

Today we meet Jesus and the disciples at the end of Matthew, after he has been raised to new life and is giving instructions to the disciples about what they are to do now, now that the world has shifted for them once again, now that they must chart a new path without the physical presence of Jesus. We meet them in chapter 28, verses 16-20. Listen for God's word to you this day:

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore 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 that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."^[a]

This is the word of God for the people of God...Thanks be to God.

Today we celebrate the Trinity, God our Creator, the Son Jesus Christ, and the one who sustains us, The Holy Spirit. The celebration of Trinity Sunday is different from other holy festival days, as Debi Thomas says, "Most Christian festivals honor events that are fun to describe and dramatize. The angel Gabriel's appearance to Mary, Jesus's transfiguration atop a mountain, his birth and resurrection, the arrival of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. But Trinity Sunday invites us to celebrate an idea. A theological abstraction that's beyond our understanding. One in three? Three in one?"¹ It's an

¹ www.journeywithjesus.net, The Undivided Trinity, Debi Thomas, May 31, 2020

idea most of us have never fully been able to grasp but I believe it is the celebration of this uncertain mystery that gives the Trinity some of its deepest meaning.

This concept of God's nature as both far away and within, both having had human form and also formed of some mysteriously ethereal energy that now not only resides everywhere but also within each individual, it is that mystery that keeps us longing for answers, it is the essence of what draws our faith to seek understanding. The near and the not nearness of it all, and how we fit in relationship to it. The Trinity as an understanding of who and what God is in relation to humanity reminds us that God is continually, from the beginning of all time and creation, seeking relationship with its creation. God did not create to observe but to interact and has over and over again, as given witness to in scripture, sought to do just that. The embodiment of God in Jesus the Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit across time and space give us the tangible aspects of the creator's intention of relationality with creation.

Today's scripture tells of Matthew's account of Jesus' physical appearance to the disciples after his resurrection. This text, ending this particular gospel account, highlights God's on-going desire for relationship with humans, Jesus who has been given all authority is now passing that authority onto the disciples. It is this text, The Great Commission, as it's often called, that has been used to encourage and sustain Christ followers in their call to spread the news of Jesus Christ and yet, like so often happens, the text has become flattened, institutionalized, losing its dynamic possibilities, losing the movement of the Holy Spirit.

I can remember growing up the use of this text to commission missionaries, whether they were people going to serve within the United States or in another country,

the concept of conversion was drawn directly from this text and the focus was shifted from discipleship of human beings to acquiring human beings as numbers. You may remember hearing this language around traveling revivals, the number of souls won for Christ each night, or even around some hometown Vacation Bible Schools.

Because this text has been turned into a focus on others and lost the inclusion of the disciples who are doing the sharing of the gospel I wonder if we have lost sight of the fact that we too are disciples, that we are the ones now in the text who are to be learning about Jesus, to be obeying his commandments? Jesus does not differentiate between the disciples to whom he is speaking and those that will become disciples. Discipleship isn't about a number of "souls saved" but about being in relationship, having opportunity for reciprocated learning and sharing of life. As disciples we should always be learning. We are a creation living in constant tension with the known and the unknown and our deepest desire is to know, to know it all, right? So many times we create structures of what we believe to be known and stop seeking the unknown. But, the Trinity, the dynamic, living, God, Christ, and Spirit, who have been and will always be, are still not fully known. Their fullness cannot be captured by anything our human minds can imagine.

For us to believe that we could possibly share the story of Jesus' life as the embodiment of God one time on a mission trip and feel as though we have "made disciples" for God seems to miss the point of the opportunity God gives to us as disciples to engage in relationship with humanity with the same vigor and interest and compassion as does the Trinity.

So here we are, disciples of Jesus Christ, in June 2020. Disciples receiving all that Jesus has taught and commanded, and disciples encouraged by the presence of the Holy Spirit to share about this relational God who loves creation so much that God would create and call it all good, and also care for humans in a way that invites us into personal relationship and then invites us to share that relationship with others. Wow! How could we imagine we have a full knowing of this God? So if you're sitting there now thinking, oh you know what, maybe I don't fully know God then the rest of this is for you. Or, if you're sitting there thinking I do already know everything about God, then I would invite you to be open to the possibility that you may not and that what is coming next is also for you.

I want to give you a few moments to reflect in this next section so I'll give pause between the questions for you to reflect. Being a disciple of Jesus means learning, embodying, making known to others the existence of God in this world, in this time, and in this place.

What are you learning?

What are you obeying and embodying?

In what ways have you tried to conform all that Jesus teaches us into what you would like to learn and ignored what it is you don't want to learn?

Being the disciple who lives in the mystery of the Trinity, of the unknown, is easy when all is right in our lives and in the world, or at least the world as we know it, but it is often pushed to its limits in times of unrest, discipleship in the unrest gets uncomfortable and causes us to often times hunker down in our knowing.

We are being stretched to new understandings in our time as students, our time as disciples, we have long been willing to ignore what is happening outside the church walls when we gather together on Sunday morning

It is our responsibility to become humble students of Jesus Christ, recognizing we don't have it figured out, we've had it wrong in a number of ways, and to learn how to move forward inviting healing instead of causing pain. What is God teaching us now? How are we becoming disciples anew?

As I heard Lisa Sharon Harper say recently, we have been leashed to so many ideas that we have lost our ability to engage. So let us unleash ourselves from an institutionalized religion and engage in the messiness of relationship that is found through the example of the Trinity and to which we are called in the words of Jesus Christ.

In the past two weeks I have had two revelations that I wish I could share with each of you face-to-face in conversation, but since I cannot I share them with you now because I want you to know my intentions, and I want you to hear the places where I, too, am learning about God and the world.

The first is that we are in the midst of a moral revolution. It has been a long time coming and a long time needed and it is not just around racial injustice, it is an overall examination of systemic oppression and our role in that oppression as people who proclaim the life of Jesus Christ. It's going to be long and it's going to be hard, requiring us to truly examine ourselves individually and institutionally, but it is necessary, and it will bring healing and wholeness, it will bring us closer to God's kingdom.

The second is this: I have worshipped in predominantly white, middle to upper middle class churches my entire life and the chatter among membership, me being one of those members for more years than I've been part of the clergy, was always discomfort and annoyance when the pastor would preach about something considered political.

But this week I realized that was all a ruse. We have used that excuse, we have made proclamations of keeping politics out of the pulpit and out of church life to bolster our privilege, to ignore the compliance with oppression that has crept into our churches over the centuries. Because by not hearing what the church says about what is happening in the world, we can continue living comfortably in our constructed, segregated world, by which I mean every single way we have kept out those who are not "like us" along the way. But, friends, the church is the VERY place where issues of morality should be encountered head on. And, this should not be done solely from the pulpit. It should be done in conversation. In relationship with one another.

But, we cannot continue to use the guise of separation of church and state to ignore issues that have moral implications for the people we are called to serve. That is the very essence of the gospel of Jesus Christ, of Jesus' teachings and commandments, the very thing those disciples were sent out to share. We are called to be disciples, and make disciples. To be in relationship with God and invite others into relationship with God too, and then to be in relationship with one another.

These are hard days, for so many reasons, and so much is unknown. However, the thing we can say for certain about the mystery of the Trinity is that God, and Jesus, and the Spirit of God, are in relationship with one another, and each of those entities,

separately and together, are in relationship with us, humanity, showing us what it is to abide with one another, to share our existence with one another, giving forgiveness and compassion when it is needed, inviting each of us to love one another as God loves us, embodying the grace of Jesus Christ to which the gospels give witness, and sharing life with one another the way the Spirit abides with us, in all that the world brings to bear.

May we continue to seek the unknown, the mystery, and in so doing, be led by the Holy Spirit to be made into disciples anew, learning, embodying, and showing God to the world in all we do.