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**“God in Threes”**  
**A sermon by Marilyn Hedgpeth**

**Trinity Sunday (Year A)**  
**June 11, 2017**

**Genesis 1:1-2:4; Psalm 8; 2 Corinthians 13:13; Matthew 28:16-20**

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Friends, today is Trinity Sunday.

And while I want to affirm my deep belief in the Triune God

who created heaven and earth as *good*

and who then created humankind in God’s image

and appointed us to be keepers of God’s good creation,

it is beyond my skill to explain the profound mystery of the nature of our

God.

But here’s what I am able to do: I AM going to talk Greek grammar to you,

because words matter, and they help in our attempts to fathom

the profound mysteries of our God

whom we have come to understand as Triune.

Perhaps, like me, you memorized the Great Commission from Matthew in childhood:

*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,*

*teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.*

*And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.* (Matthew 28: 18-20)

So, let me begin with the verbs in that text, because they tend to be where the action is.

First, there is one imperative verb in the Great Commission.... and it's not "go"! What? My whole life, I thought the force of Jesus' his last words in Matthew, was the command to "go" out into the world, to march onward like Christian soldiers, going as to war.

But actually, the imperative, the command, in the passage is this: "disciple"! "Y'all disciple", in good southern Greek, the second person plural imperative, *mathayteusatay*, which means: y'all teach, instruct, follow, emulate, immerse yourselves; y'all pay attention and learn.

In other words, like a novice painter learning from a grand master, you copy first, in great detail, every brush-stroke of your master's hand. Or like a child learning from parents, you follow in their footsteps, you adopt their posture, you repeat their words, you copy their inflection, you relate to others as they relate to others.

You lean in and remain so close, that you absorb their world-view, and you begin to see things the way they see them.

Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, compares discipling not to military mobilization, but to bird-watching (David, Judy, Mary Kay).

He says discipling is living in a state of heightened expectancy, a state of awareness,

"sitting still, poised, alert, not tense or fussy, knowing that this is the kind of place where something extraordinary suddenly bursts into view." (Williams, Rowan. *Being Disciples*, p. 5)

This is the place where *kingfishers catch fire and dragonflies draw flame*, as poet

Gerard Manly Hopkins might say, revealing the holy  
bursting through the ordinary, uncovering new light.

So that's the imperative command; the real Great Commission: *disciple!*

And then Jesus uses a triplet of participles, verbs ending in i-n-g, to give  
instruction as to how we carry out his mandate to disciple:  
(*poreuthentes, baptidzontes, and didaskontes*) going, baptizing, and teaching;  
while going, by baptizing, and by teaching.

That's how this discipling is to be done.

You will recall that Jesus was the ultimate rabbi/teacher,

whose pedagogy or methodology was called *peripatetic*.

In other words, he disciplined, as he walked from place to place.

His teaching was not limited to the classroom or to the synagogue,

rather his teaching took, place everywhere, *while he was going,*  
*while he was on the way;*

while he was doing common, everyday things: eating, boating, sleeping,  
fishing, going to the farmer's market, going to weddings.

For Jesus, every moment was a teachable moment: an opportunity for discipling,  
and for revealing the sacred just beneath the surface of the secular.

Or to quote Hopkins once again, to see *Christ play in ten*

*thousand places, lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his,*  
*to the Father through the features of men's faces.*

(Hopkins, Gerard Manly, *Poems and Prose*. "As Kingfishers Catch Fire", 1985)

So the idea here is not to "go", and make disciples,

rather, it's *while going, disciple;*

while going anywhere and everywhere, disciple;

while working, while fixing dinner, while exercising, while quilting or knitting,

while driving carpool, while attending GBCFF this week,  
*no mission trip required, disciple!*

The second participle is *baptizing*. This is rather churchy, perhaps, but what I think Matthew's Gospel is saying, is that discipling should give opportunity to make a commitment to Jesus Christ *and his church*. Sometimes that results in baptism, sometimes in a public profession of faith, or a reaffirmation of faith, as we have witnessed through our young confirmands and new members this spring. Ultimately, it means placing oneself in the company of other Jesus-watchers, in beloved community, who act like a bunch of bird watchers, while learning from one another.

Rowan Williams again says, this "doesn't mean you will agree with everything the other Christian says or does; simply that you begin by asking, 'What is Jesus Christ giving me here and now?'"  
Never mind the politics, the hidden agenda, or anything else of that kind; just ask the question and it will move you forward a tiny bit in discipleship." (Williams, Rowan. *Being Disciples*, p. 9)

The third participle is teaching. In order to disciple, one must teach by word and by deed; by concept and by model.  
*Every single day, every word you say, every game you play....* someone will be watching you and learning from you, so make it all count!  
Teach by discipling those inside the community of faith, as well as those outside on the margins.

*While going* about our ordinary business, we teach, baptize into community, witness, and model the faith, never alone in our discipling, Jesus assures us. For he is going, baptizing and teaching with us, always, even to the end of the age.

So, I want to disciple you with a story about the image of God in three persons. Not long ago, in April, actually, I daydreamed that we, the church, should make a quilt,

for the Carseys, since Tom is battling ALS, and Dawn, herself, is a quilter. Now, I'm not a sewer, but I consulted with **three quilters** here in the church, and they said, "Good idea! All **YOU** have to do is buy unbleached muslin, cut it into 4 1/2 inch squares, purchase fabric markers, and instruct people to draw pictures or messages for the Carseys, and sign them not too close to the edge."

So, I went to JoAnne's Fabric, bought a delicious array of sherbert-colored muslin, lemon, lime, mango, and peach, came home and washed it all, ironed it, and cut, and cut, and cut, until my hand cramped: 100 squares I cut.

Next, on our April Fifth-Sunday event, when the lectionary text was about the resurrected Jesus meeting his sorrowful friends on the Road to Emmaus,

*discipling them while walking with them and teaching them;*  
you all created beautiful quilt patches with pictures and messages of love, encouragement, and support for the Carseys.

That part of the project went perfectly, resulting in over 60 heart-felt squares.

So, I went back to the three quilters and said,

"Okay, here are quilt squares that are ready to go. What's next?"

The first quilter replied, "Well, I'd love to help, but I'm awfully busy right now, why don't you ask other members of the quilting group for help."

Said the second quilter, "Bring the squares over and let me take a look at them." Which I did.

She called me later to ask, "When do you want this quilt to be finished?"

And I told her that time was of the essence; that we have to party while the bridegroom is with us, as Dawn says.

And she replied, "How about a pillow?"

"No thank you," I said. "This needs to be a quilt, either to hang on the wall or to use."

So, she consulted the third quilter, and they decided they didn't have sufficient time

to turn out a quilt of that quality.

The first quilter was consulted again, and she said, "Bring me the squares; I'm busy, but I'll make time to *at least* get the quilt top pieced together."

Which she did, in the course of *one day!* Amazingly, she pieced together a lovely sherbert creation, and passed it back to the other quilters.

Then they put their heads together, and remembered that they knew

a local seamstress, who has a textile mill of sewing machines,

bobbins, and spindles in her basement,

and they decided to ask her to work her machine-magic

with the quilt top, batting and backing.

But even she said it might take ten days to two weeks to finish.

Nevertheless, she apparently became *inspired*, too, because the next thing I knew,

the near- finished product was back in the hands of the third quilter,  
who only had to bind the edges to finish the quilt.

And miraculously, by the next Sunday the completed quilt was in my hands:  
a perfectly beautiful work of art

that reflected the love and prayers of many in this congregation.

When I presented the patchwork quilt to the Carseys, and told them  
the unbelievable story of its coming together, Dawn said,

“Isn’t it interesting that everyone told you ‘no’, initially, but that ‘yes’ the  
work actually got done? Isn’t there a parable about that?”

“Yes,” I said, “that is amazing, isn’t it? That IS the miracle, really: that the ‘yes’  
of God, is more powerful than all of our ‘no’s.”

*No, I can’t sew or quilt! No, I’m too busy! No, I don’t have time! No, not a pillow!*

Perhaps like the three figures in the classic Rublev icon, *The Trinity*,

our three quilters leaned in, then looked, then surrendered  
their time and their talents to the triune Wholly Other,  
and the loveliness of God flamed out, and shone forth  
to beget a new creation. And it was very good!

(Rublev, Andrei, *The Trinity*, circa 1410, Courtesy of the Tretyakov Gallery,  
Moscow, Russia, Photo credit: Scala/Art Resource, New York, New York)

Friends, isn’t this the message of the gospel: that the “yes” of our triune God  
is a force more powerful than the no of our inabilities, the no of  
improbabilities,

the no of limited time, the no of separation, and even the no of death?

And I am tempted to imagine, also, as novelist Marilynne Robinson says, that “the divine image of God *is in us (too)*, despite all, as an act of God, immune to our sacrilege, apparent in the loveliness that never ceases to shine out in incalculable instances of beauty, love and imagination.”

(Robinson, Marilynne, *The Givenness of Things*, p. 256)

“Lo, I am with you always”, YES, I am with you always, and YES I am *in you* always, even in my apparent absence, even to the limits of your understanding, even to the end of the age, Jesus says.

In the loving name of the Father, in the gracing name of the Son, and in the community-making/binding-together name of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*Because sermons are meant to be preached and are therefore prepared with the emphasis on verbal presentation (i.e., are written for the ear), the written accounts occasionally deviate from proper and generally accepted principles of grammar and punctuation. Most often, these deviations are not mistakes per se, but are indicative of an attempt to aid the listener in the delivery of the sermon.*

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