

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

By the Rev. Dr. Harry Wendt, Founder of Crossways International
(Sola Publishing, Edited Version © 2023 H. Wendt)



Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Matthew 28:16-20

Year A - Holy Trinity Sunday, Text: Matthew 28:16-20
Year A - Holy Trinity Sunday, Text: Matthew 28:16-20

Some English translations of “The Great Commission” (Matthew 28:19–20) are misleading. The opening words in English translations are usually, “Go and make disciples of all nations, teaching them, etc.” However, in Greek the first word is not an imperative. It is a participle. The passage should be translated, “*As you are walking/going through life in this world...*”

The message does not have to do with sending missionaries to distant places because we ourselves cannot go. Jesus’ message is, “As you, all my brothers and sisters, go through life in this world, teach all those around you, teach all with whom you come into contact, teach people of all nations.” All of life is to be a teaching-about-Jesus, showing-Jesus experience — non stop! It follows that those who wish to teach about Jesus need to be taught (not just preached at) about the real Jesus and inspired to embrace His forgiving grace and reflect His servant lifestyle.

Jesus’ closing words in Matthew point to the fact that He will remain with His brothers and sisters until the close of the present age. In the ascension, Jesus did not withdraw His presence; He transformed it. He remains with and among us invisibly. We wait for His final reappearing! While we wait for that reappearing, we are to devote life to revealing His presence to all those around us in all that we think, say, and do. We are to show people the Jesus we want them to believe in. We are to live now as we shall then!

While we wait for Jesus’ Final Reappearing, we need the Holy Spirit’s help to deal with a non-stop challenge. C.S. Lewis wrote, “There is no neutral ground in the universe. Every square inch is claimed by God and counterclaimed by Satan.”

How utterly true — and a reason second to none for thinking through what we believe about the Person, work, and presence of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Some thoughts on the Trinity

When Jesus commissioned his disciples are to teach all nations and to baptize them “in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,” he was not merely *describing* God, he was *naming* God. He was identifying which God was the One they served, and who is was who sent them. Here, the Trinity is an expression of God’s identity.

Our world is a different from the world of Pentecost. After Peter preached the sermon recorded in Acts 2, the people asked, “What shall we do?” Today when the service is over, some merely ask, “Where shall we eat?” Sad to say, some see the Bible’s contents as a menu from which they can select the items that please them.

If back in the 7th century AD, someone had succeeded in explaining the doctrine of the Trinity to Muhammad, today there would be no world of Islam. Muhammad could not understand (and thus rejected!) what the New Testament writings reveal about the Persons of the Trinity and their relationship to one another. The result: Today we have the Qur’an, and more than one billion Muslims, hundreds of millions of whom take their faith much more seriously than do many Christians.

The early church struggled for hundreds of years to produce an adequate statement about the doctrine of the Trinity. It was not until AD 451 at Chalcedon that a confession was produced that finally expressed to everyone’s satisfaction a way to articulate what the Bible has to say about the issue. The early Church was forced to formulate this and other creeds because most of the heresies that plagued the Christian movement had to do with the issue of defining the Trinity and the Person and work of Jesus in relation to the Trinity.

The New Testament itself does not sharply define the doctrine of the Trinity. Perhaps the most inspiring statement about the Trinity is in Ephesians 1:3–14.

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight 9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. 11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, 12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

In the original Greek, this passage constitutes one unbroken sentence. The Revised Standard Version breaks it down into six sentences. But it is easy enough to understand the message of that long Greek sentence. It is a hymn to the Trinity.

In English, verses 3–6 are a hymn to the Father. Verses 7–12 are a hymn to Jesus Christ. Verses 13 and 14 are a hymn to the Holy Spirit. In this hymn, Paul does not set out to define the mystery of the Trinity. He merely lists what each Person has done for us and calls us to believe in, praise, and respond to each Person.

Several unfortunate things happened in the early church. First, it spent so much time discussing and debating the nature of each Person of the Trinity and their relationship to each other that it neglected Paul's approach to the matter. Second, it focused so much on salvation in the narrow sense that it paid insufficient attention to God as the One Who made and owns the universe, Who came among us as the Servant Son and is still among us through His Spirit seeking to have us believe in the Person of Jesus the Messiah and to conform to His servant lifestyle.