June 14th , 2020

Springfield Presbyterian Church

TrinitySunday+1

**Embodying Discipleship**

I. Opening with the Commission

We hear the last words of Jesus recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, and the parting words are ones that push the believers to action. It is the great commission – the great call, the great sending or benediction that still calls us today. We are told as believers to go and make disciples, baptizing them, in the name of the Trinity. God encourages us to know that as you are doing this good work for the Kingdom, that Christ stands with you always. It’s worth noting that Jesus didn’t throw in any particular parameter limitations – he didn’t say, “If it was easy” or “If the right occasion came up” or “If your views jive with others.” Because the Kingdom of God is more than a race or a nationality, it is a people, a people who believe in the Savior who came to save not from a perspective of guilt or retribution, but one of grace and mercy.

Today we hear that call, again, one that comes from a point of view of grace and mercy, that is gentle and yet firm, and that pulls together the Trinity, the Trinity which we celebrate this morning.

I always hope as the years progress, that my understanding of the Trinity will gain some scholarly footing, like I will get wiser or have a beautiful explanation for this idea of God as Three-in-One and One-in-Three. As it turns out, my basic view of the Trinity that served me as a young person still serves me today, and it has given me a metaphor that I still share with our youth and young people. I may one day come to resolve that this is all I may understand and that faith can fill the places in which I cannot.

The metaphor is simple. God is like water. Water comes in three different states of being – gas, liquid, and solid. While in those different states, water is used in particular ways, and in that way, each state differentiates. On the other hand, when it comes down to it, all of those states of being are water – it is simply H2O. I’m sure the scientists among us and those more clever than I am in that particular department could break down the chemical compounds or variations, but for me, at the core, this simple understanding is the one that has helped me over the course of time to really begin even a semblance of understanding of the Trinity.

II. Water: Father, Son, Spirit

So just like water has three states, so does God – Creator, Spirit, Son. In our call to worship this morning we’ve heard just a handful of names in which the Trinity has been expressed throughout time. And just like water, all the parts of the Trinity serve different ends.

While the Trinity was around since the beginning of time itself, we remember the acts of God as Creator, as the one who created the seas, the stars, the skies, the sun, and all the goodness of the world. We may not understand the Trinity in totality, nor perhaps the act of Creation – we trust in faith that God as Creator paved the way as the ultimate being that started the world that we know now. And for God’s gracious acts as Creator, we look around and give thanks.

Jesus was also around from the beginning of time, prophesied throughout the course of the Old Testament, and came to true fruition in the Gospels. Jesus came here to do what we could not do as humans – to pay the price of salvation, to craft in us a new way and a new sense of living life, and become the living and breathing example of what we are called to do each and every day.

And the Spirit, the Spirit was also there from the beginning, being the breath that filled the lungs into life. The Spirit is one who called those believers in Acts to action, to begin what we understand as the church. It is the Spirit who we call upon in earnest for help, healing, and guidance. The Spirit is the one who resides deeply in hearts, our bones, our souls, that helps us to discern what is right and what is wrong.

The Trinity stands together. No part better than the other, each holding its own value and place in the world and in our lives.

III. Awake

For those of you who may have fallen asleep, understandably, at my very theological analysis of the Trinity, I say – awake. Here’s where it might get interesting. We celebrate the Trinity, Creator, Spirit, Son, and we hear this commission this morning and these are beautiful concepts – but the question remains – what do we do with this information? This commission still stands for us as it did for the disciples of the time, but our context and culture and even the way we understand discipleship has changed and shifted throughout the ages. So what we do? How do we embody this discipleship that Jesus leaves as the last commission, as his very last words in this Gospel?

So, the root of disciple in Latin really means ‘learner’ – right, so God is calling us to be learners and to make learners. That means that we need to continue to learn and we all learn in different ways. For some of us, our knowledge of God and our learning comes from reading, some from hearing, some from experiences, etc. We are the diverse people of God, so there is no prescribed one way of learning and this is a gift, because it requires us to be flexible in our learning and in helping others to learn.

If we all learn differently, then we have to learn how to teach differently. Now, we have many teachers in the congregation who could probably speak to the myriad of ways in which you can convey a certain idea in a multitude of ways. Our teachers...have a lot to teach us about...well, teaching. So I lean upon them and their knowledge, hoping that they will share their strengths with us so that we may learn new ways of sharing the Gospel.

One of the best ways we can embody discipleship, we can follow this call and this commission, to perhaps to find out how we learn. What fits you best? For me, it’s often in experience, in art, in the rush of the smell of honeysuckle, hearing the crash of a wave, or watching the deer in the pasture. Sometimes it is in music, and sometimes in reading – but I know my most deeply foundational knowledge of God comes from living. Before you go out and try to make disciples of every nation, I think you need to be firm about where you stand as well. Do not let it be the thing that holds you up from moving forward, but really discern how you’ve come to know God, why it is that you sit in your metaphorical virtual pews, and what are the ways in which you’ve come to know the grace, love, mercy, and power of God throughout your years.

Often, that is the place to start, for our stories and experiences, our own knowledge of our faith can help us to translate faithfulness to others. This is where the learner continues to learn, but also transforms into a teacher. In teaching, we are firm in our learning and only in love, service, and by living a life of faith that is not from on high, but that journeys-with, it is there that we have found a place where we can teach others. In continual learning and in teaching with an open mind and open heart, we are beginning to embody this discipleship that we are called to in the great commission.

May you, through the love of God, find where you have found your faith and in that experience, may you ask the Spirit’s discernment and guidance as you seek to share your faith with those around you. Amen.