

## **“Go, Make Disciples”**

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First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood**

**Sunday, June 11, 2017**

**Trinity Sunday**

**Readings from Scripture: 2 Corinthians 13:11-13 and Matthew 23:16-20**

*Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.*

*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.*

*2 Corinthians 13:1-13*

*Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; yet some doubted. And Jesus drew near to them and began by saying, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’*

*Matthew 28:16-20*

Let us pray. Gracious and loving God, we open our hearts, our minds, our imaginations and our faith to you and to the power of your Holy Spirit. I pray that you would take the words and images, concerns and joys upon our hearts, that you would take the words we offer in song and in prayer this day, that you would take the words we have heard read from holy scripture and the words that you have laid upon my heart to share. Transform, touch and bless all of them that they might become the living word of Jesus Christ, that that word would do its work within us, among us and through us so that the world might be a better place because we are faithful Christians. We ask this through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

As I mentioned to the children, there are members of the congregation who are wearing yellow carnations because they have been members of this particular church, this congregation here in Kirkwood, for 50 years or more. You will notice the list on the back of the insert of the bulletin

has all of the 50-year members. As I walked in, one of the ushers who had a yellow carnation on his lapel said, "Wow! I had no idea there were so many 50-year members." But this should not surprise us because after all, we are Presbyterians. Presbyterian is the Greek word for elder. And so if you were quite literally translating the name of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), you might translate it as The Church of the Elderly in the U.S.A. As I typed in "Presbyterian" one of the things that came up was "presbyopia" which is the far-sightedness caused by the loss of elasticity of the lens of the eye occurring typically in middle or old age. It dawned on me that for many people outside the walls of the church, we are in fact The Church of the Elderly Who've Lost Our Elasticity and Our Ability to See Reality Properly, U.S.A.

But, thank God, that is not how we here live our life. We have not become God's frozen chosen. We have not decided to rest on our laurels and wait until the endowment runs out and then shut the doors. Instead we have decided to be a congregation enlivened by the Holy Spirit, trusting in the promises of Jesus Christ, always for the glory of God. We know ourselves to be called to be a welcoming and supportive community whose inspiring worship of God encourages everyone to deepen their faith and to respond to the needs of the world with the compassion of Christ.

On this Trinity Sunday when we seem to celebrate a theological concept, what we, instead, are being invited to celebrate is the living reality of who we are as we ground ourselves in the promises of Christ, as we ground ourselves in being enlivened by the Holy Spirit, and as we ground ourselves in glorifying God through all that we do—not just here in this hour that we spend together in this beautiful sanctuary or the hour that we spend elsewhere throughout the program year, but in all things that we say and do, and all the ways that we give of our time and our money and our talent, we have decided to be a congregation that is fully alive in the promises of God through Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is Trinity Sunday. If you've noticed, in both of the readings it mentions Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

At Princeton Seminary one of the things that I did was I read John Calvin's two-volume opus, "Institutes of the Christian Religion", a definition of what it means to be a person of faith. I especially fell in love with his earlier one-volume 1536 edition, in which he kept referring to "union with Christ" as a primary guiding principle for what it means for us as disciples and followers of Christ. Union with Christ. I could never quite figure out what that meant and so years later, I emailed George Hunsinger, the Calvin Scholar at Princeton, and I asked him, "What was John Calvin referring to when he said 'union with Christ?'" And his response startled me, first in how quick it came but in how simple it was. He said, "David, this is Calvin's use of the Latin phrase *participatio Christi* – participation in Christ or with Christ.

The invitation of Trinity Sunday is for us to realize in all that we do, we are participating in something that God is doing at the very heart of creation. The Trinity is not a theological concept but it is a divine and dynamic model of what it means for each of us to live a Christian life—a life where we mutually pour out love into the lives of others, and as we do so we are filled with love that is poured back into our hearts by those that we serve. It's by serving on a committee for 35 years, or being a member for 50 or more. It is by giving of who we are and the gifts that we have in order that our common life is better, not for our own credit or our own glory, but that our church and our community and our faith may be alive and thriving and growing. We live in an interdependent flow of God's eternal love and we participate in the middle of this flow. This is what makes our congregation, our community of faith, so vibrant. We understand that everyone lives in this flow, that everyone is gifted and that no matter who you are, that love flows through you into the lives of others and continues to flow from one to the other, back and forth and around, and that swirl is

God's Spirit at work among us and as we pay attention to that swirl and we stay open to that swirl and we trust that swirl and we have the courage to honor that swirl, we as Christians do amazing things in this world. It's only when we get afraid and close off from that swirl do we sin and fall short of God's glory.

So what is it that we are supposed to do as we stay open to this swirling energy of love that God is at the very heart of God's nature? In a sense, Jesus tells us in this, what could be the shortest and best commencement speech ever given. He gathers his students before him and he says to them, "Go. Make disciples of all people. Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to do what I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to end of the age." I want to unpack this, just a little bit.

Earlier this week I got a call from my brother-in-law, Darren, who by some strange circumstance has been asked to give the commencement address at the university where he teaches. He's never done it before and he was afraid, like *what do I do, what do I say? It's gotta be big and grand and encouraging and all that stuff.* And I said, "No, no, no. Tell me, what do you do when you lecture?" He says, "I know the four or five things I need to get across and I just put it on a piece of paper, and I stand up in front of the people and I start talking." I said, "Do that. Make it short and sweet and alive, and I'm telling you, they will love you for it." (laughter) So you, too, have been to those kinds of commencements. The 46<sup>th</sup> minute in 92 degree heat and you are going *please God, let them stop.*

Jesus' commencement is simple. Go. Teach. Baptize. Teach them to obey and to remember that I am with you and with them forever. What does it mean for us to go and to make disciples of all nations? I heard a great story this week of a family member of a friend of mine who sees himself as a street-corner evangelist. He wears a red suit with a white shirt, and I kid you not, proselytizes in the parking lot of a Target Store. The friend told me that when she was down in Texas and spent time with this relative, he was so proud of being able to reach out to a Muslim gentleman and have an interaction with him and give him a Bible as he gave him a Koran. He was convinced that he had saved his soul and made a disciple for Jesus. My friend said, "Do you think that's what happened, or could it be that you simply exchanged address cards, so to speak? Just as you gifted him with a holy text, he gifted you with a holy text." And befuddled, the man in the red suit said, "Well, I've never looked at it that way before."

To go and make disciples is to not go and drag people kicking and screaming into the church. Jesus says that to make disciples we have two or three things that we need to do. The first is that we baptize all who want to receive the promise of God for them—the glory of the Father, the redemption of Son and the sustaining power of the Spirit. And the second and probably most important thing that we have to do is teach them to obey everything that Jesus has commanded. Sounds ominous, doesn't it? Remember everything that Jesus has commanded us.

But in John 13:34, Jesus says this: *I give you a new commandment that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.* So when Matthew says to teach them to obey everything that Jesus has commanded them, what he is trying to get people to realize is that our job is simply to love the person standing in front of you, or sitting beside you, or preaching to you. We are to love one another for the common good. It sounds so simple and yet we know that it is so difficult because fear and sin close us off from that dynamic outpouring of love. That's why I believe Jesus concludes his commencement address with the promise or admonition to remember that he is always with us. Whenever fear hangs on or life starts to look a little bit dimmer or starts to narrow

in, when we are waiting for the diagnosis, or we're wondering about the outcome of a test, when we're afraid of what's happening to our children and everything seems to be closing in and getting more and more presbyopian, Jesus says, *no. I am with you always.* So brothers and sisters, go forth and love one another. Amen.