

“We Are Disciples of the Triune God”

“In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” These are the first spoken words of the Common Service, an order of service based on the historic liturgy of the western Christian church. The Common Service is found beginning on page 15 in the front of our Christian Worship hymnals. Here at Grace we’ve used this service and other similar services at various times over many years. Those many years would include the years in which we used the Lutheran Hymnal, the hymnal previous to Christian Worship, which contained a similar service. We have come to refer to this phrase, “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” by a Latin name, the Invocation. Invocation means a calling upon. In this case, we are calling upon the name of the triune God.

You might notice that today we did not use the exact words of that invocation. Today we are following the Service of the Word, also found in our hymnals, and that service is more loosely based on the historic liturgy. Yet, at the beginning of the service, we called on the name of the triune God. We used the words of an apostolic blessing, based on 2 Corinthians 13:14, **“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you.”**

It may be easy to overlook these words at the beginning of the service, as we stand and straighten out the knees and stretch out our backs, as we rustle pages of the bulletin and try to get the hymnals back in the rack, or as we try to convince our young children to participate in the service along with us. But it is important to realize what it means for us to call on the name of the triune God as we gather for worship. We are reminded that we are disciples of the triune God. We acknowledge that we have gathered in his name and that we come in need of his blessing.

Our text this morning, today’s Gospel, does not give us specific instruction about how we are to conduct our worship services. It does, however, remind us of the importance of being disciples of the triune God, and it explains for us what it means. Listen again to Matthew 28:16-20: **“¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”**

Jesus directed his disciples to go out to all nations in their work of making disciples. And as we gather here, we see the results of such work. Have you really ever looked around at those who gather with you in worship here? I realize I have a view that you don’t necessarily see, but I’ll tell you what I see on a Sunday morning. I see children, and you might hear some of the younger ones from time to time. I see young people and teenagers. I see young adults and middle age adults and older adults. I see people from all sorts of circumstances and backgrounds: single

mothers, young families, grandparents, friends. I see lifelong Lutheran Christians, people who grew up in this congregation, and I see young Christians and those who have joined us recently.

In spite of all these differences, I see people who have come together in the name of the triune God. I see people who have come to celebrate and remember and recall not the things that might sometimes separate us or make us different, but the things that connect us and that we have in common. That's why sometimes we set aside our personal preferences regarding the style of music we use, and the hymns that we sing, and the way I would like to see things done. We don't worship based on our own preferences, because our neighbor in the pew might have different opinions, and the person in the next pew probably does, too.

Instead, we come together because God has brought us together. We come from all walks of life because "**God our Savior...wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth**" (1 Timothy 2:3-4). We come together to acknowledge that God doesn't love us because of who we are or because of what we have done, but only and entirely because of his Grace, his indescribably unselfish love. And that's something that only the true God, only the triune God of the Bible offers to us.

Jesus went on to tell his disciples *how* they were to make disciples of all nations: by baptizing and teaching. God has given to his people the tools through which he shares his grace and by which he calls people to faith. These are the Means of Grace, the gospel in Word and Sacrament. And in our worship services we note that it is through these means that God has called us to faith.

By nature, from birth, we wanted nothing to do with God. We were always and only interested in our selfish desires. We were enemies of God. Our rebellion against him deserves his punishment. But instead of punishing us, God punished his Son. Instead of sending us to hell, Jesus humbled himself to suffer hell in our place. Instead of abandoning us to our own wicked ways, God sent his Holy Spirit to us in Word and sacrament.

We will speak at length about baptism in a few weeks, but it deserves mention here because it is a means of Grace through which God washes away our sins and adopts us into his family. It is a tool he uses to convert us from his enemies and to make us into his followers, his disciples, and his worshippers. It is with good reason that the Invocation matches the baptismal formula, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." We gather together only because we are baptized disciples of the triune God.

Through the Means of Grace, God brings us to faith and connects us to the death and resurrection of Jesus so that we receive the benefit of everything he has done for us. We come together to receive the Means of Grace from God knowing that we all have this in common: we are all sinners, and we are all forgiven only through the blood of Jesus Christ.

This is the message of the God who has revealed himself to us in the Bible, the true God. This is the triune God. We have used that word, triune, to describe him repeatedly today. Some of you may recall celebrating Holy Trinity Sunday three weeks ago. By trinity or triune, we are saying that we believe what the Bible teaches that God is one and at the same time three. He is one God

in three persons and three persons in one God. He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and yet there is only one God.

And that's not an easy teaching for us sinful human beings to comprehend. There is nothing else in our experience to which we can compare it, so there is no way for us to fully understand it.

But we gather in the name of the triune God to hear what he has revealed to us. Jesus' instruction to his disciples was to teach everything he had commanded. We do not gather to hear what we want to hear, or what seems inoffensive to society. We do not gather to hear what we can understand or what makes sense to us rationally. We gather to hear the Word of the true God who has revealed himself, his will, and his love to us.

He is the Father, who created us and loved us enough to send his Son to die for us. He is the Son who came to earth to live and to die in our place to achieve our forgiveness. He is the Holy Spirit, who works through Word and Sacrament to strengthen our faith and to deepen our understanding and our love. That is the God we worship.

We will continue to discuss the various portions and parts of our order of service in the upcoming weeks. Let's appreciate the depth of the proclamation of God's Word that runs throughout our worship services. Let's cherish the way God has brought us together in faith to worship as a family of believers. Let's live lives of humble repentance and anticipate the day we are released from this sinful world to live forever with God. Let's do all we do in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.