle? Of course not. The Church, the bride of Christ, needs to know who her Husband is. My friends, **know the one true God.**

I.

When I was in the army, I had a conversation once with a young man about Jesus. He thought of himself as being a spiritual person and he was very interested in Jesus. But he rejected the idea of Jesus paying for our sins because he thought of Jesus as only another spiritual person. When I quoted a passage from St. Paul he told me that he wasn't interested in what Paul said. He was only interested in what Jesus says. That's a fairly common perspective today. Some people will even read the gospels looking for guidance from Jesus about what it means to be a loving person. But they don't want to think about a sacrifice for sin. What they don't realize is that they have fallen into the devil's trap. He likes to invent false Christs and have people merrily follow them thinking they're following Jesus. **To know Jesus, you have to know the Trinity.**

Jesus' entire ministry was about getting to know him. He spent three years with his disciples teaching them and showing them who he really was. Our gospel lesson for today records Jesus sending his disciples back to Galilee to complete that lesson. He sent them back to the place where they first met him, where they heard him teach, where he called them to follow him. There where it all began, he completed the lesson and commanded them to teach that lesson to all nations. We call his command the Great Commission. According to Jesus himself, you can't bring anyone to Christ unless you know the Trinity.

Jesus said, **"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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."** The heart of this command is "make disciples of all nations." We sometimes think of that only in terms of mission work. We need to bring people in. That is, without doubt, a vital part of the command. But it's more than that. I'm making disciples of you right now, as I teach you to know Jesus better. Even if I don't say anything you haven't heard before, by reminding you of these all important truths, I'm continuing the process of making you Jesus' disciples. A disciple is someone who sits at Jesus' feet, and you have come here just to do that. You've come here to know him better.

He commands us to baptize all nations in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Of course, baptism usually takes place at or near the beginning of our lives of faith. Jesus speaks of introducing

people to him as the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity. Jesus gives us here the most basic statement of the Trinity that you will find in Scripture. In fact, because of this verse, we almost always say it this way: the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Now, the Bible doesn't always say it that way. It uses different words for the persons. It changes the order. But the simplest way for us to remember is what God gives us here.

And he mentions all three persons side by side. They are three separate and equal persons. When we confess our faith today using the Athanasian Creed, we'll try to say that as clearly and as absolutely as human language allows. But don't miss the other part. Jesus did not say, "Baptizing them in the names – plural – of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." He told us to baptize in the one name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So while there are three separate persons or beings, they are one God, totally united in every way. A point, again, that we will try to make absolutely clear in the Creed.

That matters because false Christs don't lead us to heaven. You don't know the real Jesus if you don't know him as the Son of God and the second person of the Trinity. But we're not just talking about head knowledge here. There is a lot of head knowledge here to talk about. If I really wanted to see how dizzy I could make you this morning, I could haul out a lot of Greek and Latin terms and read through dozens of passages and make all kinds of careful distinctions and give you long lists of false teachers and false teachings about this doctrine. We could run through centuries of Church history and controversy. But today, we'll keep it simple to avoid the kind of pride that can come from knowing lots of theological terms. The doctrine of the Trinity is not an intellectual exercise. It's not a game of philosophy or an argument about words or ancient views of reality. You only really know Jesus when you trust in him as your Savior. You only have that faith when you correctly identify who Jesus is. The doctrine of the Trinity is the doctrine of life.

There is only one way to know Jesus. God has to work through the gospel to give us that faith. Why? Because we're born sinners. God has to overcome the unbelief and rebellion that is born into our hearts. The smarter we are, the more educated we are, the more we tend to trust our own judgments. You know what? Most people today think that God should be reasonable to them. He should be able to defend his actions before the court of human opinion. We get to judge whether he's doing right or wrong. And all that he is and says should be understandable to the human mind. That's just sinful pride. When we think that way, we show that we cannot come to Jesus or believe in him on our own. God has to overcome all that sin inside us and give us faith. He did that when he sent Jesus to die and rise for us. All that pride and sin are paid for and forgiven. He did that when we were baptized as babies or when someone told us about Jesus later in life. The Holy Spirit gave us faith. He changed our hearts so that now we just trust in Jesus, the Son of God. Through the gospel, God reaches into our hearts and enables to accept that one plus one plus one equals one.

God will continue to work through that gospel. Don't forget, this is the Great Commission, the command to make disciples of all nations. The Trinity isn't just for veteran Christians Jesus himself frontloaded the doctrine of the Trinity into baptism, into the very beginnings of faith. Share that good news with others! The Holy Spirit is working when you do. He will overcome their objections. He will conquer their sinful pride. He will make them disciples of Jesus Christ through the gospel he gives you.

II.

But let's not forget who sent the disciples back to Galilee and who spoke to them there. It was Jesus. Now, there are times in the Bible when the other persons of the Trinity are mentioned alongside Jesus. His baptism is the most obvious example. We heard last week how Jesus was returning to his Father so that he could send the Holy Spirit. But in this lesson, Jesus alone appears and teaches us about the Trinity. That points to another important truth about knowing the one true God. **To know the Trinity, you have to know Jesus.**

There simply is no other way to get to God. Notice, three times, Jesus points to himself. He says, "**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.**" And, "**teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.**" Finally, "**And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.**" At least two of those statements, all authority is given to him and he is with us to the very end of the age, point to the fact that Jesus is true God. No human being can have the authority to rule the world, to say nothing of the power or the wisdom to do so. No human can be with all of us wherever we go, and that over the course of two thousand years and more. Jesus is true God. And even the other statement points that way. It's true, he taught them mostly before he died, when they could only see his humanity. But the eternal authority he claims by demanding that all Christians everywhere be taught all that he commanded points to someone greater than even a prophet. Jesus is God the Son.

He is the primary figure in the gospel, which is why it's so important to see him as part of the Trinity. All three persons are equal. All three are eternal. The Father and the Holy Spirit are always there and always working for us. But we approach God through Jesus. He is the Word made flesh. No one comes to the Father except through him. He sends the Holy Spirit to us. So by God's design, Jesus is always the most prominent figure in our teaching. But he is still one person of an eternal Three.

Jesus' job, then, is to bring us to the one true God, the Holy Trinity. He did that by living and dying and rising for us. But he also does that by ruling the world for us and sending the Holy Spirit to work through the gospel. He does that by being with us, wherever we gather in his name. He does that by speaking every time we speak the gospel. When we look at Jesus, we see all that God is. The night before he died, Philip asked Jesus to show them the Father. Jesus answered, **"Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."** The Father is in Jesus and Jesus is in the Father. They are one, even while they're three.

Jesus communicates God to us. The Bible tells us that God is love. When we see Jesus we see the love of the entire Trinity. When we look at Jesus, we see the love of God the Father who sent him into this world, who sacrificed his beloved Son so that we will live, who controlled all of history so that Jesus would be born and live and die, who committed this world to his Son. When we look at Jesus, we see the love of the Holy Spirit who gives us faith in Christ, who comforts us and strengthens us by pointing us to the cross and the empty tomb, who gives us the gifts to do his work and reach out to the world, who lives in our hearts. When we look at Jesus, we see the love of God the Son, who took on human flesh for us, who traded the glory of heaven for a stall in Bethlehem and a carpenter's shop in Nazareth and the dusty roads of Israel, who stretched out his hands on the cross and suffered hell itself and died to pay for our sins and then rose again to give us life.

That is the doctrine of the Trinity. One God in three persons who does all we need to bring us home. Jesus commands us to share that message. Jesus sends us out into all the world to claim the lost, to build up the hurting and the weak, to encourage one another with the good news of all that he has done for us. This is not an intellectual exercise. It's the life of faith. Make disciples of all nations. Know the true God and help each other and the world to know him, too. Amen.