

I come to you in the name of God...Father, Son and Holy Spirit...the God who charges us through Christ to teach all that we have been commanded.

It is not the mystery of the Trinity that I wish to share with you this Trinity Sunday for there are those far better grounded in theology than I who have tried and failed in explaining that which is beyond human comprehension.

And, in any event, it is how we embrace God in our lives...it is in our relationship not only with God but with each other and the world...it is how we share that which we have been commanded that both explains and reveals the mystery, beauty and wonder of the Holy Trinity...the nature of God... far better than mere words I might speak.

So, I want us to focus this morning on what it is that Christ has commissioned us to do in today's Gospel.... to "Go Forth"...to "Make Disciples"...to teach others to obey

Christ's commandments as we are to obey them. For the mystery of the Trinity is, after all, about relationships....not only the relationships between God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit but, also, the Godhead with us and we with God.

But, what is it we are to teach?

Some of you, I would think, recall Christ's admonition that we love the Lord our God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind.

Others, perhaps, recall the simple but difficult instruction to love both your neighbor and your enemy.

Perhaps you thought of the Ten Commandments or their expansion and explanation by Christ at the Sermon on the Mount.

It is within the Sermon on the Mount that perhaps the most intimidating commandment is found:

“Be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect”.

Be perfect...pretty intimidating isn't it? It is even more so when we read of Christ's encounter in Matthew 19 with a young man who has kept the commandments but wants to know how he may attain eternal life. Christ responds:

“If you wish to be perfect, go sell your possessions and give the money to the poor and you will have treasures in heaven. Then, come follow me.”

The scripture tells us “When the young man heard this word he went away grieving for he had many possessions.”

We don't know what happened to this young man but we are left with the feeling that there was a point at which following Christ simply had become too costly.

But the question is raised...what is the price you are willing to pay to follow Christ? Is there a point for you at

which you aren't willing to go and spread the Good News...to teach others that which Christ has commanded us?

Yet, Christ's message in today's Gospel is not a conditional one. It is not to proclaim Christ's commandments only when it is convenient, when to do so entails no sacrifice.

Those of you we honor today who give your time and talents in Christian education show your love for others through your actions...by your commitment... to teach that which God has commanded... even when it has not always been convenient.

Indeed, we all have heard or been told "Actions speak louder than words."

In that vein, there is a framed print in the clergy vesting room with a saying attributed to St. Francis of Assisi:

Preach the Gospel at all times

If necessary, use words.

Isn't that wonderful...Preach the Gospel at all times...if necessary use words.

As we each go into the world in our daily lives and in response to today's Gospel, whether, as adults, as children, as teenagers or as graduates about to enjoy the freedom that comes with maturity, always remember to ask the question, "Would others by my actions know I am a Child of God?"

For how can we teach others to follow as we have been commanded by today's Gospel if we ourselves do not teach by example...if we do not allow God to work within us through the Holy Spirit.

I asked you earlier if there is a price at which we would no longer be willing to be a messenger for Christ? For some ...there is no such price. For others the price may be as slight as not wanting to offend a friend or fellow parishioner.

I am going to run the risk of offending some of you this morning and I may even make a few of you angry with me and that is ok. But I must I tell you that I believe we have failed to follow the message of Jesus Christ.

For I know, Brothers and Sisters, when I read and re-read today's Gospel and as I contemplate anew the vow I will take, God willing, at the time of my ordination..."to interpret to the church the needs, concerns and hopes of the world".... I know what Christ has commanded me to do.

For me the list of that which I should teach is quite long; yet, it is one instruction from the Book of Matthew

that burns in my soul...that causes me tremendous sadness and discomfort as I look at the world around me...not in judgment of others but in my own failure to be more outspoken in carrying out the charge of today's Gospel.

In Matthew, Chapter 5, Christ states:

“You have heard it said ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’. But I say to you, “Do not resist an evildoer.” But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek turn the other also...

* * *

You have heard it said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, ‘Love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be children of your Father in heaven...If you

love those who love you, what reward do you have?”

It is this instruction, coupled with the scriptural admonition “Thou shalt not kill” and in recognition that we are all children of God, made in God’s image, that have led me to oppose war...to spread Christ’s message of love and peace...not as some political statement nor in derogation of the honor and bravery of our men and women in harm’s way - - past and present.

Indeed, my father served in the Army Air Corps as a sergeant in North Africa during World War II. My brother-in-law as a medic in the jungles of Vietnam, where he was awarded a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star. I take pride in their service and in their bravery as I do in all who have offered themselves in our nation’s service.

Yet, as I have studied in great depth that which Christ has commanded me, has commanded us, I have come to oppose war as I can conceive of no other answer to the question of “What would Jesus have us do?”

Brothers and Sisters...

- We are engaged in a war in Iraq and Afghanistan; yet, against an enemy without a defined country...a war in which, according to the United Nations, over 600,000 children have died due to a lack of basic medical care – where vaccines and drugs to prevent infection and cure disease are no longer available.
- This is a war in Iraq and Afghanistan in which over 4,500 American soldiers have died and where over 30,000 American soldiers have been wounded.

This a war where, for the average Iraqi, it is now 58

times more likely that he or she will die going about their daily routine than it was 5 years ago.

- This is a war where a population equal to every man, woman and child in this State has been forced from their homes.
- This is a war in which, according to the Congressional Budget Office, our country will have spent \$771 **Billion** by June 30th of this year.
- \$771 Billion on war in a world where over one billion people do not have access to clean water.
- \$771 Billion on war, when a number of our elderly have to choose between the medicines they need and the pain of hunger in their stomach.
- \$771 Billion when schools exist across the low country of this state with leaking roofs, with fouled toilets,

without the necessities by which the impoverished White, Black and Hispanic children who attend these rural schools may hope to escape the clutches of abject poverty.

We are now a country viewed by much of the world and clearly by our enemies not as a nation of compassion...of love...of peace...but, rather, as a militaristic one. And, indeed, we are a nation that spends 36 times as much on our defense budget as we do on international development and food aid. Brothers and Sisters, we have made it so very easy for our enemies to hate us by our actions.

For can you fan the inferno of hatred more easily against a people who build hospitals, who provide clean water...a people who live by the example of Christ...that teach the Gospel by their action..... or is it easier to fuel

the fire of hatred against one who kills, maims and destroys?

Yet, we have chosen not to project that which Christ has commanded us.

You will recall with me the scripture:

I was hungry and you gave me food

I was thirsty and you gave me drink

I was a stranger and you took me in

I was sick and you took care of me

Yet, we as a Church can do so much more to share Christ's message...to let the world see the Holy Spirit at work within us in helping by action and words the hungry, the thirsty, and the sick. Today we ignore the fate of faceless strangers in a far away land...We have chosen instead to fund the killing of others made in God's image and that is not teaching by example, it is not making disciples for

Christ, it simply is not in concert with Christ's commandments.

It is in recent times that we are bombarded with the knowledge of possible terrorist attacks and, quite candidly, many of us now live in fear...forgetting that which Christ tells us in Matthew 10:28..."Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul."

Is fear...is being afraid...the price at which we no longer are willing to teach ...to live by example...the Commandments of our Lord?

I confess that I have close friends who disagree quite aggressively with me - - who say I am politically naïve... that Christ's commandment of Love, of forgiveness, of Peace, cannot be applied in today's complex world filled with those who wish to destroy us.

Yet, as I study scripture and as I read and renew my...our...Baptismal Covenant, I find no caveats.....there

are no footnotes.....I know of no exceptions..... to the Commandments, “Thou shalt not kill” and “to love our enemies”. For in my Baptismal Covenant, I have given a solemn vow to God...a vow to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving my neighbor as myself...a vow to strive for justice and peace among all...not some but all... people...a vow to respect the dignity of every...not some... but every...human being.

Are we honoring our Baptismal Covenant...are we teaching by example that which Christ has commanded us. Do we embrace the beauty of the Holy trinity...do we reflect the nature of God...in the conduct of war?

I want to leave you this morning with words spoken by someone who proclaimed the Gospel everyday and even used words when necessary...someone who reached very early in his ministry the same conclusion as I...that

violence is not the path to which Christ has pointed us ...

the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He said:

The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy.

Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it.

Through violence you may murder the liar but you cannot murder the lie nor establish the truth.

Through violence you murder the hater but you do not murder hate.

Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars.

Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that.

Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do
that. **AMEN.**