

5.31.26 Sermon on Matthew 28:16-20 on Confirmation Sunday

To our confirmands:

Today, on Confirmation Sunday, I want to speak directly to you for a few minutes, not only as your pastor, but as someone who has watched you grow become part of this church community in your own unique ways.

And I think it is fitting that today is also Trinity Sunday, because Trinity Sunday reminds us that at the center of our faith is relationship – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. A God who is love, community, connection, and self-giving relationship. And today, you are saying yes to living inside that relationship, with God and with this community of faith.

The Scripture we heard today is often called “The Great Commission.” These are some of Jesus’ final words in Matthew’s Gospel: “Go and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you, and remember, I am with you always.”

I want you to notice something important about this. Jesus does not say, “Go be perfect.” He does not say, “Go win every argument” or “Go make everyone think exactly like you.” He says, “Go make disciples.” But in order to make disciples, we first have to be disciples. And that means we are people who are learning how to live like Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Learning to live like Jesus is more important than ever, because the world is going to spend a lot of time trying to tell you what kind of people to become. There will be voices that tell you strength means overpowering people. There will be other voices that tell you that being a man means never showing emotion. Some voices will tell you that popularity matters more than kindness. Other voices will tell you that winning matters more than compassion, or that people who are different from you are somehow less valuable.

Some of those voices will be online, others at school. Some of those voices will come from people you admire. Some of those voices will come from adults. But the voice you truly need to listen to is the voice of Jesus.

Jesus says blessed are the merciful. Blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed are the humble. Blessed are those who hunger for justice. We listen to Jesus’ words, but we also look to his example. Jesus spends his time with people others ignore. He treats people with dignity. He forgives. He tells the truth even when it is hard. He uses power to protect instead of dominate.

So when Jesus says, “Go and make disciples,” what he means is this: “Go live like this. Go embody this kind of love in the world.”

Most of the time, it’s not dramatic work, but it is the most important work there is. Discipleship happens in the ordinary moments of life – it happens in your school cafeteria and in your classrooms, on the field and on the courts. It happens in group chats and locker rooms, on gaming headsets and social media. It happens in the moments when you decide whether to join in the cruelty or to resist it, and when you choose whether to laugh at someone or stand beside them. Discipleship happens in every choice that you make. The kind of person you are becoming matters deeply.

And it's not that God is waiting to judge every mistake you make. If that was all that God was about, we'd all be in trouble. Instead, it is that every day something is shaping your heart.

If you practice cruelty, then that continues to shape you. But if you practice compassion, then compassion will shape you. If you practice honesty, courage, forgiveness, and mercy, then those things begin to shape you, too – and they shape you into disciples of Jesus Christ. That is what following Jesus really is. It's not just believing certain things about God – it's about being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ (even if it is a slow and lifelong process).

And here is something else I hope you remember, something that I wished someone had told me when I was confirmed at the age of 13: the disciples themselves did not have everything figured out. They still had questions throughout their lifelong journey of faith and discipleship.

In this passage we heard this morning, Matthew says that when the disciples saw the risen Jesus, "they worshiped him; but some doubted." Even after everything, even after all the miracles and witnessing the resurrection, they still had doubt. They still had unanswered questions. They still had uncertainties and worries. And that means that if they had doubt, then doubt does not disqualify you from faith. Questions do not disqualify you from faith. Struggling does not disqualify you from faith.

Fred Rogers, the man many of us know as Mister Rogers, once told a story about a boy who came to visit the set of his television show. The boy was carrying a puppet that had very clearly been loved for years. One eye was missing, the fabric was worn thin, and it had obviously been repaired over and over.

An adult on the set joked that the thing was falling apart, and said, "Maybe it's time for a new one." But the boy hugged the puppet tightly and said, "But I love him." Mister Rogers later reflected that this is how God sees us: not as projects to fix, or mistakes to throw away, or people who are replaceable, not as people who have to earn love, but simply as beloved.

I think that's important because sometimes confirmation can feel like you are expected to now have everything figured out about faith. But that's not what it is. I wish, when I was confirmed at age 13, that someone had told me that I didn't have to have all of the answers, and that instead, it was just about saying, "I want to keep following Jesus." Even as the disciples doubted and questioned, Jesus still called them. He still trusted them. And he still promised to be with them.

And that's true for you too. Maybe the most important part of this whole passage is the very end, where Jesus says: "And remember, I am with you always."

There will be moments when following Jesus will feel difficult. There will be moments where kindness is unpopular, or doing the right thing will cost you something. There are moments when you will fail. There will be moments when you wonder who you are. But in all of it, Christ is with you.

When I think about what Jesus means by making disciples, I don't actually think about missionaries or pastors or church programs. I think about a story that I think I must have heard from a teacher a while back. But she talked about a new student who transferred into the school halfway through the year. And, of course, as it often happens, everyone already had their friend groups. Everybody already knew where they sat at lunch. Everybody already had their routines. So, for the first few days, the new student ate lunch alone. But then, after several days of this, a boy noticed him sitting by himself, and just walked over

and asked, “Mind if I sit here?” And that was it. Nothing dramatic, no miracle, just one kid deciding another shouldn’t have to eat by himself. The teacher said that years later, that new student still remembered that moment. He couldn’t remember what he had learned in math class, but he remembered the person who saw him and made room for him.

Often, we can tend to think that changing the world has to be something huge. But Jesus spent a lot of time noticing people that everyone else overlooked. A lot of the time, discipleship looks like making room at the table.

You are going to have opportunities like that. Too often, the rest of the world will teach you to ask, “What do I get out of this?” But Jesus teaches us all to ask, “How can I love my neighbor?”

You are on a lifelong journey – but you do not walk alone on it. Not only does Jesus walk with you, the church promises to walk with you too – to encourage you, to support you, to remind you of who you are when the world tells you otherwise, and to help you keep growing into the people God created you to be. The world does not need more people obsessed with power, and it does not need more cruelty, arrogance, or division. Instead, it needs people who are shaped by the way of Jesus – people who know how to love, and show mercy; who know how to stand up for others, and to carry hope in dark places.

And you can become those people – you already are. Today, Confirmation Sunday, is not the finish line. It is the beginning of a lifelong journey of learning how to live in the way of Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. This journey will take you through many places and experiences – but remember – you are a beloved child of God, precious and beautiful to behold. You belong to this community, no matter where you are. And Christ goes with you always. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, may it be so. Amen.