

New St. James Presbyterian Church
Trinity Sunday, June 7, 2020
Rev. Mark McLennan

“The Great Omission”

Genesis 1:1–2:4a Psalm 82 Corinthians 13:11–13 Matthew 28:16–20

A lot of other writers and preachers have advised not to try to explain the Trinity on this Trinity Sunday.

Although I am tempted, because I believe in the Trinity, and I think I understand it in my own way, I am going to take their advice.

Let's talk:

As Christians, we only have three things that God requires of us:

- love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength,
- love our neighbor as ourselves,
- make disciples of Jesus Christ.

To make disciples means to be witnesses of Christ in order to bring others into a relationship with Christ.

At the end of Matthew before Jesus ascends to the Father, Jesus' last words to his followers were **not**,

"Go and find a comfortable church and have pot luck suppers."

His last words were not, *"Go and sing the songs you like in worship."*

Jesus didn't say, *"Try to do some good every once in a while."*

Jesus said, *"Go and make disciples!"*

This is called the *"Great Commission,"* not the *"Great Suggestion."*

The church is the only institution in the world that exists for those outside of it.

Unfortunately, many churches don't even see it as a suggestion.

Instead, it has become the *"Great Omission."*

As the church has turned inward over the last 30 or 40 years, it has lost sight of its mission to make disciples.

This is one of the reasons why the mainline church is struggling to grow.

The stats don't look good.

The mainline church overall is not replenishing itself with a new generation of disciples.

We are not reaching the younger generation.

Fewer and fewer churches are bringing even one new person to Christ in one year.

What has happened?

Why can't the church today be like the early church?

The answer comes through something that AW Tozer said long ago:

"If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the Church today, 95% of what we do would go on and no one would know the difference.

If the Holy Spirit had been withdrawn from the New Testament Church, 95% of what they did would have stopped, and everybody would know the difference."

Is the Holy Spirit the driving force of the church today?

If we are to reclaim the fire of the Spirit the early church had, if we are to share our witness effectively, we must get back to fundamentals

--**what we believe and what we practice.**

We must be willing to open ourselves to the movement of the Holy Spirit!

That's what the early followers of Christ did!

They were not sophisticated people. They hadn't been to seminary.

They hadn't read books on church growth and marketing the church.

They simply made themselves available to the Holy Spirit.

And look what happened in Acts chapter 2, verse 6: *"Each one heard them speaking in his own language."*

Now this was not the gift of glossolalia or speaking in tongues.

What happened on the day of Pentecost was that a bunch of people from all over the place, all speaking different languages, all coming from different cultures, heard the gospel in their own language.

The good news of the saving love of Jesus Christ was communicated to them!

It was clear!

The Holy Spirit did it through them because they were simply willing to be used!

The Holy Spirit broke through communication barriers and the gospel translated.

Now isn't it interesting that here in 2020 with all of our miraculous communication technology we still have communication problems?

Isn't it interesting that in spite of our advances in Bible translations and production of gimmicks that people are still turned off by religion and the church?

It seems we are good at information, but not communication.

Will Willimon wrote a few years ago,

"To many outside the church, the Church is like a football huddle.

You know that something important is being said there, but you can't understand a word of it, and all you can see is their rear ends."

Someone else said the Church needs to speak some other language than *Christianese*.

How is it that the early church was able to communicate so clearly and we have so much trouble?

Where is our passion and love for God and our passion and love for people?

This is what translates!

That's what translated at Pentecost and that's what translates today!

Believe me, when you forgive when everyone else wants revenge, that translates.

When you are loving when everyone else is hateful, that translates.

When you don't give up on people when everyone else wants to, that translates.

There is a great debate in the Church right now on how to be relevant in this post-modern world.

You know what? The Church ought to be a little strange. We ought to be a little off-kilter.

If people come to the church because the values of the world have diminished them and they are looking for something different, why would they be attracted to us if we are like the world?

So, if we are a little odd, a little weird, that's good.

It is as if we are saying, "*What you are looking for, you will not find in the world!*"

People respond to real people who have a real love and passion for God!

The gospel does not have to be dressed up, dolled up, souped up, or given a make-over.

The gospel does fine by itself.

The early church knew this.

The power of the early church was rooted in prayer and discernment from the Holy Spirit.

If the church today made itself more available to the power of the Holy Spirit,

I suspect, people would notice.

The church would be led to speak to the real spiritual needs of people.

And when the church starts doing that, people will listen.

The following story reminds me of a Portuguese bakery in London that I visited once when I was visiting my sister. (best dinner rolls ever!)

Wayne Cordeiro tells a story about a bakery he knew about.

It was located in a bad part of town.

The bakery was small, rundown, and nondescript.

Yet at 5am every morning the aroma of delicious bread emanated from that bakery.

People would line up around the block to get their hands on that bread.

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That is a parable for us as the church.

It is not about appearances or gimmicks; it is simply about offering the bread of life.

People are so spiritually hungry that all we have to do is offer the bread of life with passion and authenticity, and they will come from all over to taste it.

Does the sweet smell of Christ emanate from your life?
Are you sharing your witness?
Are you letting your light shine?

The unavoidable truth is that as Christians we are called to bear witness, to testify to the hope that is within us, to tell people about Jesus --to **make disciples**.

Now, this may scare some of you to death. But, take heart and listen closely. By the grace of God, you are able to preach. You don't do it on your own power. This is why Jesus said, *"I am with you always, even unto the end of the age."* Jesus is always with us, helping us and empowering us to share the good news.

I know he is. As a minister, I have heard many great sermons from the church.

Some of them were even in words.

To close - several stories from The Rev. Dr. Charles Reeb:

I heard about a woman who had a friend who was an addict. Her addiction was destroying everything she loved. Most people would have said, *"Well, we need to pray the she gets the help he needs."* But that is not what this woman did. She wrote her friend a letter telling her that she was going to lose everything including her life unless she went into treatment and received the help she needed. And then she wrote in her letter that the only one who could make her whole is Jesus Christ.

Now, where did she get the power to write a letter like that?
Jesus said, *"Go and make disciples and I will be with you always."*

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He was a young man still living at home. He was rather quiet and kept to himself. One day his coworker found him in the restroom crying. His coworker asked him if he could help. The young man confided in him. He told him that his girlfriend was pregnant, and he had just revealed this to his parents the night before. They are very strict and religious. They screamed at him and said that he had embarrassed them and shamed the family and told him that he should never set foot in their house again.

What did his coworker do? He reached out, put his arm around him and said,

"I am sorry that happened to you. I am sure this is difficult for your parents, and I am certain this is difficult for you. But I am a Christian, and I believe that God loves you, and his love will help you through the most difficult situations."

Now how was that coworker able to say something like that?
Jesus said, *"Go and make disciples and remember I am with you always."*

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I remember preaching at a youth camp several years ago.

The worship service went really late. I didn't get up to preach until about 11p.m.

It didn't help that I had the flu.
But it was the last service of the week, and I had to finish.

I don't know what I said. I was so sick. I was just trying to get through it.

I thought it was the worst sermon I ever delivered.

After the service, a teenage girl approached me. She looked very angry.
She said, *"I have to find out if something is true."*
I replied, *"What's that?"*
She said, *"You mentioned tonight that God loves me. Do you believe that?
I don't believe anyone has ever loved me.
My dad left me and my mother abused me, and I moved from one institution to another.
I've been sexually abused, neglected, and you are telling me that God loves me?"*

I looked into her eyes, and said,
"That's right. I know this for certain. God loves you. You want to know how I know? God got up on a cross and said, 'This is how much I love you.'"

She paused for a moment and tears began rolling down her cheeks.

Then she said, *"Well, if God loves me, then nothing else matters.
If God loves me, that's all that matters."*

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People of God - People of New St. James - you who are reading this:

Deep down you know there are people all around you who need the love, forgiveness, grace, power, strength and comfort of God in Jesus Christ.

Give me one good reason why you wouldn't want to share it?

IN THE NAME OF THE HOLY TRINITY:
CREATOR, MESSIAH, AND HOLY SPIRIT...AMEN

Matthew 28:16-20 - comments

"We're called not just to baptize.

We're not called to make churchgoers, people who include religion as one among many respectable civic activities.

We're called to make disciples, people who really follow Jesus as Lord."

"And so, as we go forth into the World, we're not alone.

God is present. God is active. God is creating and recreating.

God is redeeming. God is sustaining the creation.

Yes, God is with us – in Jesus through the Holy Spirit – to the end of the age."

STEWARDSHIP THOUGHT

We read the gospel as if we had no money and we spend our money as if we know nothing of the gospel.

John C. Haughey, Jesuit theologian, professor

PRAYER OF APPROACH

Out of our ordinary, everyday lives, you have gathered us here, Holy God, to this time of worship, to this time of praise.

We join with angels and archangels and all the company of the saints to bless you, to listen for your Word, to immerse ourselves in your grace, in your love.

Open our eyes, our hearts, our minds to your presence with us.

Take the chaos of the world that has found its way into our hearts — speak your Word and give order and form and new creation.

Take the failures and defeats, the guilt and the shame that bind our spirits — speak your Word and, by your mercy, set us free.

In all ways and for all time, you are with us, and so we worship you in love and gratitude, trusting you will never leave us, ever Three and ever One. Amen.

ASSURANCE

Friends, hear this great good news:

God continually shows us another way.

God's mercy is as wide as the ocean.

God's desire to forgive is as strong as the mighty wind.

So, let your hearts receive the outpouring of God's love through the Holy Spirit.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Almighty God known as wisdom before the dawn of creation,

Lord Jesus Christ – perfect love made flesh,

Holy Spirit of God – ever present,

O Hidden Source of Life wrapped up in perfect Trinity, we meditate upon the great and gracious plan which you have brought to pass, that women and men like us should look beyond creation to worship you the Creator of all things.

In the beginning, You the uncreated moved across the face of deep and brought out space and time and then material substance:

The atom and the molecule and the crystalline form:

Then the first germ of life and the long upward striving of all things: that swim and creep and fly:

And then the miracle of intelligence and consciousness;
The beginning of mystery and the building of the first altar;
And then the saying of the first prayer;

O hidden love of God, forgive us for those times when we have taken this mystery for granted and forgive us all the more for the times when we thought that we had unravelled the mystery and thought that we knew it all – the how, the where and the why.

Take our longings for your goodness to shape our lives, this community, the hurting world — speak your Word and infuse us with your courage and your hope and your love.

Then, awaken us to your Holy Spirit who is making all things new, even us.

We lift up in prayer today:

*The family of John Arnedt, as they grieve his death in this difficult time
Members of our New St. James congregation who need love, friendship,
and care in a special way in these days of dis-ease*

The family of George Floyd

*Those places in the United States, Canada and around the world where
racial tension is a daily reality and a daily challenge*

Protesters, police, politicians, protectors, peace promoters

Show us a good way forward, by your Spirit, with your blessing

We ask in Jesus' name, who sends us out to speak love and mercy and grace to those who are waiting, longing, hoping for a sign that they are not alone, that you are a God of love, that you are a Saviour who knows their name, that the Holy Spirit is leading them home.

Almighty God, let us not harbour anything in our hearts that might spoil our fellowship with you or with one another; work with us and within us:

Do what you will with us;

Make of us what you want of us;

Change us as we need changing

Use us as your will requires –

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

The Blessing of the Three

The blessing of God and the Lord be yours,
The blessing of the perfect Spirit be yours,
The blessing of the Three be pouring for you
Mildly and generously,
Mildly and generously.