

Text: Matthew 28:16-20  
Trinity Sunday, Year B  
27 May 2018  
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I don't think Jesus ever said, "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." Feel free to disagree with me - this is what I think. I don't think Jesus commanded the Apostles to baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," because that language does not resemble anything Jesus said elsewhere during his life on earth. It's too developed a concept of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - the Holy Trinity - to suddenly appear at the end of St Matthew's Gospel on the lips of Jesus. Instead, it's the sort of thing Christians would say after years of reflecting on the sayings of Jesus and the letters of St Paul so that, by the time the *Gospel According to*

*Matthew* is written between 90 AD to 110 AD, sixty to seventy years after the resurrection of Jesus, the church that St Matthew wrote his Gospel for can have Jesus saying, “Go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” because by 90 AD that’s how the Church has come to experience and understand the truth of who God is – as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It’s not the voice of Jesus we’re hearing in these Bible verses, it’s the voice of the Church in 90 AD, expressing its faith that God exists as the Holy Trinity – one God, three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In fact the entire paragraph is the voice of St Matthew’s church, because it describes the situation of St Matthew’s church there in Syria. When the eleven disciples – reduced from twelve with the suicide of

Judas Iscariot - gather on the mountaintop to see the Risen Jesus for the very first time after his resurrection from the dead, St Matthew says "they believed, but some doubted" - because that would have been the situation of St Matthew's church: with few or no eyewitnesses of the Risen Jesus left 60 years after his resurrection, there would be those in the parish who would doubt that the Resurrection was real or true. When Jesus orders the eleven disciples to "Go and make disciples of all nations", that means Jesus orders them to make disciples, followers of Jesus, of all peoples - both Jews and non-Jews - but that's not something the Church started doing until years later, and it was what St Matthew's church was doing in Syria, where the makeup of the congregation was transitioning from mostly Jewish disciples of Jesus, to

mostly Gentile - non-Jewish - disciples of Jesus. So, when we hear from the lips of Jesus that we are baptize people in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - that is the voice of the Church expressing what Christians had come to understand and believe - namely, that God exists as a Holy Trinity of one God forever living as the three Persons of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and incidentally then sharing the formula, the words, that were used in St Matthew's church when people were baptized.

Does that make the idea of the Trinity any less true because it is the voice of the Church based on the teachings of Jesus? No. According to St Matthew, St Luke and St John, at the end of his ministry on earth Jesus gives his authority to his followers, to his Church, to be led by the Spirit and develop and grow the

Church. In St John's Gospel, this happens on Easter Sunday evening. According to St Luke, it happens on Pentecost. According to St Matthew, it happens in the verses we heard today when Jesus' disciples encounter the Risen Jesus for the first time and Jesus tells them that through his resurrection he has been given all authority in heaven and earth and then Jesus sends them out into the world, presumably using his authority to spread the word and grow the Church, promising he will be with them in what they do. And the fact that St Matthew has Jesus have this encounter and say these things to his apostles on the mountain top is consistent with how divine truth is revealed throughout St Matthew's Gospel, in which Jesus is the new Moses. Just as Moses went up the mountain to speak with the Lord, and reveal divine truth, so in St

Matthew's Gospel Jesus goes up a mountain to reveal divine truth. So we have Jesus going up a mountain to give the Sermon of the Mount, the new Law, and going up Mount Tabor to reveal his glory in the Transfiguration, with Moses and Elijah there to point to Jesus as their successor and fulfillment; and going up the mount of Calvary to reveal God's truth on the cross, and finally after the resurrection Jesus having this only resurrection appearance recorded in the St Matthew's Gospel on a mountain top, signifying it is divine truth. Elsewhere in the New Testament, St Paul, St James, and the author of the Letter to the Hebrews all develop teachings and doctrines out of what Jesus said and taught, so that what we Christians today believe and do comes out of those developments, including our faith in the Holy Trinity - God 3 in 1 -

Father, Son and Holy Spirit. A truth that Jesus, the incarnate Second Person of the Trinity, lived by and pointed to, but never articulated, never put into words in that language of the Trinity – but true, nevertheless.

Today we celebrate a feast to honor this truth – the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity. And yet, still a truth difficult to grasp, because it is so outside of our human experience. Some talk about the Holy Trinity as three separate gods – the Mormons do. Some think about the Holy Trinity as God taking on different jobs when needed. Just as I switch between being a pastor, and a lawyer, and a dog father, depending where I am and what time it is, some think God switches back and forth from being Father to Son to Holy Spirit on demand, as needed. None of that expresses the truth of the Holy Trinity.

The truth of the Holy Trinity that Christians came to understand and believe after the resurrection of Jesus is that it is the nature of God to be in relationships. God, by choice, by desire, always has existed in relationships – the love of the Father bursting out in the existence of the Son, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, consubstantial with the Father, the Son loving the Father and the Father loving the Son from eternity to eternity, with the Holy Spirit rising out of this eternal relationship of love between the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit together with the Father and the Son adored and glorified, joining and binding all three together from before time began, from before there *was* time, speaking God’s word through the prophets. It is this truth of God in

relationship within Himself as the Holy Trinity that culminates in the gift of the Son on the cross and the sending of the Holy Spirit: God wanting to be in relationship with us as God is in relationship in Himself. And that, as best as I can explain it, is the Holy Trinity - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - as Christians have come to understand and believe.