

# “A Specific Mission”

Matthew 28:16-20

June 15, 2014

The Holy Trinity

I have not served in the military as many of you have. However, I'm pretty sure that the orders for a military mission don't go like this: a bunch of you soldiers go somewhere and do something to some people. You always want to know who is going to go, where you are going, and what exactly you are going to do. Vague orders can be not only unclear, but dangerous.

There is a lot of vagueness though these days when it comes to talking about God – who He is, what He does, and what He is all about. People like to define God, not according to specific Biblical revelation, but according to vague personal preference. The “god” of many people today is always accepting and never judgmental. This “god” never condemns behavior of the individual as sin but always supports his or her behavior as either good or necessary. This “god” is present when you need him/her/it, but otherwise leaves you alone to do what you want. This “god” never expects, requires, or demands anything of you.. This “god's” job is to make you happy.

The same vagueness exists when it comes to teaching and the will of God. People like to define the will of God, again not by specific Biblical revelation, but according to vague personal preference. People pick and choose what they believe the will of God is. People like all the teachings about God's love. People don't like all of the teachings about sin. People like talk of a happy place called heaven. People don't like any talk about hell. People will pick and choose which commandments they like and which they don't like. A commandment against stealing is good, but any commandment regulating sexual behavior is bad. A commandment against murder is good when it applies to someone killing me, but not when it is applied to killing a preborn baby. Lack of consistency contributes to the vagueness. When confronted by any sort of specific standard, people will use their personal feelings as the method for establishing truth. For example, people will say, “I

can't believe in a god who won't let me marry someone I love." "I just can't believe in a god who would send anyone to hell."

Such vagueness, rather than being ridiculed or rejected, is actually praised today. In American religious thought in general and in American Christianity in particular, certainty is frowned upon. Uncertainty is seen as a virtue. In many churches which attract the interest of young people, there is an emphasis on raising spiritual questions, but never in answering them. There is continuous dialog, but issues are not resolved.

Vagueness and uncertainty in religious beliefs may appear to be humble, but such an approach can be dangerous. In no other area in our lives is vagueness a good thing. Imagine in math if someone said, "The answer to  $2 + 2$  is somewhere between 1 and 5." Or in medicine, if a doctor said, "Take some of these pills a few times a day." Vagueness can be unhelpful or even dangerous.

Trinity Sunday and the Gospel reading for this festival remind us that our God is very specific and His will and commandments are very specific. And, while this seems to be restrictive to us and our freedom, this is actually good for us.

The testimony of the Word of God, both Old and New Testaments, is that there is one true God. All other gods are idols and are false. The Bible (most clearly in our text for today) then tells us who this God is: He is one, yet He is three: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – an incomprehensible mystery.

This very specific and unique God, the only true God who is One and Three, has brought you into relationship with Himself as His disciple – His pupil, His student, through baptism. You have been baptized in His name – the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Do you know what that means? It's more than just ritualistic formula we use. By having His very specific name – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – attached to you in baptism, you have been brought into the possession of God and have been placed under His protection.

You belong to God who is Creator of the universe yet is also Father who has lovingly created you individually. He has given you your body, your mind, and all your senses and still takes care of them. He richly and daily provides you with all you need to support your body and life. He defends

you against danger. He guards and protects you from all evil. He does all of this out of fatherly divine goodness and mercy without any merit or worthiness in you at all.

You belong to God who is Son and loved you with a great love – a love so great that He gave all that He had in order to possess you for all eternity. By the evil we do and the good we fail to do, we have cut ourselves off from our Father, put ourselves under His wrath, and earned His punishment. God the Son became a man, Jesus. He fulfilled God's Law and will for us by doing all that was required of us. He took away all of our transgressions of God's Law and will by undergoing the punishment required of us. He redeemed us – paid the price to buy us lost and condemned persons back. He bought us from sin, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with cold hard cash, but with His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death. He came out of the tomb and back to life again to show us that our debt to God has been paid and to lead us past our graves and to a life in His presence that never ends.

You belong to God the Holy Spirit who lovingly recreated you and restored you to Himself. Despite the Son's payment of the redemption price, you remain apart from God because sin blinds you from seeing and believing that this payment has been made for you. But the Holy Spirit has called you to faith by the Gospel – the Good News of what the Son has done for you. Through faith in the Son, you have received the payment for all of your sins and are right with God. The Holy Spirit goes on to enlighten you with His gifts, sanctify (make holy) your life, and keep you in the true faith which He has given you.

The second part of becoming disciples after baptism is being taught "to observe all that [Jesus] has commanded [us]. This is a very specific command about teaching. We are not to teach and learn only some of what Jesus has given. We are not to teach and learn only that which we like, that which is positive, or that which we agree with. We are to teach and learn EVERYTHING which Jesus has commanded us.

This means not only the parts about how much God loves us, how much God forgives us for Jesus' sake, and how much God has promised us in this life and in the life to come. It also involves the parts about our status as sinners, the anger and punishment we deserved, and the threat of hell. These unpleasantries of God's Law are like medical diagnoses of diseases. Diagnoses tell us the specific truth of what is wrong with us so that we might seek the cure. The harsh testimony of God's Law shows us what is wrong with us in terms of our sin and drives us to the cure of forgiveness which the Gospel offers us.

Not only is there specificity in terms of what is to be taught, but also what we are to do with that knowledge. We are to learn all that He has commanded and to observe it. What does it mean to "observe"? It means more than simply to obey all of Jesus' teaching, although it does mean that. The Greek word means to guard or keep something. It is often used in the context of guarding a prisoner.

We are to guard and keep pure all that Jesus has commanded and taught. Why? Is it so that we can win all the religious arguments and take pride in being the most orthodox church? No, not at all, never. We guard the commands of our Lord and keep His teaching pure for the same reason that we strive to keep food, drink, air, and water pure and clean. All of those things keep us alive and healthy. However, impure food and drink or polluted air and water can hurt us or even kill us.

In the same way, we guard and keep all that our Lord has commanded and taught so that we may remain healthy and vibrant spiritually. Vague or uncertain doctrine can confuse us, lead us into sin, or lead us away from God. What is politically correct these days may often be spiritually incorrect. A "live and let live" ambiguous standard of morality may seem right and enjoyable, but may be very wrong. This spells spiritual doom for us now and after we die.

Guarding what the Lord has commanded and keeping pure what He has taught clarifies our understanding of God, leads us away from sin, and leads us closer to God. Even when such guarding and keeping shows us our error or our sin, it is still a good thing. It serves to drive us back

to the Word of God to gain the truth which sets us free and to the Gospel to receive forgiveness which gives us peace.

Beginning next week, we leave the festival half of the church year and enter into the non-festival half. The first half has emphasized the life of Jesus. The second half emphasizes the life of the Church. The question will be: how is each of us to live? Trinity Sunday is a good springboard into that as we remember the specific nature of our lives as Christians. We worship and serve the one and only true God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We believe, teach, and confess all that our Lord has commanded and taught us. Do not let the cries for tolerance and sensitivity turn your away from this. Popular political thought, as strong and dominant as it seems to be, will eventually pass away, as well as its proponents. Of His teachings, Jesus says, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” (Matt. 24:35). Of Himself, Jesus says, “I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt. 28:20) Those are specific promises for a specific mission which will not fail.

Amen.