

When I came on board here at CPC we started a youth group lessons series on Jesus. Real specific topic, I know, but the goal was to set a foundation for our students and see what they knew about Christ. We talked about Jesus' miracles for a few weeks, his top teaching points, his parables, how He can be both human and divine and lots of other things to build on our students' understanding of Jesus.

One of our weeks we talked about the Trinity and I think that week we all left with more questions than when we arrived - and that's such a good example of how trying to make sense the Trinity works. I think it started with "oh yeah, duh" to "huh?" by the end because it's something we don't truly think about deeply. We may have been shown a basic concept of the Trinity early in our faith journey and never thought to ask more probing questions about how God can be both one and three, or maybe we asked questions and never got a good answer. The mystery of the Trinity creates uneasiness in us when we stop to think because it's something we can't fully understand, and it's not something I'm going to try and help us understand today - because that's not the point. We aren't designed to understand God, He's bigger than we can imagine. There's a lot about theology that we do understand and I love studying that, but at a certain point you have to shrug your shoulders and realize that there are mysteries about God's attributes that we won't know this side of the Kingdom. Because who wants a God you can fully know? God shows his power and his bigness by being something we can't wrap our brains around. But one thing we did try and clear up in youth group is why we have the Trinity - why did God choose to express Himself as three distinct persons?

I. Community

One of the most obvious answers to why is there a Trinity is similar to what all parents say to their children at some point: "because I'm the parent." God can do whatever He wants, and if He chooses to show us that He is Three and He is also one, then by all means He can do that, because He is God.

But there's more to it than that, God has shown us through His mutual communion how we're not supposed to be alone. God's eternal personhood is not singular but plural. Through the example of the Trinity we see that life is not meant to be a solo adventure. We need others; we need each other. Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit onto his followers, just as God poured into Jesus, and they all flow into and through each other equally. That's what life together looks like and how our lives should be; in healthy, authentic community. Loving each other for who we are at this moment; not for who we want someone to be.

Being a church community isn't about new members or weekly attendance, but about teaching and showing others how to follow Jesus. And that brings us to today's verse: before Jesus ascended he told his followers one thing: go. Go and make disciples; go and teach others about me. This is another example of the Trinity showing us how to live - the pouring out that each person of the Trinity flows into the next is how we should be pouring ourselves into new disciples. How the Holy Spirit calls to us and reaches out is a great example of how we should be reaching out to others.

This last message from Jesus isn't a suggestion, it isn't optional - it was a command. Some would even call it a great commandment. Something all believers in Christ are required to do.

II. Go

So how does this 'go' work? It's easy to read, but very difficult in practice. Let's start with breaking down what discipleship means:

Going through college and learning about ministry we talked about programming in the sense of discipleship and evangelism. Discipleship was always inward focused, building up the current base of church attenders, and evangelism is outward focused, reaching out to the community for those who don't attend. We talked a lot about ministry in this way, and even had classes that broke down each focus; but as I've been in ministry for a while now I've found this is not the best view of discipleship. Discipleship is

not only for those who are in the church regularly, all who seek Christ (new, old, young, doubters, questioners, sinners, saints, know-it-alls) need to be disciplined - and through the entirety of their faith journey. Discipleship comes from the Latin word for student, and was the prevalent form of training for young rabbis in Jesus' day. Jesus' disciples were his students; individuals he was training and teaching. Biblical discipleship can be equated similarly to how we do mentoring today, but with a different focus. In mentoring the goal is to help raise up individuals to do life or a task on their own, whereas discipleship is to teach someone how to be like Jesus and do life together.

What does discipleship look like practically? I can't very easily have a group of 12 young men following me around and taking notes on what I say and do all day like Jesus did. But that would be really helpful with babysitting! There are hundreds of books and curriculum on discipleship, mentoring and living out your faith practically, so I won't try and imitate any of those materials but I can tell you what I've discovered from my years as a student and a youth pastor: discipleship happens best outside of the 4 walls of the church building. This 'go and make disciples' command that Jesus tells us about is something that is best done at the lunch table, on car rides, at sporting events, the movie theater, the mall, at the park, and anywhere else where people gather. Jesus was saying in the great commission to go all over and teach people how to follow me. Show them what it means to be like me and form a community of people around that. Build an ever-growing body of followers that continually reach out and seek other disciples. That means we have to leave here and go out there.

I once heard a pastor tell a story of when he started at a new church and had a meeting about getting new students into the youth group. The church members weren't sure how to find new teenagers, so the pastor told them to go. "Go where?" "Go where the teenagers are and be there with them!" We long-term Christians can overly complicate discipleship - we make events and programs that try to trick people into coming to our

church when instead we should be what Jesus (and the pastor from this story) did and just GO. Go find out where people are and be there. Go sit somewhere and get to know new people and let them see Jesus through your conversation. Call up a friend that doesn't know Jesus and treat them how Jesus would treat them. Allow the Holy Spirit to move through you and work in you to help build new disciples. Ask God for guidance on who needs to be built up and who needs to be taught more about Him.

Discipleship works best if we are being discipled and also are discipling someone else, creating a linking chain of followers learning and teaching at the same time.

I do a lot of my youth ministry work incarnationally, which comes from the Greek words for 'putting skin on'. Incarnational ministry is where we try to be Jesus with skin on to allow others to see Jesus through our words in actions. It means to get out of the way and allow our disciples to see Jesus. Jesus trained 12 people to follow in his footsteps, who then turned into 72, then hundreds, then 3000 at Pentecost and from there it exploded even more, and it happened not by amazing programming or emotional worship or the best preaching, but by intimate, authentic discipleship and the work of the Holy Spirit. Discipleship is a daily, intimate, authentic, Jesus-centered life that we share with others to teach them how to be intimate, authentic and Jesus-centered daily. It's time to take Jesus literally, it's time to go and make disciples.

So let me ask a final question to close: where will you go?