

The Gospel for this Holy Trinity Sunday, May 31st, 2026 comes from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 28, verses 16 through 20.

The Commissioning of the Disciples

Matt. 28:16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.* ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him, but they doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.* ¹⁹ 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* ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”^h

Grace, Mercy and the Peace of Christ who shows up in our midst and sends us out to be the communion of saints in a world of great need; may this Spirit of Christ Jesus be with us again today as we consider these words from our scriptures.

Hello! My name is Joel Pakan. And for almost two years now I've been the South Dakota Synod's Director for Rural Ministries. I've put on a lot of miles in these almost two years and feel that I've only scratched the surface of a beautiful diversity held within our South Dakota congregations.

But having now scratched the surface of this beautiful diversity in which Christ is always with us, I want to bring a word of concern that comes from these months of travel. My concern is this: are we going to lose something precious if we neglect talking to one another even when we may disagree? On one hand I don't think it's likely that we'll ever really lose this relational part of who we are, because that's who Jesus is and I trust in the Spirit of Christ in our midst who promises to be with us always. Still, our ability to trust is like a muscle, and this muscle is one we must exercise through a community practice of this faith that we share.

As I've reflected on the readings for this Sunday and the Trinitarian theology that is central to both our Lutheran tradition and the whole of the Christian Church, I've come to simplify this sermon. Not because I think we cannot handle a more complex conversation, but because I want this sermon to lead us toward exercising our faith where we live in relationships with one another. This sermon will exist as a file online, distanced by necessity but therefore also distanced from close relationships. And relationships are at the heart of both the theology of the Trinity and Jesus the Christ "who is, and was, and is to come" (Revelation 1:8).

So having now noted a desire for simplicity, I'm going to cite something that's quite complex: The Athanasian Creed, from the early 5th century (so it's the most youthful of the creeds referenced in the Book of Concord). And I am reading this part of the creed while sitting in my office where I have this beautiful icon titled Lakota Trinity by Father John Giuliani. This piece was gifted to me by my parents when I was ordained in 2021.

Now here's a small part of the Athanasian Creed which reads,
"...We worship one God in trinity and the Trinity in unity,
neither confusing the persons nor dividing the divine being.
For the Father is one person, the Son is another,
and the Spirit is still another.
But the deity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
is one, equal in glory,
coeternal in majesty. What the Father is,
the Son is,
and so is the Holy Spirit..."

This creed (like its more familiar elders the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed) was written when there was a deep divide that threatened the unity of the love of Christ in community. The divide referenced in the Athanasian Creed has to do with a group that believed that Jesus was less powerful than God. That Jesus had been created by God and that if there was some perceived conflict or disagreement between what Jesus

said and what God said, well then you better stick with God because Jesus was the younger not-quite-eternal one.

And to bring this closer to home, I think we've been experiencing a not dissimilar debate in our own communities around how much diversity is possible within the unity that forms community. I'm not here to attempt to settle that debate but I am interested in asking this question: how much are we willing to exercise our trust in the Spirit of Christ for the sake of the diverse body of Christ as experienced in the lives of our neighbors?

I'll ask this again to give us both some time to consider the question: how much are we willing to exercise our trust in the Spirit of Christ, for the sake of the diverse body of Christ, as experienced in the lives of our neighbors?

Hear again this promise Jesus makes to his disciples both then and now: "I am with you always," period. "I am with you always," even when you fail to exercise your trust in Me or choose the limits of uniformity over the beautiful diversity found within this trinitarian tradition that "neither confuse[s] the persons nor divide[s] the divine" from the whole.

Our scripture reading notes that the disciples worshipped AND had doubts, but their openly displayed doubts did not limit Jesus from a commitment to be with them, in their midst, always. And this same Spirit makes this same commitment toward us, so what have we to lose? It seems, according to Jesus promise, that we lose nothing and potentially gain an increasingly diverse community when we exercise our trust in the one "who is, and was, and is to come."

As I was writing this sermon my phone pushed an update across my screen. This update noted how multiple college and university commencement speakers have been booed in the past few weeks by graduates at the mention of A.I. - Artificial Intelligence. The USA Today article also referenced how Steve Wozniak (co-founder of Apple

Computer) was recently cheered when he exclaimed to an assembly of graduates, “you all have A.I, actual intelligence.”

Friends in Christ, I agree with Steve Wozniak, (and not just because he was cheered at a graduation ceremony) but because standing with the diverse body of Christ will always be an encounter with the cross. And at the cross there is a perennial opportunity to proclaim that God has gifted all that God has made with “actual intelligence” and that God has called all that God has made “good” and “very good”. AI is already bringing changes, and what changes it brings will be better weathered or utilized at the crossroads of a diverse and local community of support. Thanks be to God that we Lutheran Christians have a couple hundred years of practice in which we’ve sinned boldly and trusted in Christ even more boldly.

As I travel our synod I am seeing signs of communities reaching out and beginning the conversations that will lead to new, local partnerships that will ultimately allow for our thriving in the midst of immense challenges and changes. If you want to know more, I hope you’ll reach out and ask me and your local Rural Ministry Ambassador about where we’re seeing Christ show up in our midst.

Better yet, ask your neighbor. Follow the example of the disciples in our reading who openly expressed both the doubts that challenged them and what was bringing them joy. Together, let’s see where the Spirit will lead.

Now as a blessing for the conversations I hope you’ll start or continue this week, here’s this years Epistle reading for Holy Trinity Sunday, 2 Corinthians, chapter 13, verses 11 through 13 as read from the First Nations Version:

2Cor. 13:11 Last of all, my sacred family members, let your hearts be glad. Mend your ways, walk side by side with each other, sharing the same purpose and living in harmony with one another. In this way, the Great Spirit who gives love and peace will walk with you on the road of life.

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2Cor. 13:12 Welcome each other with a holy kiss. All of Creator's holy ones who are with me send their greetings to you.

2Cor. 13:13 May the gift of great kindness that comes from our Honored Chief Creator Sets Free (Jesus), the Chosen One, along with the love of our Creator remain with you as you walk hand in hand together with the Holy Spirit.

Aho! May it be so!