

[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Trinity Sunday
May 31, 2026

Great Commission

Matthew 28:16–20

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. ¹⁷ When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted.

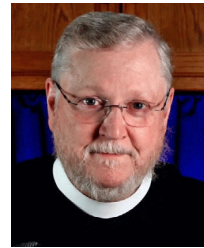
¹⁸ And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

The words in today's Gospel were the last Jesus would speak before He left this world, and they remind us of the vital practice in the Church of making disciples. Because of this, they are often used in connection with mission work. But they turn up today because of their reference to the Holy Trinity. So, on this Feast of the Holy Trinity, I'd like us to focus our attention particularly on Jesus' instruction to baptize all nations in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

The triune nature of God is often a difficult reality to accept, but everything you *are* and everything you *have* you owe to the Triune God. God the Father created you, God the Son has saved you from hell, and God the Holy Spirit has given you faith together with all spiritual blessings.

For nearly two millennia the followers of Jesus have struggled with how the Bible speaks about the workings of God, and what we've discovered is that God's Word refers to His work on two different levels. There's the inner working of God, the *opera ad intra*, in which the three Persons share in *everything* God does. When God creates, all three Persons share in that work of creation, as John points out in the opening verses of his Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made." So the Son, according to the *inner* working of God, shares in the work of creation. The same is true with all the other works of God. When God redeems, all three Persons share in that redemptive work. When God sanctifies, all three Persons share in the work of sanctification.

But, there's another level on which God works, and that's the external level, the *opera ad extra*. Here the Bible separates the works of God, and ascribes various works to the



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Trinity Sunday

May 31, 2026

individual Persons.

For instance, according to Scripture, God the Father is especially credited with the work of creation. We confess with Luther in his explanation to the First Article of the Creed: "I believe that God has made me and all creatures." So it's the Father – according to the *opera ad extra* – who called into existence the creatures of earth and heaven, even the very earth itself, and stretched the canopy of heaven over it and set the sun, moon, and stars in their places.

We learn all this from the first pages of the Bible. Since we accept the Holy Scriptures as the inspired and inerrant Word of God, we reject the ridiculous theory that everything just sort-of got here by itself. We also reject the notion that somehow God used natural processes as His method of creation. Scripture simply doesn't speak that way.

When God created the universe, He called it into existence by the Word of His power. So says the Word of God. God said: "Let there be," and there it was. The Bible is very specific in this. In Hebrew, the original language of the Old Testament, there are two distinct words to describe creative activity. One means to craft or form out of pre-existing matter. The other means to call forth out of nothing, to bring into existence that which was heretofore non-existent. Guess which one is used in the opening chapters of Genesis!

If you're thinking the second one, you're right! God called our world into existence *ex nihilo* – from nothing – the land, the sea, the birds of the air, the fish in sea, the animals on the land.

Adam and Eve – whom God formed by hand out the dust of the ground – were made perfectly righteous and holy. They shared a blissful knowledge of God, and were created in His image. This divine image was lost, however, when they fell into sin. But God had a plan. As soon as Adam and Eve sinned, the work of restoring that divine image began. It would not be undertaken by the Father, however. Rather, it would be taken up by the Son, the Redeemer.

We confess with Luther: "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil."

Lost and condemned – that's what we are without Christ. As Adam and Eve so vividly demonstrated, when God created us, He gave us the ability to make bad decisions. Clearly, we had the capacity to fall into sin. What He did *not* give us, however, is the ability to *repair* the damage such terrible decisions cause. Oh, we can bring the wrath of God down upon ourselves, but we can't do anything to appease it. That God reserves for Himself – more specifically, He reserves that for His Son. What we are unable to do, Jesus, the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity, has already done for us. He left



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Trinity Sunday

May 31, 2026

His home in heaven and descended to this world of misery and pain by being born a true man of the Virgin Mary. By His active and passive obedience to the Will of His heavenly Father, Jesus earned – for us – perfect righteousness. He fulfilled God's Law.

But then He allowed that perfectly righteous life – that perfect fulfilling of the Law of God – to be whipped, crowned with thorns, and condemned to a shameful death by crucifixion until – finally – He died. But He came out of His grave two days later and has given us indisputable proof that the work of redemption was complete. The penalty for our sins has been paid.

His perfect obedience to the will of His Father, and His substitutionary death on the cross, mean everything to us, for He has redeemed us lost and condemned creatures, purchased and won us from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil. The image of God that was lost has been regained. God has reconciled the world to Himself. Through faith in our Redeemer, we've become His very own, and we now live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.

But we wouldn't know any of this without the work of the third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. We confess with Luther: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith."

God's Word teaches that we are by nature blind to all things spiritual, that we're spiritually dead, born enemies of God. St. Paul says that "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). And he tells the Ephesian Christians: "You were dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). These and other statements of Scripture are so clear and so overwhelming that they leave no doubt about our inability to come to faith in Jesus by ourselves. It's only by true, saving faith that everything Jesus did for us becomes ours. And *that* faith is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

You and I have been baptized in the name of this wonderful God whose works we've considered today. By Baptism we were made His very own. We have the confidence that, though our faith at times can waver, His love for us will never change. And because of this, our Baptism can be a source of comfort and peace throughout our lives.

Beloved, in a day when doctrinal indifference abounds, when even those who call themselves Christians have some strange ideas about the Godhead, hold fast to the Faith of our fathers – the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Not everyone who says they believe in God believes in the right one, the only one that truly *is* God. So you should tell them. With your life and conversation, tell them about the God who has revealed Himself to you in Holy Scripture. And never forget: the God who created all things – who set the stars in the



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Trinity Sunday

May 31, 2026

heavens above and planted you on the earth below – has chosen to reveal Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – not as Mother, not as Wisdom, not as the Great Spirit. He is Father; He is Son; He is Holy Spirit; He is Triune – three in one. This is the God we Christians confess, the God who sends us out as His witnesses, the God who has promised to be with us to the very end of time. Him we love. And Him we serve. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen