

Trinity Sunday, Matthew 28:16-20
Rev. Kimberly Glenn
May 31, 2026

Glory to you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; we will praise you and highly exalt you for ever.
Amen.

Here's a story I heard recently that you might enjoy. Several centuries ago, whichever Pope was at the head of the church at the time announced that all Jews had to leave Italy. Naturally, this caused a lot of people to feel upset, especially in the Jewish community. There was a huge uproar! So, the Pope made a proposal. He announced that he would hold a religious debate between himself and the chief rabbi. If the rabbi won the debate, then all the Jews would be allowed to stay; if the Pope won, they would all have to go.

There was one problem, though. They did not speak the same language. The rabbi couldn't speak Latin and the Pope could not speak Hebrew. In order to avoid being misinterpreted, they both agreed to debate using hand gestures. They had not yet invented Pictionary, so they debated using a game of charades.

A crowd gathered on the day of the debate to watch. The Pope and the Rabbi sat facing each other in silence for several minutes before the Pope finally stood up, raised his hand showing three fingers. The Rabbi stood up and raised one finger in response. They both sat down.

A minute or so later, the Pope stood up and pointed his finger in front of himself moving it from side to side in a wide arc. In rapid response the Rabbi stood up and pointed his finger firmly at the ground where he stood. They sat down again.

The Pope's face registered that he'd just had a brilliant thought. He turned and retrieved a chalice and wafer from a bag he had brought with him. He stood, poured

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wine in the chalice and held the wine and the bread out in front of him. The rabbi reached into a bag he had brought with him and pulled out an apple. At that moment, the Pope declared that the debate was over. He said, "I concede. This man has outperformed me. The Jews are free to stay."

Later, the Cardinals wanted to learn what had convinced the Pope to concede. The Pope explained. He said, "I started out by holding up three fingers representing the Trinity. He held up one finger in response meaning there was one God that we all believe in. Then I showed by making an arc with my finger around the room that God is all around us. He pointed to the ground saying that God is right here with us. Two excellent responses. So finally, I pulled out the wine and wafer to show that God forgives our sins. His final response outdid me. He pulled out an apple reminding me of mankind's original sin. After that, I was forced to concede.

Meanwhile, the Jewish community was curious about what happened, too. The rabbi explained it all to them. He said, "First the Pope held up three fingers meaning you Jews have three days to get out of here. So I responded bluntly, holding up one finger in a dare. Then he waved his hand around the room telling me the whole city would be cleared of Jews. So, you saw me firmly point to the ground meaning we are staying right here! Then the Pope got hungry and pulled out his lunch so I pulled out mine, too."

This is Trinity Sunday. I'll bet you didn't know this, but a whole lot of preachers like to assign the sermon to someone, anyone else, on this day. The Trinity is a concept that is really challenging to describe and I'm not going to try to do that here today. The truth is that the doctrine of the Trinity was never created in order to explain God

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completely. It was created as a way to describe how human beings kept encountering God, in ways that just could not be ignored. You see, the Trinity is not something to be learned in an intellectual way, it is something to be experienced in a human way.

When I think of my earliest awareness of God, I think of moments when I experienced awe or wonder. For me, it was in the magnificence of the beauty of the Blue Ridge Mountains that surrounded the little town where I grew up. It was in the radiance of the pipe organ music in my childhood church. It was in the peaceful sounds of the water flowing over rocks in the Maury River. And today it is in the words of scripture found in Genesis, from the first story of creation.

That story offers us a picture of God speaking the world into being. In the beginning, God's spirit hovered over the waters. The very first thing scripture says about God is not a description or definition of what God is but of what God does. Our God is a creative, creating God. By means of the power of love contained in His spirit, God creates. He brings order and beauty out of disorder and chaos, brings fullness out of emptiness.

God is constantly creating forward, never backward; always pulling us toward new things, new discoveries. How many of you have sensed that in your lives? God is in the mending of broken relationships, in the healing of emotional and physical wounds. The power of the love in God's spirit leads us to new beginnings, if we let it.

Unfortunately, people have learned ever since Adam and Eve that they can resist the power of God's spirit. If that apple is ripe and juicy, red and delicious it takes a lot of will power not to take bite after bite. But giving in to that temptation can lead ultimately

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to an unpleasant end. Temptation led Adam and Eve right out of that garden. The apple that Eve ate in the garden is a metaphor for the temptation to power, fame and material excess in our world today. We can see how yielding to that kind of temptation can lead ultimately to all sorts of unpleasant consequences. The rest of us suffer, too, in the wake of their lustful actions. Adam and Eve doubted that God had their best interest at heart. They doubted that God's spirit could lead them in the way they needed to go.

It is evident that even Jesus' disciples and the earliest followers of Christ doubted whether they could trust the spirit of God. In Matthew's gospel from today, Matthew says that when they saw the risen Christ, "they worshiped him, but some doubted." Even while standing right in front of Him, not all of them were ready to commit their lives to Him. Maybe some of you doubt whether you can trust and follow Him. Yet Jesus comes to us anyway. He comes persistently even when it would be more convenient for us to ignore His presence. He came persistently to the disciples, too.

Christ offers to share the yoke of our burdens with him. His presence with us is gentle but firm. He is our rock and our compass. He encourages us when we doubt ourselves. Jesus sent the disciples out to forge their own path and find their own faith – their faith in the Lord and Jesus' teachings. He sends us, too, and tells us that He will be with us, with us always.

When God sent his Son to us, He sent his Son to dwell with us, to dwell in us and with us.

Where do you sense the presence of Christ? Is it here in the midst of us when we share God's peace? In our time gathered around the Holy Table? In the glorious music?

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Maybe you sense him with you when you're in trouble, involved in an accident or when you encounter needy people at the Grace Church Yard Sale. Maybe you sense His presence when someone you've been thinking about connects with you out of the blue.

The Holy Three, The Three in One that is our God is always reaching out, always trying to connect with you. Like the sun showers us with light, God showers us with love, compassion, encouragement, and a sense of hope. Just as no one can ever fully understand God, no one really fully understands the sun. But we experience both of them. We experience the sun's warmth. We experience God's creativity in our bodies and in the world around us.

The Father is like the source. The Son is the light reaching us. The Spirit is the radiant warmth that transforms us. The Father is the creator, The Son is the companion. The Spirit is the transforming mover and shaker. The point is not to understand every detail and fact about the Trinity, the point is to experience all of it. The point is to live the reality it offers to us.

In Matthew's gospel that is what Jesus was asking the disciples to go out and do. Jesus said, "Go therefore and 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 to obey everything that I have commanded you." He doesn't tell them to go and explain the Trinity, he tells them to baptize people into it - into the life of the Father, into the love of the Son and into the power of the Holy Spirit. He urges them to invite people to immerse themselves into the experience of a life lived in and with Him. Nothing in his words

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suggests that any of this is made mandatory. It is freely given and it is hoped that it will be freely received.

Do not doubt, but believe in the Trinity. Every sunrise reminds us that the Creator is still creating. Every act of grace reminds us that Christ is still present. Every stirring of courage, compassion, forgiveness, or hope reminds us that the Spirit is still moving. You are not expected to explain the mystery of that truth, but God wants you and me to be part of the abundant life He is offering us. In the name of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.