

Sermon Draft

Text: Matthew 28:16–20

Sermon: Trinity Sunday 2023

Today is Trinity Sunday. One God, yet three persons. The Father is fully and always God. The Son is always and fully God. The Holy Spirit is fully and always God. But the Father is not the Son, nor the Holy Spirit. The Son is not the Holy Spirit. Three distinct persons. One God. And it's right here in our text from Matthew 28. Jesus says, *“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”* (vs 18–19).

Got it? Understand the Holy Trinity?

Hardly. I cannot understand who God is. Neither can you. The Trinity is far beyond our comprehension. Oh, we can say the words. We can picture it. But we can't fully grasp the mystery of three in one. We can't get our heads around the essence and relationships involved in our God as the Trinity.

We try. One illustration is water. I used a glass of water last week as my aid, and to drink. Water can be a liquid. It can be frozen as ice. It can be heated to become steam. Yet in each state, it is still H₂O, still essentially water. Three in one. However, the analogy, helpful in some ways, fails in one crucial way.

You can't have ice, steam, and liquid all at the same time. You have either steam or ice or liquid. But the Father is always God; never is there a time he is not God. The Son is always God; never a time he was not. The Holy Spirit is always God; never a time he was not. All three persons are always and fully God at the same time.

I've seen a children's book that uses an apple as a way to describe the Trinity. You have the outer peel, the inner core, and the meaty center. One apple and three parts. Again, comparing the Trinity to an apple is helpful in some ways but fails in one crucial way. The peel is only part of the apple. The core is only part of the apple. Same for the tasty part inside. But the Father is completely God all the time, not just part of God, not just a third of God. The Son is completely God all the time. The Holy Spirit is completely God all the time.

Are you beginning to see how even our best attempts to grasp the mystery of the Trinity fall far short? That's only the start of it. Go back to the Old Testament Reading for today. It's the account of God creating everything. Did you catch the possible reference to the Trinity in verse 26? ***“Let us make man in our image.”***

Now consider how impossible it is to comprehend our God in all his power and immensity and majesty.

The Hubble telescope has sent us pictures of the universe beyond our planet that boggle the mind. We can see far distant galaxies, and now astronomers estimate the observable universe contains two trillion galaxies. Remember from science class that light travels 186,000 miles per second or about six trillion miles in a year. It would take over 158,000 light-years to reach even one of the closest galaxies. The universe is about 96 billion light-years in diameter, and expanding even farther and farther every minute we're in church (*"How Many Galaxies Are There in the Universe?" The Nine Planets, <https://nineplanets.org/questions/how-many-galaxies-are-there-in-the-universe/>*).

Very simply, our triune God is so far beyond us that we've just barely scratched the surface of who he is and what he can do. But he has revealed himself to us as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Three in One. The Trinity. We believe this. We confess this. Even if he is far beyond our comprehension. So far!

But thankfully, our triune God is not only beyond us. He is also with us. The very last promise Jesus gives us in Matthew, the last words of our text:

“Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (v 20). With that promise, everything changes. He is no longer merely the distant, too-big-to-know God. We know him as the God who comes to us, is with us, and always will be with us.

Let’s go back to the beginning of Matthew’s Gospel, to Matthew 1. An angel appears to Joseph in a dream to tell him he must not divorce Mary, even though she is with child. Rather, Joseph is to give the baby a special name, Jesus, for this child will grow up to save his people from their sins. Then the angel reveals to Joseph that with Jesus a prophecy will be fulfilled: ***“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel’ (which means, God with us)”*** (1:23). God in all power and immensity and majesty becomes one of us, fully human. The Father sends his Son, conceived by the Holy Spirit, and the small child in Mary’s arms is now God with us in fulfillment of that prophecy.

Now jump ahead thirty years. Jesus appears at the Jordan River. John is baptizing the people who have come to him in repentance. He looks up and sees Jesus wading into the water. He resists baptizing Jesus: ***“I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”*** (Matthew 3:14). But Jesus insists. He says he needs to fulfill all righteousness. So, John scoops up the water, and the Father’s voice booms from heaven, ***“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased”*** (v 17). The Holy Spirit lands on Jesus in the form of a dove. See the Trinity there? Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Yet what is Jesus doing in the water? Why is he baptized? He is taking his stand with us. He will not be separate from us but is already standing alongside us. His righteousness, his sinless life and the purity of his mission to save us, will be accomplished as he begins his public ministry to live up to his name. Jesus, right from the start, is saving his people from their sins.

Now it’s three years later still, and Jesus hangs on a cross. He is taking on himself anything and everything that would keep us at a distance from our God. He takes our punishment—the agony of our sins, the sorrows of death, and even the horrors of hell, which is the complete separation from God.

In a mystery beyond our understanding, Jesus, the Son of God, goes through that hellish abandonment when he cries out, ***“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*** (Matthew 27:46). What we deserve, Jesus serves, and we are promised an eternal life that is always with our triune God.

For what happens next once again boggles the mind. Jesus rises from the dead on Easter morning. He is victorious over death. He has conquered the sin that leads to the grave. He has crushed all the powers of hell. Never again will those evil forces make any claim on him. He is given all authority. So he will never leave us. He will always be close to us. As the apostle Peter says in his sermon from our Acts reading, ***“This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing”*** (Acts 2:32–33).

This we believe because we have been baptized into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus told the apostles to do in our text. When the water was scooped up and poured over me, over you, when those precious words were spoken along with our name, we were brought into the eternal presence of the triune God. Sin forgiven.

Jesus living up to his name as we are saved from our sins. The prophecy fulfilled once again in our own lives, for Jesus, our Immanuel, is with us. The God who is beyond us is now the God who is with us—always—forgiving, saving, raising us up to life eternal.

The apostle Paul says it this way, ***“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life”*** (Romans 6:3–4).

Beyond us—yes. With us—indeed. And more! In us too.

Jesus speaks about making disciples by baptizing and by teaching all that he has commanded: ***“Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you”*** (vs 19–20). So, just as we turned baptizing in his name into being baptized into his name, so here we turn the teaching into learning all that he has commanded.

How does that happen? By the power of the Holy Spirit working through God's Word. Whether in a Bible class or sermon or devotion or conversation or podcast or radio message or wherever else God's Word is taught, the Holy Spirit works in us to teach us what Jesus has said and done.

For example, in Psalm 8, King David looks at the heavens, the moon, the stars and asks, "*What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?*" (Psalm 8:4). He sees the enormity of God. He knows the majesty of God. Yet he believes that God is mindful of him. He trusts that God will care for him. And so he praises this God of creation who is with him.

We will not grasp the mystery of the Trinity, although we confess it with whatever creed we use in our worship. We will not comprehend just how majestic and immense our God is, but we will believe he is always with us as the living Lord of all. We will not understand how he is three persons yet only one God, but we learn what he has done for us and praise him for it all. While the mystery of the Trinity is beyond us, our Creator God is always present with us through the exaltation of his Son and in us by the sanctifying gift of the Holy Spirit.

Amen