

Never Alone

Genesis 1:1-4a

Matthew 28:16-20

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First Church West Hartford

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We are a finite people trying to understand an infinite God. On the church calendar, today is Trinity Sunday. God as trinity – God in three persons, as we sang about in our opening hymn - is one way biblical scholars and theologians have tried to explain that there is multiplicity to God's revelation of Godself in the world. I especially appreciate the words of Henri Nouwen (Dutch Catholic Priest and 20th Century theologian) who described the trinity as a "community of love."

We are a finite people trying to understand an infinite God. Our Holy Scriptures help to reveal what we as people have understood about God. The opening verse of Genesis says, "in the beginning God" which implies that God has always been. The closing verses of Matthew's gospel tell the words of the risen Jesus to his disciples, "I will be with you always, to the end of the age" which implies that God will always be. This promise of Jesus in Matthew of his presence is not only to the disciples in the text, but for all disciples always and promises the same empowering fellowship with the triune God that Jesus has. Those bookends on the Scriptures which our deacon, Robert, read for us today help to describe God as Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. And, in between, God chooses to extend God's community of love to us.

We are a finite people trying to understand and infinite God. Jesus' words to the eleven disciples include what is called "the great commission." That is, Jesus with "all authority in heaven and on earth" (which we learn in Genesis 1 was created and organized by God) has been given to Jesus. And what does he say? "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." We are not to keep this relationship, this community of love, to ourselves. We are being called to share it.

We are a finite people trying to understand an infinite God. Jesus' great commission goes on to say "teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." In an earlier chapter in Matthew's gospel when Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment is, he answered "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself." Matthew 22:37-40 Jesus names that all the Law and the prophets hang on these two. Love God, Love neighbor. Jesus has asked his disciples to teach everyone everywhere to love God and love your neighbor.

We are a finite people trying to understand an infinite God. We learn later in Genesis 1 that "God created mankind in [God's] own image." (Genesis 1:27) Love God, Love neighbor. Ultimately, God is a mystery to us. However, it does not mean that God is completely unknowable. God is known by knowing our neighbor. We can love God by loving our neighbor. God is known and loved in community with one another. We were made for community. God made us in community. God is community. We are stronger together.

Our world is a broken place. There is intolerable injustice. Many of us, myself included, have been deeply affected by the murder of George Floyd. Mr. Floyd was one of thousands of people who are black and have been victims of police brutality. Somehow, though, this time seems different. Maybe it is because it happened in the midst of a world-wide crisis of pandemic. Maybe it is because we witnessed Mr. Floyd's death on recording, watching the life drain out of him as he struggled to breathe. Maybe it is because this clear evidence of injustice simply cannot be ignored. Maybe it is because it reveals the oppression in our social systems. Maybe our awareness is raised due to the sheer number and frequency of protests – people demanding to be seen and their voices to be heard.

Whatever the reasons, it has absolutely compelled me to make sense of Mr. Floyd's death in light of my faith. It is my sincere hope that you will hear today's message as a call to action. The words of former president, Jimmy Carter, come to mind, "My faith demands – *this is not optional* – that I do whatever I can, wherever I am, whenever I can, for as long as I can with whatever I have to try to make a difference."

The message that Jesus, the resurrected Christ, spoke to his disciples as part of the Great Commission matches this sentiment. After all, Jesus sent forth his disciples for the transformation of the world! The fact that Jesus commissioned this over 2000 years ago and there is still need for transformation simply reveals our human condition. We continue to be afraid, we continue to be selfish and we continue seek to be understood rather than seeking to understand, we continue to be divided, which separates us from God and from one another.

2,000+ years of a need for continued discipleship also reveals that discipleship is not a destination, but rather it is a life-long journey. It means that discipleship is not easy. Discipleship is a commitment. Discipleship is a sacrifice. Jesus called his disciples to be a community and extend that community to all nations. God calls us to be with others, to be engaged, to be part of the community of love that is God. Christianity is a social religion, one that demands something of us. It is not a passive religion, but one of action!

We share a special connection with one another because of our connection to Jesus the Christ. Ours is a religion of resurrection power. I invite us to resist the powers which try to divide us. Instead, let us unite as followers in the way of Jesus.

We are a finite people trying to understand an infinite God. However, it does not mean that God is completely unknowable. God is known by knowing our neighbor. Let us listen to our black neighbors. We can love God by loving our neighbor. Let us show love to our black neighbors by becoming allies. God is community. Let us learn more about that which we do not know, so we can be the community we are called to be as the church. We are stronger together.

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