

The Holy Trinity

May 31, 2026

St. Matthew 28:16-20:

## **“God Is Not Who Or What People Think Or Feel”**

- I. The Only Way
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St. Matthew 28:16-20

Dear Friends in Christ,

In light of what I'm going to say at the beginning of this sermon you might think, "what a bummer." But I promise, there is a reason, and it has everything to do with why we gather here every Sunday. You're going to die. I'm going to die. Not simply because of age, or a heart attack, or a terminal illness, or an accident, or because we did too much of something we shouldn't have done, or because we didn't do what we should have done, or because someone killed us.

We must remember what God said to Adam and Eve in the garden: "...of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die (Gen.2:17)." God didn't tell them how they were going to die if they disobeyed His commandment. He clearly told them they would die.

Death is not natural or normal. Aging, heart attacks, terminal illnesses, accidents and abuse are the consequences of sin. The Word of God doesn't change: "The soul who sins shall die (Ez. 18:4,20)." The question for many is, "What's going to happen after I die?" If you don't believe in God and then find yourself standing in front of Him, then what? This is Trinity Sunday.

## **GOD IS NOT WHO OR WHAT PEOPLE THINK OR FEEL**

### I. The Only Way

I remember sitting in college classes studying The Old Testament, The New Testament, The Life and Time of Jesus, The World's Major Religions, Ancient History that had to make reference to the presence of the Hebrews throughout ancient history. I remember the professor's teaching that all religions are basically the same; a person must do certain things to enter Heaven, or Swarga, or Devaloka, or Jannah, or whatever a person wants to call it. They didn't express conflict over the religions of the world, but when it came to Christianity, well, that was a different story. Christianity had certain exaggerations and contradictions. However, in time I saw that the only exaggerations and contradictions are those created by liberal, exaggerated, and contradictory professors, theologians, and pastors.

Christian congregations that believe the Holy Scripture is the inspired, inerrant, authoritative word of God; that the only way into eternal life is through faith in Christ, have been swimming against the tide of popular thinking from the beginning. And, unfortunately, there have always been congregations, a multitude today, that sacrifice God's word for gain. Nothing changes with the times. There are not many different gods. There are not many different truths. There never has been and there never will be.

Now the 11 disciples went to Galilee, to the mount to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw Him they worshipped Him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me (vv.16-18)."

First, "they worshipped Him" and he didn't stop them, though some doubted. Second, Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me," and there was no debating the point. So, Jesus is either God in the flesh or the consummate narcissist. He is either The Divine or The Deceiver. Either way, you can't be neutral about Jesus.

### II. The Trinity

The theme, God Is Not Who or What People Think or Feel, is then emphasized in these words of our text, "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 behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age (vv.19-20)." Jesus, the Son, commands that his church

understand that He is one of three persons - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - involved in the Great Commission. Three persons. One God. Triune. God who has revealed himself through all the Scriptures. God who says, "I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other; nor my praise to carved idols (Is.42:8)." With that, Jesus said "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life... Whoever does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God (Jn.3:16,18b)." Do you see why Christianity is mostly rejected? Most contemporary churches want to avoid the issue for fear of offense and loss of people.

A good number of you are familiar with "The Lutheran Confessions". They are not a replacement for Scripture but teach what we believe, teach and confess in order to confront false teachings. Please listen to this statement from the great confession, *The Formula of Concord (Solid Declaration, Article X1)*:

... The entire Holy Trinity, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, directs all men to Christ as to the book of life... For the Father has decreed from eternity that whomever he would save, he would save through Christ, as Christ himself says, "no one comes to the Father but by me (Jn.14:6)".

This is what we believe, teach and confess with no exception.

Over these years of ministry, I have lost count of people saying to me, "Well, I think or feel God is this or that, or whatever a person wants to think or feel." That's called idolatry, creating God according to your image. I have lost count of the number of times I've heard these questions: "If God is love then why did he let this or that happen?" - "If God loves me then why did he let this or happen to me?" However, the question that must be asked is, "Why do humans think, say, and do the things that cause all the "this and that" (the bad things) to happen?"

And then, there's this thinking: "God loves me because I'm a good person and do good works." Scriptures teach, "Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ (Gal.2:16)." Simple!

### III. God Draws

Years ago, after being brought to faith, my family and I were invited by some friends to their church. It was a congregation of a well-known denomination. After the service the pastor inquired as to what brought us to his church. I referred to our friends then told him that we were brought to faith in Christ one evening in our home while reading various portions of the Bible. I expressed our great joy and desire to worship with God's people. His response was, "Well, we believe in small miracles." I thought to myself, "You're a pastor and surely understand Scripture, 'But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved (Eph.2:4,5)". The spiritually dead cannot make themselves alive and save themselves from hell! Faith in Christ is the greatest miracle a human could receive!! Remember the words God gave to Paul: "... I am not ashamed of the gospel (the Word), for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Rm. 1:16)." The Gospel! The word of God!

This isn't hard. Jesus said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him (Jn.6:44)." **God draws.** The Holy Spirit draws us to Christ through the Word – the Bible - The Holy Scripture. We're told, "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword (Heb.4:12a)." The Word is alive and active and speaks to the human heart. It can save a soul, or condemns, if a person rejects Christ, This is the word we are assigned to proclaim to others.

#### IV. We'll See Him As He Is

And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God (the Holy Spirit) descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased (Mt.28:16,17).

Do we see? Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (the Trinity) reach into our earthly lives through the written word (Bible) and visible word (Baptism and the Lord's Supper) so we would have eternal life. It's what we confess from the Athanasian Creed:

But the whole 3 persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) are co-eternal with each other and coequal, so that in all things...the Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity is to be worshiped. Therefore, whoever desires to be saved is compelled thus to think about the Trinity...

So, here we are, living in and walking through "the valley of the shadow of death." A journey filled with uncertainties, good times, bad times, times of laughter, times of tears, and the times we want to ignore; dying and death. Christ came into this world for one purpose, to take away our eternal condemnation and death because of sin so that we would "dwell in the House of the Lord forever!"

The Scriptures teach us everything we need to know and take to others. And what about those things we cannot understand? The Lord had the Apostle Paul write, "Oh, the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways (Rm.11:33)."

We don't need what people think or feel about God. What we want and need are the clear promises and comfort God gives in His Word such as this: "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; But we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure (1 Jn.3:2-3)." We will see the Triune God as He is and know what He wants us to know! There will be no aging, heart attacks, terminal illnesses, accidents, abuses. And we will be eternally joyful, at peace, and satisfied.

Amen!

Pastor Bill Abbott