

The Triune God Is Revealed in Power and Love

Friends, especially our confirmands,

Our Gospel today is commonly called the “Great Commission.” What purpose do you have in life? Well, Jesus spells one out pretty plainly: Go and get disciples from all nations. He explains how to do it: by baptizing and by teaching God’s Word. On this Confirmation Sunday, it makes for a nice statement of our mission in life.

But this is not just our mission. It is also God’s mission. This is God’s will—that more and more people are brought into his Church, brought in through the Word and Sacrament. On this Trinity Sunday, we could call it God’s “co-mission”—that is, a joint mission of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. You see, this teaching of the Trinity is not some obscure fact. The Trinity shows us God our Savior.

And as we look at God’s mission on earth, we learn so much about him. The true God, the Triune God, is revealed here in power and in love.

God the Father—we normally think of him when we think of creation, as we heard from Genesis. And yet, did you catch the references to the Trinity in our First Lesson? God referred to as “him,” yet also calling himself “us”—right there, a reference to the three Persons in the one God. But there was more—the first verses referred to God and to the Spirit working in creation. And other parts of the Bible make clear that Jesus, the Word of God, was the means of this world’s creation: through him all things were made.

But God did not simply make this universe and then leave it alone, like a craftsman makes a toy or a piece of furniture and then sells it to someone else, never to see it again. The Lord is actively taking care of this world. He gives breath to every living creature. And that is so important, ever since Adam and Eve brought sin into the world. Only by God’s grace does life still exist in this ruined creation.

Keep that in mind every day. When you see a fruit tree, see it as a gift of God, how he feeds you. See that fireman as God’s gift to protect you. And with this coronavirus, we can thank God for everything from nurses and doctors to our immune systems to the government officials working to protect us, and don’t forget that God is working in so many ways we can’t see.

Of course, a virus, and sickness, and death, remind us that we are sinners who deserve to be punished. But Scripture says that God chose us even before he created the world to be his. Before he said, “Let there be light,” God already knew you would be born, and the challenges you would face, and how he would use you to help others and accomplish his will.

But this was not some random choice. Scripture says, “God chose us in Christ before the creation of the world.” God the Father chose us in the work and love of God the Son. He promised it to Adam and Eve—right after they sinned and brought sickness and death to the world, God promised that one of their descendants would crush the devil’s head and undo all the evil. He would be our Savior.

God the Father sent his Son, his only Son, here to save us. Jesus, God himself, was born a real human. God came into this world of viruses—and dealt with it by healing the worst of

diseases. God lived a real human life, experiencing the joys and sorrows that we feel. Our confirmands studied about how Jesus grew up and studied the Word, yet he learned it so well that by the age of 12 he knew more than all the teachers in Israel. Jesus preached about God's love and forgiveness for even the worst of sinners.

The world of Jesus' day was like the world of our day. There was prejudice, there was violence, there was injustice. Jesus spoke out against that injustice, like the Old Testament prophets had done. But then the greatest injustice in human history came crashing on him—Jesus, who had never broken even one of God's commandments, was arrested, beaten, mocked, and put to death. He allowed it to happen, so that he could suffer for all the wrongs we have every done. And because Jesus sacrificed himself, there is forgiveness available for all of our sins, all the hatred in the world. When we repent—when we admit that I am the sinner—then our slate is wiped clean.

Jesus' rising from the dead on Easter proved there is new life for everyone who trusts in him.

Our Gospel today takes place some time after Easter. Jesus has gathered with his disciples. He assures them that he has all authority in heaven and on earth. He is, after all, the Lord God, and the victorious Savior. He can take us to that home prepared in heaven. There is no reason for us to doubt it.

But before he takes us there, he wants us to help build his kingdom. So he took some of his authority and handed it down to us. He told his disciples, and ultimately you and me, to go into the world—into all the world—and gather disciples into his church. We do this by the means he gave us: the Word and the Sacraments. Teach them to keep all the instructions he has given—“keep” means not only obey, it also means to believe his Word and to treasure that Word.

Our confirmands will be asked today if they believe that the Bible is God's Word. We talked about how God inspired humans to write down his own words, and how the Bible has no errors in it, unlike any other book. And we talked about how powerful the Bible is—this is how God saves us, by filling us with faith in Jesus. Whether we read the book, or when we use Jesus' words in Baptism, this is Jesus' mission for our lives—this is how we gather people for Christ.

But we aren't the ones bringing anyone to faith. We are just tools of God the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit was involved in creation. Last Sunday we heard about the Spirit coming at Pentecost, filling the reluctant disciples with the strength to preach about Jesus. And the Spirit has been working ever since the Garden of Eden to lead people to faith. After Adam and Eve disobeyed God, as the Father spoke to them with the promise of God the Son, God the Holy Spirit worked through those words to get them to trust. Adam and Eve were heading out into a world made terrifying by sin; but through the Holy Spirit's work, they knew God was with them.

The Holy Spirit has worked ever since to put faith in the hearts of people like Moses and his sister Miriam and David and Mary Magdalene, and now you and me. Faith is not something we can come up with; “I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel...” And when you were baptized, the Holy Spirit made that call very personal!

In our Gospel, it says that when Jesus appeared to his followers, they worshiped him; but some hesitated because they just weren't sure—they still struggled with doubts. We have doubts, at times, too; as you grow up, the devil will put plenty of doubts in your minds.

So what did Jesus do? He spoke to them. He reminded them of his authority. It is always Jesus' words that strengthens our faith. So when you have doubts, go to the Bible. Use your Catechism to find passages about a particular topic—like, to find verses talking about whether Jesus really is God, look in the Creed's Second Article—there is a list of verses. Or, if you face a disaster, look in the Lord's Prayer, the petition about "deliver us from evil."

In Confirmation class we spend time talking about real-life situations. Both of our confirmands gave a lot of good examples of challenges they might face and how they could use the Bible to discover what to do. And never forget, the Holy Spirit keeps building up our faith so we can follow God's will; and he gives us wisdom to make decisions that are God-pleasing.

The Ten Commandments guide our lives. What should we say when people want to follow other, non-Christian religions? God says, "You shall have no other gods before me"—and that tells us not to give any support to a non-Christian group. God's name summarizes all of God's love, so we won't misuse that name, instead we will call on God every day. "Remember the Sabbath"—in a few minutes our confirmands will promise to be faithful in the use of God's Word and the Sacrament of Holy Communion, so their faith will stay strong.

And God's Word is so relevant to the most current issues we face—not that God spells out exactly what to do, but he lays down the principles for us to follow. Our government has laid down so many rules to fight off covid-19, restrictions that have in many ways worked, but that have meant job losses and anxiety. We may not agree with all the rules; but the Fourth Commandment says to honor those in authority, so we try to follow the rules they lay down. And the Fifth Commandment reminds us not to hurt others but do all we can to preserve their lives; so we take seriously the rules about social distancing, and choosing times to wear a face mask, because we love others and we don't want them to get sick. Again, God doesn't say this is exactly what you do; but he lays out the basic principles which we follow out of faith.

Out of thanks for God's love, we will follow his other commands too: Not encouraging adulterous words or actions; not stealing; not saying false things about anyone no matter what they have done; not even coveting, that is, sinfully desiring someone else's stuff. And as we follow God's law, we reflect the love God has for us.

And this sets the stage for us to talk about Jesus. Confirmands, I can say with great certainty something that is going to happen to you: Someone will ask you, Why do you go to church? Or, Why don't you curse or do drugs or something else that they do. God willing, this will happen a number of times in your lives. And what a great opportunity that will be, for you to tell that person about Jesus.

This is God's mission. It is the mission that our God took on—Father, Son and Holy Spirit work to keep people in the faith. It is the mission Jesus then handed to us. This Great Commission also reveals our True God, our Triune God, in his power and his love. Amen.