

May 31, Trinity A (Matthew 28:16–20)

Before the Great Commission is proclaimed, Matthew could be accused of being a unitarian.

by [Brian Maas](#) in the [May 2026](#) issue

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Ages ago, in a seminary course on the Trinity, our professor chided us students, most of us Lutheran, that our tribe had been described by some as “unitarians of the Second Person of the Trinity.” Without missing much more than a beat, the one Assemblies of God student in the seminar chimed in, “I guess that makes my people unitarians of the Third Person of the Trinity.”

The point was shared in good humor, but I have ever since tried to be mindful in my preaching and teaching of the imbalance inherent in resting on a one-legged stool. That was also the moment at which my little mind was stretched enough to let the concept of Holy Trinity out of the intellectual box in which it had been so neatly and tightly stored. That was the moment for me when the Trinity finally ceased to be a What and became fully a Who.

Which is, of course, not at all the same as suggesting that I understand the Trinity, anymore than I can claim to understand my spouse (or my children or closest friends, for that matter). Understanding isn’t the point—relationship is. And Trinity is all about relationship.

That becomes clear in the Great Commission, though until it’s proclaimed, Matthew could also be accused of being a unitarian of the Second Person. It’s to Jesus alone that the disciples relate in this brief passage. They obeyed him (by going to Galilee), saw him, worshiped him, doubted him, and heard him. All of their actions—positive, neutral, and negative—are in relationship to Jesus.

And it is out of that relationship, imperfect though it may be, that Jesus commissions these 11 to transform the world. This is perfectly understandable. When you’re sending people to do hard things, it’s a lot easier for them to hear “trust me” from someone they know well than from a stranger or even a distant familiar.

Once Jesus starts down the list of marching orders, however, he makes it clear that they will be far more than disciples of a beloved rabbi. They will be agents of the very God of the cosmos, one on whom they may call as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Matthew doesn’t spend any time on catechesis here. He recounts Jesus’ commission as straightforward and simple. Presumably the disciples grew in their understanding of—and, more importantly, their relationship to—God the Holy Trinity as they fulfilled their mission. This was the One, after all, in whose name they would be baptizing all those disciplined nations.

Yet Jesus keeps them moored in what they know and who they know, lest the enormity of being the world’s first trinitarian agents overwhelm or paralyze them. Having made clear the great big Who they’re serving, Jesus adjusts the scope of their attention back by declaring that the obedience they’re to teach is to the content *he* has taught them, and by offering the assurance that he will be with them.

Isn't this the gift and the genius of the Holy Trinity, from the Holy Trinity, and about the Holy Trinity? That, without lapsing into some anemic modalism, we are encouraged to fulfill our own baptismal call as agents of the fullness of God Almighty, even when we can't grasp the whole of what such an identity means? That we might lean in any given moment on the promise that the Spirit's power will become our own to sustain us, on the awareness that we and the whole of creation are good because we are the work of the Father who created us or on the certainty of our value to God because of the awe-full grace of the Son who redeemed us?

Go. Make disciples. Baptize. Teach.

Most importantly, perhaps, remember. Remember the relationship, the witness undergirding the witness. Remember Jesus' promise in its fullness: "*I am* with you." God, the verb beyond comprehending, in the limitless fullness of God's being, is with us.

That relationship is the basis, maybe the only certain basis, on which we can hope to build our own response to the Great Commission. And not only the basis for our response, but the model for it as well.

It was in that same seminary course, though later in the semester, that I first recall encountering *perichoresis*, the notion of the perpetual dynamic co-indwelling of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Or as it is so much more artfully articulated, the divine dance among and within the Three Persons. Like the Great Commission with which we're charged, the Holy Trinity is all relationship and all verbs. And all for us.

On Trinity Sunday and always, may our seeking for the What never exceed our desire for the Who, and may our response to "Go, make disciples" be our yes to "Come, join the dance."