Title: We Belong To God
Text: Matthew 28:16-20
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The disciples did not arrive at the **mountain** together. They came separately or with a companion. I imagine them coming in twos and threes, quietly. Some came carrying overwhelming grief that their Master and Teacher was gone. Some came because of a rumor that some of the disciples saw him. And others came because of the memories they carried. Some still were not sure what they believed. Matthew says, "Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them."

But each one who came did come to the mountain did so for their own reasons and made the journey.

Have we ever noticed how much Matthew likes mountains? Things happen on mountains in Matthew. Sermons are preached there. Temptations are faced there. Crowds are fed there. Visions break open there. For Matthew, mountains are liminal places where heaven and earth seem to lean close enough to whisper to one another. And now, at the very end of his book, they climb one more mountain.

Maybe we should wonder what the silence sounded like on that climb. Perhaps Peter lingered at the back, carrying the memory of charcoal smoke, the smell of cooked fish, and a threefold denial mixed with a threefold commissioning. Perhaps Thomas kept turning questions over in his mind like stones in his pocket. Perhaps Mary Magdalene's news still sounded impossible even after they had seen him. Perhaps they all climbed with that peculiar mixture of hope and exhaustion known only to people who have survived sorrow.

And perhaps that is why Trinity Sunday belongs on our liturgical calendar. Because Trinity Sunday comes to people who are trying to make sense of what they have seen and what they cannot yet explain.

The church, in her wisdom or mischief, places this day before us every year. After Christmas, after Easter, and after Pentecost, we have. After the fire and wind and alleluias, we are handed a doctrine that has humbled theologians for two thousand years.

We speak, almost casually, of the three: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Three in one. One in three.

But may I share a secret with you? Most preachers secretly dread it.

Because everyone wants an explanation. So, we start reaching for metaphors. Water, steam, and ice are three versions of water. Clover leaves make a great coloring book. Eggs with shells and yolks: each part is still an egg. And before long, we have accidentally wandered into ancient Marcion heresies before the offertory hymn even starts.

Yet when we read Matthew's ending, he offers no explanation. Rather, he gives us a scene. He takes us to a mountain. He brings us into a gathering. He records a wounded Savior. He tells of a handful of uncertain disciples gathering for one last glimpse of Jesus. And one astonishing sentence says it all: "When they saw him, they worshiped him; but **some doubted**."

And there it is. Matthew could have cleaned that up if he wanted to. He could have protected the disciples from embarrassment. He could have written, “They all believed courageously and sang triumphant hymns in four-part harmony.” Rather, notice that he does not. He simply and matter-of-factly says, “They worshiped him, but some doubted.”

The Gospel always tells more truth than we are prepared to hear. And in this morning’s text, we discover a theological surprise hiding in plain sight: Jesus gives what we do now call “the Great Commission” not to perfect believers, but to conflicted worshipers.

The risen Christ entrusts the future of the church to people whose hearts are divided between adoration and uncertainty. When we see that and understand it, we discover that it is astonishing.

We usually assume God waits for certainty before calling people. But scripture suggests otherwise. Abraham and Sarah leave home without a map. Moses stutters, and he receives Aaron. Jeremiah protests. Mary asks how any of this can be possible. Peter sinks while walking on water. And here, at the end of Matthew, the church is born in a cloud of worship mixed with doubt.

Friends, maybe faith is not the absence of doubt after all. Maybe faith is what happens when people keep climbing the mountain anyway. Our Gospel continually overturns our assumptions about where God shows up. We expect God in strength, but we find God hanging on a cross. We expect resurrection to begin in palaces, but we discover an empty tomb in a graveyard before dawn with women nobody would have trusted in court. And now we expect the final triumphant scene to shimmer with certainty and power.

Instead, we get hesitant disciples on a mountain in Galilee. Galilee, of all places. We are not in Jerusalem, Rome, or the center of religious power. We are in Galilee. The overlooked place. The place of fishermen and laborers. The place respectable people dismissed.

I find it surprising that God seems to prefer working from the edges rather than the center, and Matthew’s Gospel keeps proving me right. The kingdom keeps arriving from underneath instead of above. And perhaps that is the first hint of the Trinity itself.

Because the Trinity is not God’s power arranged like a pyramid. The Trinity is God’s life shared in mutual love. The early church struggled to describe this mystery because every human analogy finally breaks apart. But they kept returning to one astonishing conviction: somehow, the deepest truth about God is relationship itself. The Abba pouring love into the Son. The Son returning love to the Father. The Spirit moves as the living bond of that love into the world.

In that relationship, we discover not hierarchy, competition, or lonely supremacy. We experience communion. When we understand that relationship, suddenly the whole Gospel begins to look different. Creation itself becomes an overflow of divine fellowship. Redemption becomes God refusing to let creation go. The Spirit becomes the holy persistence of God’s presence among frightened people.

Which means the universe is not grounded in violence, fear, or domination. Everything we experience is grounded in self-giving love. Now that sounds lovely, embroidered on a pillow somewhere, but it is also deeply threatening. Because most of the world runs on scarcity and fear.

We are trained to protect ourselves. Define ourselves against others. We want to win. We desire to accumulate. We expect to control. But the Trinity reveals a God whose very life is shared. When we understand those relationships, it is no wonder human beings keep trying to reduce God to something simpler and safer.

A solitary ruler would be easier. A distant judge would be easier. A predictable machine would certainly be easier. But the Christian God is somehow eternally giving and receiving life. Which means that to know God is to be drawn into relationship, not merely with God but with one another.

And maybe that is why Jesus says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name" (singular) "of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." We baptize not with names plural but with the name in the singular. We have one life, one communion, and one divine reality drawing the whole fractured world toward itself.

And notice this: Jesus does not say, "Explain this mystery to all nations." Thank God. Rather, he says, "Baptize them into it." We are baptized into the life of God. Baptism is less like passing a theology exam and more like being swept into a river already moving. Which may explain why baptism feels both beautiful and dangerous.

Because to be baptized into the Trinity means our lives no longer belong entirely to us. We are joined to God and to one another in ways that dismantle our cherished isolation. To be simple, we belong! We belong to God and to each other through the waters of baptism.

While I was assisting a baptism, I once watched a little boy being baptized who was furious about the whole arrangement. He twisted and cried, splashing water onto the lead pastor's robe. His mother looked horrified. But the congregation laughed gently because every person in that sanctuary recognized something of themselves in him. That child was resisting grace the same way most of us do. So, why do we resist?

Friends, we resist because we want to belong without our vulnerability. We resist because we desire community without inconvenience. We want ourselves to love without surrendering. But the Trinity offers none of those bargains. But the life of God is shared life in relationship with God and with others.

And perhaps that is why the church struggles so much now. Our struggles as a people and culture are rooted in our relationships. We struggle not because we lack programs, buildings, or strategies, but we struggle because authentic relationships are hard. Real fellowship asks too much of us. Real communion requires forgiveness, patience, listening, and mutual burden-bearing. Our relationships ask us to become people who reflect the very life of God.

And then Jesus says something even stranger. **"Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."** That promise sounds almost small compared to resurrection and cosmic authority, but it may be the greatest miracle in the passage. Because Jesus did not hand the disciples a detailed strategic plan. He does not guarantee success. He does not promise cultural influence or institutional security. He promises presence. He said, "I am with you."

At Christmas, the Gospel begins with **Emmanuel—God with us**—and now on the mountain, we end the same way. And perhaps that is the deepest Trinitarian mystery of all: the God beyond all knowing desires to be with us.

God desires to be with doubting disciples, failing churches, fearful people, and wounded communities. God wants to be with us. God does not wait until we become worthy. God doesn't wait until we understand everything. God wants to be with us NOW!

And here is the surprise hidden inside Trinity Sunday: **The doctrine many people fear as abstract and inaccessible may actually be our, the church's, most intimate confession.**

Because the Trinity says that ultimate reality is not coldness but communion. Not isolation but presence. Not domination but love poured out endlessly.

Which means that every act of compassion, every shared burden, every forgiven enemy, every table where strangers become neighbors, and every moment someone chooses mercy over power participates in some way in the life of God. All of it echoes the divine life.

So maybe the Trinity is not a riddle to solve after all. Maybe we are offered an invitation. An invitation to stop standing safely outside the mystery and enter it. And in our entering into that relationship, we must risk belonging, loving, and becoming the kind of people who mirror—even imperfectly—the shared life of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And I wonder about those disciples descending the mountain that day. Did they understand the Trinity? Of course not, and frankly, neither do we.

Yet perhaps they carried something better than explanation. Perhaps they carried the unsettling suspicion that the universe is held together not by force but by communion. That God is less like a monarch on a distant throne and more like a living relationship drawing creation toward wholeness.

And if that is true, then perhaps the final question of Trinity Sunday is not whether we can define the Trinity correctly. Perhaps the real question is this: "If the deepest reality in the universe is self-giving love shared eternally between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then why do we spend so much of our lives afraid of belonging to one another?"