
AS YOU ARE GOING

Today is HOLY TRINITY Sunday.

- The name suggest that we focus on our three-in-one understanding of the TRINITY.
- Today's gospel reading emphasizes the TRINITY in JESUS' instruction for how we are to baptize.
 - So, I could do a very theological sermon and talk about our understanding of the TRINITY, which we don't fully understand.
 - I could expand on the Creed which we say each week to talk about the relationship of the three PERSONS to each other.
 - But I think this text gives us a very good opportunity to think more about our relationship to the TRINITY and what that means for us daily as a church and as Christians in today's world.

One of the last things JESUS said to HIS disciples is this passage.

- It's known as the Great Commission: *"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."*
- It's an instruction about what we call "evangelism" or "outreach."

The best measure of a congregation's outreach is the number of adult baptisms performed each year, reach the unchurched in our community.

- Today, with so many households unchurched for even two or three generations, infant and child baptisms become important yet.

The ELCA, though evangelical is part of our name, has been primarily an immigrant church: people immigrated from northern Europe to the Midwest, and from the Midwest to California.

- Sixty year ago, all you had to do was build a church like this one, and the people would come. That's no longer the case.

But "if you build it, they will come" was never JESUS' vision for the Church.

- JESUS wanted HIS followers actively sharing the good news with others, both so that they would grow in faith through their sharing and so that those with whom they shared would come to know HIM.
 - Thus, HE gave the Great Commission, and though we've gotten out of the habit or just come to ignore it, that instructions is increasingly important today.

The Great Commission has two parts: baptism and teaching.

- The first part, baptism, invites us to think about our relationship to the TRINITY. Why do we baptize with all three names? Why not just JESUS?

Again, it's about our relationship, first to the FATHER, the ONE who created us.

- The baptized person has GOD as her or his gracious, loving FATHER.
 - Not everyone grew up with a good father, but GOD is that perfect FATHER, who loves us and cares for us.

There is something within each of us—an urge or need to be in relationship with our CREATOR.

- Each of us desires to know the purpose for which we were created.
 - Only GOD the FATHER can meet that need and answer that question.
 - In baptism, the baptized is claimed by our FATHER as GOD'S adopted child.

The next relationship is to the SON, the ONE who saves us.

- The baptized person receives the forgiveness that CHRIST secures and offers from the cross.
- GOD becomes human as JESUS, and lives with us to physically establish our relationship with GOD.
- CHRIST died to free us from sin so that we can focus on GOD'S purpose for us.
 - In baptism, the forgiveness that the SON offers is claimed.

Third, the HOLY SPIRIT is the ONE who empowers us.

- The baptized person receives the life-giving, life-sustaining power and presence of GOD'S SPIRIT.
 - In the SPIRIT, we feel GOD'S presence, we are empowered for GOD'S purpose, we can see GOD'S vision for the world as well as our role in making that vision a reality.
 - In baptism, the HOLY SPIRIT'S power is released so that GOD'S purpose for the baptized can be fulfilled.

We baptize in the name of the TRINITY, because nothing connects with us more thoroughly and more powerfully, and nothing fulfills our lives more meaningfully and more completely than doing what GOD calls us to do:

- to go and make disciples—the Great Commission.

But going and making disciples can be a bit scary, can't it?

- So, let me tell you the key to the Great Commission.

As a teenager, I heard the words of the Great Commission.

- I was intimidated by them because I thought it meant that I had to go somewhere else, overseas, like to Africa, and I didn't want to.

How do you feel about the JESUS' commission?

- Unsure? Unqualified? Unfaithful?
- Is there a knot in your stomach when you hear it?
- Would you prefer to dismiss the whole idea?
- Are you thinking, "Isn't that why we hired a pastor? Isn't the pastor the one who's supposed to bring in new people?"
 - (By the way, you haven't hired a pastor. You've called a pastor to teach you how to make disciples.)
 - If it is just me who is working to bring new people to our church, you're not going to see that many.
 - But if it is all of us, we could make lots of new disciples.

So, here's the key to the Great Commission, the thing that makes it work.

- In verse 19, we read, "Therefore, go..."
- But we read it and we hear it as an imperative, a command: "Go and do this!"
 - However, the word, "Go," is mistranslated, in virtually every Bible translation. And I can't tell you why.
 - But the word is not an imperative or command. It is a participle.
 - It should be translated, "As you are going..."
 - "As you are going to work..."
 - Or, "While you are going to the store..."
 - Or, "While you are on a walk..."
 - Or, "As you are raising your children...make disciples."

Some will claim that they can't make disciples because they don't know anyone who isn't a Christian.

- Well, let me ask, "Does the person who cuts or does your hair a church-goer?" Find out.
 - Is your coworker a Christian? Find out.
 - Is your neighbor a believer? Find out.
 - Or your client, or your banker, or the person who serves you in the restaurant or store? Find out and begin to build a relationship.
 - Whenever someone new moves into your neighborhood, go and welcome them, bring them some food, and then extend an invitation to our church.
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Twenty years ago, the statistic was that 50% of your neighborhood was unchurched or formerly churched.

- That's every other house.

(When I said that once at an evangelism conference, a lady sitting in the front row said that her next-door neighbor was a LCMS pastor.

- "So, you're a non-Christian," I said.)

The statistic today is that more than 60% of the people who live around you do not regularly attend worship anywhere.

- Go, make disciples.
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Does that still make you anxious?

- Are you still not sure you can do this?
- Still feeling nervous about sharing your faith?

Our problem is that we have confused personal faith and private faith.

How many of you have had a bad experience with someone trying to force their faith upon you?

- The result of that kind of occurrence is the decision to keep your faith private.
- But faith is not private. It's personal.
 - It's your story, and sharing your story with another can be a blessing to them, just as hearing their story can bless you.

It valuable for us to develop door openers for sharing our faith.

- You've heard me say when I'm asked how I am, "Better than I deserve." That results in lots of good conversations.
 - Ask someone, even if you don't know them well, "How can I pray for you today?" and then do it.
 - Tell your friends about a story you heard at church that had meaning for you.
 - Tell your neighbors where you go to worship and why.
 - Invite a friend to a place aside from worship where they will meet other Christians
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Does that make it seem a bit more doable now?

- I hope so, because JESUS has called you to do something: to help bring people to know HIM.
- More than that, HE has given you the HOLY SPIRIT to help you.
- There's nothing stopping you but yourself,
 - so, trust JESUS and make disciples as you are going.