

“Disciple the Nations”

Genesis 1:1-2; Psalm 8:1-4, 9;
2 Corinthians 13:11-13; Matthew 28:16-20

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It is Trinity Sunday. While it doesn't seem that thinking about the Trinity is an easy connection to what's going on in the world, the Trinity, in some ways, *is* a description of the world. You see, I think that when God first created the world, created all that is, lovingly created light and land, there is the sense that what comes out of God's creativity is good. That creation is a result of God's love leads what is created to be good. God finishes and he says it's all very good.

God has created not only a universe, not only the physical world, but has given life to this creation. If we read on, we would read about God breathing life in to Adam, God's breath animating creation, God bringing us to life from dust. Sometimes I have to let go of trying to understand it and just experience the feeling of this poetry and how it helps me recognize that God loved the world from the very beginning because God created it very good.

He gave human beings the opportunity to be in it and to create human society, and to enjoy the gifts of creation and of living together in this incredibly complex system, this biosystem we call earth, this universe that God has given us. Sometimes for me, it's almost overwhelming to recognize the nature of the complexity of creation. It surpasses my limited understanding. I somehow live as part of it, but I'm not in control of it. I have to trust that what God made is very good.

It seems, however, that there have been some struggles for us, particularly as we have tried to live and be a human society. Too often, we don't seem to recognize the very goodness around us. Sometimes we want to hold onto that goodness for ourselves. We begin to think others are limiting or interfering with the goodness that we might have. There are all kinds of ways in which we, as human beings, take what God has given us and begin to twist it into something that God doesn't really want, that isn't the way he designed it to be. We take a different path. We quit listening to God. We miss the mark that God has given us. We lose the ability to be part of God's creation, to be a creative part of that creation. Instead, we find ourselves in need. It's too easy today to look around and point out some of those needs. The struggles we have between people, because we have created the Other. And particularly in our nation, having created the Other as ones of a different skin color. The reason I don't like to use the word “racist” is that they are really not races. Racism, races – it's all built on just skin color and other physical characteristics.

So, as we begin to realize that we cause ourselves these kinds of problems, we need the grace that God gives us, the recognition that God still loves us, in spite of our failures and struggles. And that God loves not only me or my friends, or my tribe, but God loves everyone. God loves the world.

That is why he gave us Jesus. It is the grace of God in the Lord Jesus Christ that reminds us of who God is, that God loves the world. Of course, it's more than a reminder of the grace given us. It's a favor extended to us so that we might know the love of God in our lives; we might know that we are valued; we might know that each of us is a child of God; we might know that God will show us the way and will guide us.

I truly believe that part of our problem is that we begin to pay attention to other things. We have our own definition of what it means for things to work. We look at efficiencies. We look at what I get rather than what I can give. We think others are in our way or have what we should have. We create rivalries. We create ways of putting some people in places of servitude and others are elevated. And in doing all of this, by using physical characteristics or other ways people think we can begin to write one another off, we create the divisions and anger and hatred that we see in our world today.

We can recognize that there are long cultural traditions woven into the very fabric of such divisions and ways of thinking, and the structures and systems that impose privilege on some and impose oppression and limitations on others. It is why we need the grace of God, why Jesus had to come and be among us to help us recognize that it's not about all that stuff. It is about the love of God that we can begin to not only experience, but to return, and how we love each other and so can share the love of God with one another.

As Jesus is concluding his time with his disciples in Matthew, he says, "as you go." The phrase there really is "as you go into life," "as you go where you go," disciple. *Disciple the tribes* is the way it would have been understood, particularly the other tribes, the other people, the other groups that are out there that have been written off. Now, instead, disciple them. Instead, it goes on to say, immerse them in God. It says, "baptize them in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Sometimes I think we take that too literally, and think it just means putting a little water on somebody's head or immersing somebody in a river. Because the word "baptize" does mean "to immerse." Immerse them in the name—*the name* is the term we use that is encapsulating the dynamic and wonder of who God is. So it is immersing them in that wonder, in the love of God, in the grace of God, in the creativity of God, in who God is, and helping them observe what Jesus has taught, his instruction and his commandments.

As I read that, I continually feel a great sadness because it feels to me that somehow I hear Jesus inviting us to disciple, that is to bring the Good News to our world, to help immerse our communities, our friends, our nation, our world in the dynamic love and grace of God, the work of God among us, the creativity of the creation he has given us, and that we are to be engaged with and part of, and doing it according to the teachings of Christ. It feels to me that we haven't done a very good job, because I see a nation that seems to be struggling to know what it means to show grace. I see a nation that is struggling to be able to care for the least among us. I see a nation that's struggling to not be divided. I see a nation that too often simply forgets the teachings of

Jesus altogether, but has replaced all those teachings with other teachings, other definitions of success, other ways of being.

I think all those other ways of being end up being empty, leading to brokenness. If not personal brokenness, at least at certain stages of life it doesn't look like brokenness, but sometimes what seems to be the success of some leads to the brokenness of others. So we are invited to engage our world in bringing the very love and grace of God, the teachings of Jesus, that we might love one another. That we might love God with our heart, mind soul, and strength, and love our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus' command is, "Love one another as I have loved you." We are invited to bring this to our world. Sometimes we struggle with how to do that, and how to understand that.

Jesus tells us that he gives us the Holy Spirit. We talked last week about receiving the Holy Spirit, that it might help us communicate, to talk to one another. As we hear in Corinthians, talking about the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, it's living into that fellowship, into the sharing of the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, as one that invites us in our sharing in that life of God among us, with us, in us, through us, that we are invited. I think Paul puts it in an interesting way as he concludes Chapter 13. He says, "Agree with one another." If you look at what it means there, it really means to "dig in deep together", dial in to what is real and true and important, pay attention together. He goes on to say, "Let that internal knowing express itself outwardly." I think it is the very internal knowing of the grace of God, the gifts of God, the life God gives us. We are dependent on that gift. We are dependent on God's grace. We are invited to externalize this in how we live, and in who we are, and in the ways we share our lives together.

He goes on to talk about living in peace. When I think about living in peace, I think about what it means to harmonize. When you have two people singing, if they are singing in opposition to each other in ways that try to make the other sound bad, it all sounds bad. But if we can find ways to harmonize, to come alongside each other and bring something that wasn't there before, it enables us to live better together. When you have somebody singing bass and someone else adds a tenor part to it, it can make what is happening richer. That's the invitation that God is giving us. Through fellowship and sharing of the Spirit, we are invited to harmonize our lives. It's not a competition. It's a way to try to figure out how to make life better together. Better as a congregation, as a community, as a nation, and indeed, as a world.

Too often we simply live in competition, in opposition, and in fear of one another. Too often we hold some down so others can have more. If we're going to live in the fellowship of the Spirit, if we're going to live in peace and we want the God of peace and love to live with us, it means working together to figure out how we can do that. Perhaps it means the first thing we need to do is say I'm sorry. I'm sorry when I don't understand somebody else and tend to prejudge them. Sorry for the way that prejudice has crept into our lives. Sorry for the way the world has worked that has not included everyone. Sorry for the way we have too easily allowed black people to be killed and for it not to be a problem. Sorry for the way some people live in pain and fear and suffering, and we haven't done enough to alleviate it. We can say we are sorry.

Then, we can listen to another's pain. We can listen to what's going on in others' lives. It's too easy to want to tell others, to tell what we know, to tell somebody what they should be instead of listening, hearing their concerns, hearing their pain, hearing how they understand, how they see, how they experience life. We can listen and we can learn what we can do differently. We can learn how we can share our lives, share our world, share our wealth, share the goodness of God, and share the grace of God given us. We can learn.

So as we think about the Holy Spirit and the fellowship we share in that Spirit, it is Paul's invitation in Corinthians to pay attention, to dial in, to attend to what our faith invites us to do, what is core and central and must come from within in order to live in harmony and have the God of love and peace be present with us, that we might extend that love and peace and thus be those who can disciple the nations, not so much by telling everyone what to do, but by demonstrating it. Showing love rather than telling people to love. Showing grace, rather than suggesting others be more gracious.

For me, so often the scriptures are first about how I can be a follower of Christ, and then engaging with the followers of Christ to be a better people together, that we might better the world together. It is as we gather around the table that we are reminded that we share in the Holy Spirit. That we have the love of God that has created us, has gifted us with sustenance, and continues to be with us. And we have the grace of God in Jesus Christ, who gave himself to show us God's love, to take upon himself our sin, to help us recognize the ways we go astray. Jesus wants us to drink in what he has taught, that we might live it, that it might become part of who we are and the very nature of our existence together.

We have the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, that we might dial in, that we might recognize the central nature of God's guidance and gift in Christ, and that we might let that gift be so internalized that it is what we express. When we face these times of stress, these times of uncertainty, these times of injustice, these times of grief, we do so with an eye to how we can bring the very grace of God, the gifts of God to bear. How can we live in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit with arms around one another in care, and not simply put up fists in fear?

So as we come to the table this morning, we come to a Triune God—a God of love who shows that love in Christ and stays with us in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit so we might be the people of God in this time, in this place, in this world. Amen.