

The Holy Trinity, 6.7.2020

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Genesis 1:26–2:9; Psalm 8; 2 Corinthians 13:11-13; Matthew 28:16-20

“I am with you always”

Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Good morning. Today on Holy Trinity Sunday, we remember the triune name in which Jesus sends his church into the world to participate in God’s mission. Jesus sends the church in mission to all nations and peoples, to make disciples, baptizing in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

St. Matthew writes, “*Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.*” “*But some doubted.*” All of us can perhaps understand these words. Like Jesus’ disciples, we also bring our doubts and anxieties as we gather to worship. Some may doubt the miracle of the resurrection; some may doubt the presence of God in the world; some may wonder if prayer makes any difference in life; some may feel anxious about evil, hatred, prejudice, racism, and injustice in the world. Jesus’ disciples were no different from you and me. Jesus knows our human doubts, anxieties and questions in our lives below the mountaintop. Jesus the Good Shepherd leads his church with love, forgiveness, and justice for the transformation of the world.

Jesus said, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*” For 2,000 years since Jesus spoke these words, empires and governments have argued with Jesus about this. Emperors, kings, and leaders have sought to usurp the authority of Jesus and his church. They have attempted to clothe themselves in the symbols of Jesus’ authority, without humbling themselves in discipleship to Jesus, the suffering servant. The world hates it that Christ’s church has an authority that it cannot have. The authority that Jesus sends his disciples into the world with is the cruciform name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Anyone who desires the authority of Jesus must walk the way of the cross becoming a disciple, and serving “the least of these.”

Jesus shares his authority with his disciples saying, “*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.*” The words “*go therefore*” reveal the missionary nature of the triune God, who always goes outward into the world. Christ’s church is a servant church sharing in the outward mission of God’s love and justice. Jesus doesn’t send his church into the world to oppress and lord it over others. Jesus sends his church into the world to serve the world, to suffer with the world, and to be a visible sign of God’s

transforming love for the world. However, on Holy Trinity Sunday, we must confess, as the church, that the church has also misused the name and authority of the triune God. The church has used the power and authority of the world, rather than relying upon discipleship to Jesus' cross and love.

As we know from church history, the church was persecuted by the Roman Empire, but in the 4th century beginning with Emperor Constantine, the church became an imperial church and a participant in empire building. The church went to all nations, but now as a representative of imperial and colonial power. Rather than making disciples through the example of discipleship, the church participated in the colonization and dehumanization of the nations. This stems in part, from a misreading of the Genesis creation text about the subduing and domination of creation. As human beings who are created in the image of God, we are to care for creation and our neighbors. Rather than proclaiming a message of God's liberating love for all people, the church silently participated in structures of power that led to the enslavement of nations and peoples. We cannot tell "the old, old story of Jesus and his love" without also remembering the church's failure to protect "the least of these" that Jesus has sent them to serve.

Jesus hasn't sent his church into the world to profit from the gospel of God's free grace, yet the church has marketed itself, turning a message about the "costly grace" of the cross and resurrection into consumer-oriented "cheap grace" – the easy forgiveness of Jesus as an edited, polished and marketed product. The church in a modern media driven world has uncritically centered on charismatic leadership and marketing, rather than the living, transformative grace of Christ Jesus.

Jesus didn't send his messengers from that Galilean mountaintop into the world with anything but his authority and his love. No empire, no colonies, no enslavement, no gospel of wealth. Jesus sent his disciples, and continues to send us, to proclaim God's kingdom, gather the church, and free all people and nations from our human enslavement to self-centered sin. The gospel message that Jesus gave his messengers is costly because it cost his life on the cross. It is costly because we must deny ourselves - abandon our old selves – following Christ Jesus in humble service to our neighbors.

Jesus says, "*make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*" Jesus tells his disciples to do three things: "make disciples," "baptize," and "teach." We are to make disciples by modeling Jesus; through faithful proclamation that Jesus is here, now; through deeds of love and compassion for others. The church must live for others. The church exists only when it lives for others.

We are sent out in mission to baptize in the triune name of God. In Holy Baptism, God embraces

all people saying, “Yes, yes, you are my beloved child.” Baptism restores God’s image in us not as some private treasure to hoard, but as a gift we must share with our neighbor. In baptism God restores our humanity so we can finally see God’s image in our neighbors and in all nations.

Jesus says, “*teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.*” Jesus’ taught his disciples to “*Love one another as I have loved you.*” It is impossible to teach love without showing love. It is impossible to make disciples without love. Love is not a philosophical ideal; love is a verb. Love does not exist unless it is put into action. The love of Jesus is what makes the authority of Jesus real. Only love overcomes difference, fear, prejudice, racism, and hatred. The love of Jesus makes it possible to love the Other – the one who is different from myself.

Today’s reading from Genesis reminds us that “*God created humankind in his image, male and female he created them.*” God formed humanity from the dust of the ground, and breathed into us “the breath of life.” The breath within each of us is sacred because *it is God’s breath of life.* God’s breath of life makes all living things sacred. The ethical imperative of the Genesis story is that my neighbor’s breath and mine are the same. This means my neighbor’s life is also in my care.

The first murder recorded in the Bible did not happen during wartime, but was between two brothers, Cain and Abel. Out of jealousy Cain killed the one person he had an ethical duty to protect: his brother and fellow human being, Abel. But when God asked Cain where Abel was, Cain replied, “*Am I my brother’s keeper?*” Again, the ethical imperative of scripture indicts Cain, and each of us, when we hate. We are to teach and model love for our sisters and brothers.

On this Sunday remembering the Holy Trinity, we cannot go out to the nations in mission unless we first remember in whose name and authority we are sent. We must reaffirm the teaching Jesus gives us, “*to love as Jesus has loved us.*” We are sent into mission by a servant King to be a servant church, loving and caring for our sisters and brothers in every community, land, and nation.

Jesus knows this will be a difficult mission, that his church will be tempted in the world. This is why Jesus gives his disciples words of hope: “*And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*” The end of the age is not yet over, and Jesus walks with us now. Jesus is with the world during a time of pandemic, a time of great unrest and protest, a time of racial hatred and injustice, a time of murder and riot, a time of anxiety and worry. “*I am with you always*” reminds us that Jesus is here and we must be the church of Jesus, a church of love and compassion for the world. Only Jesus’ love has the power to change the world, to restore and free the world to live for others.

True change and transformation must start in our hearts. No law or amendment to the Constitution can make that happen. Only God's love can transform the human heart, freeing us from our enslavement to sin, and to ideologies and systems of power that have little to do with God's kingdom of love here on earth, as it is in heaven. Jesus sends the church *to be in the world but not of it*. We are called to resist the world and the power of evil, always pointing to the one who says, "*I am with you always.*"

On Holy Trinity Sunday Jesus calls us to reaffirm our mission as a servant church, open and welcoming to all people, all ethnicities and nations of origin, all social identities, gender identities, and political leanings. In Christ Jesus, our human difference becomes one for the sake of God's mission to the world. Jesus sends us into the world to transform the sinful systems of power and exclusion that human beings have put into place in the world. Each day Jesus calls us to dig deep within ourselves, recognizing our own sinfulness and need of forgiveness and grace.

Wherever you are today - Jesus sends you again into the world to be light in the darkness, to be transformative love for the nations, to be Christ's hands and voice in the world. Let Christ transform you again today. Let Christ send you into the world again today with words of hope for all people: "*I am with you always.*" Amen.