

Matthew 28:16-20 – The Holy Trinity – The Great Commission – May 31, 2026

+In Nomine Iesu+

Popular actress Jennifer Aniston from the 90's TV show *Friends* said in a recent interview that Christianity is not based on anything factual, it divides people, demands too much morally, and discourages free thinking. For her, Christianity has no role in a modern, open society.

Now, her comments are not only hypocritical—but still actually religious in nature. Her rejection of Christianity is still a religious worldview. I am not saying that she is an atheist. But even atheists have a religious perspective. Remember that religion is just an explanation of the way things are—and the way things ought to be.

And although she supposes that Christianity has no historical basis—a view which we are going to refute today—her comments are based on nothing more than her feelings, intuition, and opinion. Let's not get our religious perspectives from actors, athletes, politicians, or the latest viral post on Facebook. Don't let the influencers influence you. Let's see if we can do a little better.

Today is Trinity Sunday. And today, we recognize that God has revealed Himself in great detail in the Scriptures. As Christians, we do not worship a generic deity—or one of our own making. We worship the Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—as we confessed today.

And it is as Jesus says in John 14, “He who has seen the Son has seen the Father.” To worship rightly is to worship the God who has revealed Himself in Christ. The cross is our theology—as is the resurrection. If we separate religion from God's revelation, we lose more than clarity. We lose the Gospel. And we lose eternity.

Love without truth—as is often celebrated today—is not love. It is sentimentality. And sentimentality cannot sanctify our souls. This is not about being hostile or narrow-minded. It is about clarity. It is about the Church refusing to trade truth for comfort or confusion. True unity is not found by blurring differences.

Unity is found in the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. And so, let's speak with honesty. Let's walk in humility. And let's worship the one true God who has made Himself known, fully and finally, in Jesus Christ. And this worship takes a definite tone in the Great Commission.

Now, we had a rather lengthy Old Testament reading today. Perhaps you noticed. And on the surface, the creation account might seem unrelated to the words of Jesus that we heard as our Gospel reading. But I would like to build a connection.

Now, first, we take the Genesis account seriously. It too is divine revelation from God. He wanted us to know how the world came into being. God created everything out of nothing, in six days, by His spoken Word. And God wants us to know that we humans were made in the image of God. We are His special creation. And He grants us a unique purpose.

Some have called this the first Great Commission. God has given us something to do—and it is more than just naming the animals. We are to be fruitful and multiply. We are to subdue the earth and have dominion over it. We are to spread the rule and reign of God through all of creation. We are created to represent God to the rest of creation—to image His character—His morality—His righteousness—His will to the world.

And this takes particular shape in our Gospel reading today. Maybe we can call this the second Great Commission. Here, Jesus says, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

Remember where we are in the life of Jesus. This is the very end of Matthew’s Gospel. And this particular conversation is unique to Matthew’s Gospel. Here, we find Jesus’ final resurrection appearance before the Ascension.

Now, this reading is brief. It starkly highlights the miraculous resurrection of Christ. In fact, the resurrection—as a public act right in the middle of human history—brings credibility and assurance to all that Jesus said and did.

Jennifer Aniston says that Christianity is not based on anything factual. Here, I disagree. And I hope you do too. Christianity isn’t a matter of personal opinion. Everything builds on this one event. Jesus died a horrible death by Roman crucifixion. But then, He rose again—immortal, imperishable—He conquered death—making a way for us to walk the same road.

And we have evidence. Jesus appeared to hundreds of people following His resurrection. We have eyewitness testimony—in fact, we are reading one of those eyewitness accounts today—from Matthew—but we have them from John and Paul as well.

And we have the witness of the changed lives of His Disciples. They are now brave and certain. They are willing to die for what they believe. Jesus’ own brothers came to faith after the resurrection. His number of followers exploded. The miracles that He worked continued among the Apostles as God Himself bore witness to the truth of their message.

And it is with all of this in mind, that we embrace the Great Commission as it is inaugurated by the resurrected Christ. It is the defining statement of what God has for His people—for His church—for us who sit in the pews today.

That sentiment is caught by the Church Father, St. Chrysostom. Commenting on this text, he says, “With Jesus’ resurrection, His own proper glory is again restored, following His humiliation. Jesus reminded His disciples of the consummation of all things, so that they would not look at the present dangers only, but also at the good things to come that last forever. He promised to be not only with these Disciples but also with all who would subsequently believe after them. So, let us not fear and shudder. Let us repent while there is opportunity. Let us arise out of our sins. We can by grace, if we are willing.”

This is our clarion call to hear and obey Jesus’ final words in this magnificent Gospel. Here, Matthew encapsulates the thrust of this whole book—and why Jesus came in His incarnation. Jesus declares that His Disciples are to make more—of what He has made them. He has come to inaugurate the kingdom of heaven on earth. The Church is to be the outpost of His kingdom—and we are His image bearers—following Jesus in all things.

The Great Commission contains one primary central command. Make disciples. We are to be about the business of forming followers of Jesus Christ. And then there are two subordinate participles that give us the method Jesus prescribes—baptizing and teaching. This is the whole purpose of the Church.

Let's talk about Baptism first. The word *name* here—in which we are to baptize—is grammatically singular. This is interesting, since we baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Trinitarian imagery is embedded even in the grammar. This is the name He places upon us. In Baptism—received in faith—we are members of His family. And as members, we live in His Word and in His ways. And we pass on these ways to our children and to our children's children.

And the priorities of Jesus are not simply about being nice people. They aren't about being tolerant or cultivating openness. Instead, they are about discipleship. As God's people, we have been given the task of making disciples. We are on this planet to follow Jesus Christ—and to help others to do the same. This will be quite countercultural in our times. The world tells us to follow our hearts. But we follow Jesus Christ.

Baptism is key here. In Baptism, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are at work. God grants a new identity. He restores His image in righteousness. He grants regeneration—new life from above—all received in faith. We find ourselves in Christ.

But let's talk about His teachings as well. This is the second factor here in the Great Commission. Here—among the very last things that Jesus says—He tells His disciples to teach others to “observe all that I have commanded you.” *Observe* is a good translation—but it is not quite the full scope of what Jesus means. The NIV uses *obey*—which is also pretty close to what Jesus says.

But I like the LSB—the Legacy Standard Bible here. It reads, “teaching them to keep all that I commanded you.” This word means *to keep, to treasure, to value, to love* all that Jesus has taught—all that Jesus has commanded. This is what Jesus wants His disciples to embrace. We should have a real passion for the actual teachings of Jesus. A real love for the Scriptures. A real love for the Church. We should internalize them. We should make them our own.

The Great Commission is your identity. It is your purpose on this planet. It's your highest priority with your kids and grandkids. Pour your whole self into the venture of knowing Christ—and observing all that He has commanded.

If you are doing our three-year reading plan with us, we are just wrapping up Psalm 119. And we will spend some extra time with it this summer on Wednesdays. It is one of my favorite Psalms because it defines the Christian life so clearly.

Psalm 119:105 encapsulates this whole Psalm. You hear me use these words a lot. I hope they are starting to stick with you. And I hope they are starting to become the way you live. The Psalmist says, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

And so, we trust Jesus to guide us. We don't trust our hearts—or what feels right. We don't trust the celebrities or the latest social media post. Jesus has commissioned us to bear the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And this means we image and reflect His character, His will, and *His words* to all those who are within our reach. Among our friends and family and community—and even inside these walls—we are ambassadors of Christ. God makes His appeal through us.

The Church exists to make disciples. But let's start with ourselves. Let's bring ourselves under Jesus' instruction. Jesus is our Rabbi—our Teacher—our Guide. All disciples, new and mature, are to look to Jesus' authoritative life and words in this

Gospel—in all the Gospels—in all of God’s Word—and trust in them. Obey them. Keep them. Practice them.

And when we embrace this kind of life—taking up our crosses and following Jesus—there are great promises. In fact, our reading begins and ends with Jesus’ promises to those who are following Him. He tells us, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” And then He says, “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

The resurrection of Jesus fulfills our deepest hopes. His resurrection overcomes all of the false religious narratives that permeate our culture. It gives meaning to all of life as we take our task seriously to make disciples. And we give our attention to our own personal discipleship.

I want to talk about the Great Commission a great deal more this summer with our Wednesday sermon series on 1 Timothy. Our topic is the life of the Church. Let me leave you with the first five verses of 1 Timothy. And I hope it will whet your appetite for what Wednesdays will be all about.

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, To Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

+Soli Deo Gloria+