

Matthew 28:16-20

Our calendars are marked with reasons to celebrate—a graduation, a birthday, a baptism, an anniversary, a confirmation. We get together and throw parties for many different events and milestones in our life. But has anyone ever given a party in your honor just for being you? Nothing that you did; a celebration, rather, that you are who you are!

That's what we're doing today. Today is the Sunday of the Holy Trinity. At different times through the Church Year we celebrate Jesus' birth, His death and resurrection, His ascension, His gift to us of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. But today we celebrate the festival...of God. The church turns her attention not to something specific that God has done, but simply to who God is; to the mystery of the eternal Trinity and His true Unity.

And yet it is quite impossible to speak of God without speaking of His saving actions toward sinful mankind. For we cannot speak of God's existence apart from what He does. And what He does is always done for us through Jesus Christ.

Jesus' words in Matthew 28 were spoken just before His ascension into heaven. They have been called the Great Commission. As we look at these wonderful words this morning, I want us to see them not so much as our great commission, but as God's. For these words are not so much telling the Apostles what they must do, but what God would do through them, and through His called pastors who would follow in the Apostle's train.

Jesus uses four key verbs in speaking to the Eleven here. And the first one is not "go." Yes, the Apostles are sent out, but here the focus is on the work of God within their midst. "As you go, therefore," is how it should be translated. As you go..."make disciples." That's the first verb—making disciples; converting people from all nations to the Christian faith. The second and third verbs tell how they make disciples—"baptize," and "teach." By baptizing in the Name of the Triune God and teaching the baptized the faith—including and especially the remembrance of Jesus with the eating and drinking of His flesh and blood in the Sacrament—that is how disciples are made.

We witnessed this again this morning. A disciple was made. Alexander was baptized in the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And now the teaching begins. For Mom and Dad promised to raise this child in the Christian faith, bringing him to the services of God's House, providing for his further instruction in the Christian faith, that he may be taught to cherish the Lord's body and blood in the Sacrament.

Now remember, this is God's work. And so the fourth verb in our text is the most vital, when Jesus says, "I am with you." Conversion is God's work, not man's. To command His disciples to make disciples, and then depart, would be the height of cruelty. Which is why Jesus adds these words: I am with you, always!

Not in some "touchy—feely" way. Not as a warmth down in the gut. Not even as God who fills all things because of His omnipresence. Jesus would be with them specifically as they carried out the work of making disciples—namely, through their baptizing, and teaching, and remembrance of Him in the Holy Supper. In these sacred things Christ would be with them. As they baptized, Christ would be in the water. As they taught and proclaimed the faith, Christ would be in the Word. As they remembered Him by eating His

Supper, Christ would be in the bread and wine. In these things, Christ says, “I am with you, always.”

And so it’s not the Eleven who had to make disciples. Jesus would make disciples through their baptizing; through their teaching; through their sacramental eating of His flesh and blood. What a comfort were these words to the Eleven. But not just to them—to us also. What does it mean for us that Jesus says, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age”? Does it mean that Jesus always sends His angels to be with us? No...that’s a comfort, but it’s better than that. Does it mean that because Jesus, as true God, is present everywhere at the same time, that He is always with us? No...that’s a comfort, but it’s better than that.

By these words, “Lo, I am with you always,” Jesus, as He told His Apostles, ties His presence to the Word and Sacraments. And not just His presence—His presence there for us. He is present in Baptism for us. Through the water He makes you His child in the faith. He is present in the pure preaching and teaching of His Word for us—giving you through the Word proclaimed, the forgiveness of your sins. He is present in the bread and wine of Communion for us to receive, that your faith may be strengthened and you be given His gifts of salvation.

Jesus is always with you. He is with you when you’re in your car on the road. He’s with you when you sleep at night. He’s with you when you are studying at school. He’s with you when you’re working at the job. But He is not in these places for you with His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation. When He says, “I am with you always,” He is talking about the Word—about Baptism—about the Lord’s Supper. It is in these holy things, within His Church, where He is with you always to bless you with heaven itself through the forgiving of your sins.

Let me use an illustration here to help us understand this. What would you say to a man who takes a boat out onto the ocean with no drinking water? He says, “there is going to be water all around me; why should I bring water to drink?” Wouldn’t you say: But that ocean water is not for you. It may be everywhere around you, but it is not for you to drink.

That ocean water is very necessary. It will hold up him and his boat so he can move along day after day. But if he relies on the ocean water to live, he will die—it is much too salty to drink.

And so with Christ. Is Jesus everywhere? Yes, He fills all things. But He is not everywhere for you. Because He is everywhere we fear no evil. He upholds us so that we can go day by day in the confidence of His presence. But we cannot drink of His forgiveness and salvation everywhere, but only where He promises to be with His gifts—in His Word and Sacraments. Here in these things is Jesus for you. Here in Baptism is new life in Christ. Here in the Word is Christ for you to drink. Here in the bread and wine is Jesus for you and for your salvation. To live apart from these means of grace is death, for in these holy things alone, is Christ for us to drink. And so we live with Christ, for we drink from Him and of Him in His Word and Sacraments.

Today we celebrate who God is, and in doing so we rejoice that in Word and Sacrament our Triune God is for us. In your baptism He acted in love toward you. He gave you His

name. He claimed you and made you His forgiven child. Today He comes to you through the Word reaching your ears. He comes to release you from your sins; to set you free from the burden of a guilty conscience. You are forgiven. Your God holds no sin against you. At His Table He gives you the sure sign and seal of His grace and mercy toward you—giving into your mouth His own flesh and blood.

You and I may not really understand at all the mystery of the Holy Trinity—three Persons and yet one God. But Jesus, with the words, “I am with you,” wants you to truly understand that this God, who made you and redeemed you, is for you. Amen.