

Holy Trinity Sunday-June 4,2023

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Genesis 1:26-2:4a and Matthew 28:16-20

“Go, Baptize, Teach” Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

“And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” It might seem ironic that these are the words that Matthew records Jesus saying, just before leaves his disciples and ascends into heaven. But On Trinity Sunday, and every day we remember that Jesus is still with us and always will be. There is no one else who can make this kind of promise.

You can probably think of people that you always enjoy being with or have always had good experiences doing business with that you would like to hear them give you a promise that they will be with you forever. When I think about the years behind me, I have had dentists, doctors, teachers, car salesmen, grocery stores, machinery dealerships, and insurance agents that for a period in my life, I would have sworn that I would never do business with anyone else. But none of these people or businesses from my past had everything I wanted or needed at every season in my life. If any of them would have said to me, “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age”, they would have broken their promise to me.

At the South Dakota Synod Assembly on Friday, we had an opportunity to attend different breakout labs. I attended one that focused on the different challenges of rural ministry. A professor from Wartburg and Luther Seminary led the discussion in the session I attended. They each presented new ways of raising preachers to serve rural areas. One of the students from Wartburg has been placed in a very rural setting in Northwestern South Dakota and is now serving three small congregations that have not had a pastor for several years. This student is a married young woman with two young children. She absolutely loves the congregations that she is serving, and they are thrilled to have her, and she appreciates their patience and forgiveness with her as she is learning. It seems that they have a perfect relationship. But she told us that the one thing she would never promise them was that she would be with them always. She was also quick to follow up and tell us and has reminded this congregation that the promise that Jesus gave his disciples that he would be with them always, even if she wasn't, was for them as well.

This promise held true for Jesus' disciples, and it is for us today and every day that will follow. But when we look at each of the readings for today, we also learn that this promise to be with us did not begin as we heard the gospel reading from Matthew when Jesus ascended into heaven. Every member of the Trinity, God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit was present in our first reading for today. The Trinity was not only present in the last words of the gospel for today, but the Trinity was also very much present in the very first words recorded in the bible when all things were created. In fact, **before** anything was created, the Trinity was already present. In the beginning, God was already there.

The first lesson for today includes only two days of the creation story. You heard what happened on day six, when God created humankind and day seven when God finished his work and rested. But you likely recall that what you heard happening on day six, happened in the same way on every other day before. God speaks. God says what will happen. And the day ends with it happening just as he said. God the Father spoke. Jesus the son is the word that was spoken. And the Holy Spirit opened the ears of those who were present to what God had to say. This repeated sequence of what happened in creation shows us how the Trinity was a work in the beginning and continues to work in the same way today. The work of the Trinity has never changed or evolved over time.

We did not have to wait until Christmas for Jesus to arrive. We did not have to wait until the day of Pentecost for the Holy Spirit to make his first appearance. Jesus did not go away when he ascended into heaven. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit were present in the Creation story and are present with us today and will be with us always. Before God spoke his first word for creating light, there was a wind which was none other than the Holy Spirit from God that swept over the face of the earth. We learn from the gospel of John that in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. And this Word became flesh and dwelt among us. You can't find

God or Jesus or the Spirit doing some part time work of their own. We believe in one God, but a God who is three in one as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who is working together creating faith by speaking God's word into listening ears.

Like Jesus told his disciples that he was leaving them in the gospel for today, the Apostle Paul also told his friends in Corinth that he would be leaving them. He begins by telling them "farewell" but ends by reminding them that the Trinity would not be leaving them by telling them that grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Paul even changed the order of how we usually name the Trinity by naming Jesus first, then God the Father, but this too points out that all three members of the Trinity are always at work together no matter the order that we say their names.

Before Jesus gave these disciples the promise that he would be with them always, he also gave to them what at first sounds like a command. A command that they had to accomplish on their own. "Go 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 all that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." And that's how Matthew ends his gospel. Were the disciples ready for the task of making disciples? Had the disciples received adequate training to do baptisms? If the disciples were to teach the newly baptized, had they been taught what they were to teach them? How could Jesus give this Holy authority to make disciples to such unqualified disciplers?

These disciples were not sent out to fail. They couldn't fail. All authority under heaven and earth had been given to Jesus and he had the authority to send whoever he chose to make disciples. All they needed to know was that it wouldn't be them doing the work. It would be the work of the Trinity. They would have the same authority to create disciples by speaking to them as the Trinity did by creating heaven and earth in the creation story. When God said, let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness, there was no waiting until the following week or day for humankind to be created. It happened after hearing this word. When a child of God is baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, there is nothing to do or can be done. When a sinner hears that their sins are forgiven in the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit, there is nothing more for you to do. Your sins are forgiven. When you are sent from this place with the blessing of the Triune God, you are reminded that you do not leave this place alone and you are sent into the world to make disciples by inviting them to hear God speak to them.

We learned from Pastor Renae Splichal Larson at the Synod Assembly how Edith Alberty did this in her church in Sioux Falls. Edith belongs to a relatively large church in Sioux Falls which like many churches is struggling with declining membership. This urban church, which at one time had a large Sunday School, now only had 12 children in Sunday School. Edith believed that when you are sent to make disciples in the name of the Triune God, it will happen. Edith simply used the three words found in scripture that were given by Jesus for us to use when we invite people to hear God speak to them. Edith spoke these words to people she invited to worship, "Come and See". She next started to tell the parents that were picking up their kids from the church daycare the same message, "Come and See." If Edith didn't see the people she had invited to church at worship, she would invite them again. Within two years, the Sunday School has now tripled in size and people are often joining Edith in Sunday worship.

Did I mention Edith is 5 years old? We met Edith who witnesses to us what it means to trust in a God who does what he says he will do. Edith didn't use water to make disciples, she handed out Smartie candies to those she disciplined, so the preachers at her church would still have something to do. This is not work that we must do alone. We have been given this promise, and remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. Amen