

What's In A Name

What's in a name? Do names matter? Of course they do! If they didn't, parents wouldn't spend all that time *agonizing* over the name their child is going to carry the rest of their life. Even when it comes to naming household pets, people put a lot of thought into the whole process. I still recall how my grandpa's eyes lit up when he saw an old home movie of him with his old farm work-horse, Barney. I watched those same movies with him and all I saw was a rough-looking beast of burden that probably wouldn't of even made for good dog food or glue. Not grandpa. That was Barney. That was his cohort and buddy. That horse was special. That horse bore the name my grandpa picked out *just for him*. ***Names are important. They mean something.***

It is with this in mind that we turn our attention to the Gospel lesson appointed for this Holy Trinity Sunday. “*Go and make disciples of all nations—every man, woman, and child—baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*” This may sound strange to some of you, but this is the perfect time to ask the old Lutheran question: ***What does this mean?*** “*Why would we ask that? We know what this means. This is the ‘Great Commission.’*” Yes...but what does it mean to carry out this charge/command of our Lord and Savior ***in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?*** Why is the “Great Commission” text appointed for Holy Trinity Sunday? Is it simply because this is one of the few times in all of Scripture that the triune name of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is ever given, so being that today is Holy Trinity Sunday it just makes sense to plug in this passage?

Hardly! Remember: Names are important. Names mean something. This triune name of Almighty God especially means something. And that brings up an interesting point. Have you noticed that this name of God is ***singular?*** Jesus doesn't say, “*...make disciples of all nations ...in the name of the Father and the name of the Son and the name of the Holy Spirit.*” I know that's what we sometimes hear. I know that's what we sometimes say. But that's not what Christ says, which—yes—is a big deal. As the Athanasian Creed so plainly states, “*the Godhead of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is one. There are not three Eternals, but one Eternal; not three Uncreated and Infinites, but one Uncreated and Infinite; not three Almighty, but one Almighty.*” One singular name of Almighty God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. ***This is important. It means something.***

“Okay...but this still doesn’t clear anything up as far as the Great Commission goes. This still doesn’t explain what any of this has to do with us today.” You know...sometimes our daily lives as Christians tend to take on that all-too-familiar feel. Sometimes it feels like we’re **missing something**. **“There’s got to be more.”** I’ll be the first to confess that there are times when it feels like, *“This is it? All the struggle and sacrifice and heartache that goes along with trying to be faithful in an unfaithful world and all I have to work with is the triune name of God? Help me out here! I’m going to need something more than that!”* Congregations fall prey to this same mindset all the time. *“There’s got to be more to this whole disciple-making process. What else do we need to do?”*

My friends: This is precisely why this particular lesson is appointed for Holy Trinity Sunday. Today is the day that Almighty God reminds us of how **special and powerful** His name truly is. As baptized children of God, we bear this triune name on our heads and on our hearts, marking us as one redeemed by Christ the Lord. God Himself puts His name upon us in the waters of Holy Baptism. ***This name means something.*** It means eternal life, complete forgiveness, and peace that surpasses all understanding. No other name—not Allah, not Buddha, not Enlightenment or Wisdom or Reason, not even the powerhouse trinity of Oprah, Dr. Phil, and Dr. Oz—can bring about the love, the forgiveness, and the everlasting salvation that’s found ***only in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*** All other names may mean something special to the children of Adam, but they mean nothing to God. Without God’s Almighty name—the name that He Himself puts on us—**we are lost and condemned.**

That’s how special this name is. That’s how special you are in Almighty God’s eyes. He loved you **so much** that He sent His one and only Son to live and die for you, all so that you could bear His name for all of eternity. And that’s also why this Great Commission text is so appropriate for today; the first Sunday after Pentecost; the beginning of the church year that focuses on ***the life of the church in the world we live in.*** It’s easy to forget the fact that this incomprehensible and unconditional love of God is for **everyone**—all nations—every man, woman, and child...***even those people that we don’t like.*** God so loved the world—***the whole world***—that He gave His only begotten Son to die for it. It’s easy to forget the simple command our Lord gave us regarding faithful evangelism, outreach, and disciple-making. Go and make disciples of all nations—***everyone***—by simply bringing them to the font so God Himself can wash away the death sentence of their sin and put His life-giving, life-saving name on them, marking them as His redeemed child. Go and make disciples of all nations—***everyone***—by simply letting God work in His Word. Make disciples by simply teaching the Word of God—all of it—full Law and full Gospel. This triune name of Almighty God means something. It’s powerful. It’s dynamic. It accomplishes that which He purposes. ***It makes true and faithful disciples.***

As we now come to a close for the day, I leave you with a little bit of homework. I want you to think about how often this powerful, triune name of God comes up throughout the worship service. ***You don't just hear it on Holy Trinity Sunday, do you?*** This very special name is found everywhere in the liturgy. There's a reason for that. This Trinitarian blessing—the triune name of God Himself—is put upon us repeatedly throughout the service to remind us of ***who we are and whose we are***. This life-giving triune name continually echoes in our ears, our minds, and our souls, reminding us of just how special we really are; special enough that God was willing to die for us so we could bear His name.

This name of God Himself serves to open our ears, our eyes, and our hearts to the reality of Immanuel—the reality that Almighty God is keeping His Word. “Behold, I am (another name for Almighty God) with you always, to the very end of the age.” Wherever that divine name is spoken, ***there is God. Name equals presence***. That's why God is so explicit in His command to not use His name in vain. It means something.

My fellow redeemed: Look around. You aren't just witnessing something special, like some spectator on the outside looking in. As a baptized and believing child of God, you are a part of something very special. ***You belong to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You bear His name. That's important. That means something.***

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...AMEN.