

Sermon
Community United Methodist Church of Coeur d'Alene
Trinity Sunday
May 31, 2026
9:30 AM

Text: Matthew 28:16-20

Theme: Pentecost People: Called to Bear Witness

[prayer]

Are you familiar with the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus?¹ Even if you do not recognize the name, you have probably seen the image: Jesus with his wounded hands cupped around his heart. The heart is on fire and it shines with divine light. Sometimes it is surrounded by a crown of thorns or pierced by a lance. The crown of thorns and the lance represent Christ's suffering; the flames represent his passionate love for humanity.

John Wesley wrote that the Father sent his Son into the world to spread "the fire of heavenly love over all the earth."² When I read that quote, I immediately think of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, literally on fire with love. I also think about the disciples who met the Risen Jesus on the road to Emmaus: "Weren't our hearts on fire when he spoke to us?" (Luke 24:32 CEB). And I am reminded of John Wesley himself, whose heart was "strangely warmed" by the message of the Gospel.

Pentecost People are people who carry the fire of heavenly love over all the earth. We have been given that fire by the Holy Spirit; our hearts are burning inside us with the love of God. Jesus has commanded us to "Go 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 obey everything that I've commanded you" (Matt 28:19-20).

When I started my first semester of seminary, I was required to take a course on evangelism. I was absolutely not excited for the class. I thought evangelism meant

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sacred_Heart

² John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, vol. 1, 11th edition (London: John Mason, 1831), Luke 12:49.

knocking on someone's door, asking an uncomfortable question, and then having that door slammed in your face. (As an aside, I hope you are not in the habit of slamming doors in people's faces, even if you are not interested in the topic they want to talk about. Followers of Jesus should behave better.)

Within a week, though, my professor had greatly expanded my understanding of what evangelism can look like. The root of evangelism is the word "evangel," from the Greek *euangelion* [u-ahn-gelion], which means "good news" or "good announcement." Evangelism simply means to share the Good News of Jesus. Which is what Jesus is commanding us to do in the Great Commission. [context of Matthew's resurrection story] Go into the world and share the Good News that Jesus is alive and making all things new.

How do we share the good news? Jesus gives two specific instructions: 1) Baptize in the name of the Trinity and 2) Teach what Jesus taught.

Baptism is the act of initiation into the universal Church. It marks the transition when we move from being outside the Christian community to inside it. When we make our baptismal vows, we commit ourselves to the transforming work of discipleship, of not just believing in the saving work of Christ, but letting that saving work transform the way we live our whole lives so that we become a living witness to the love of God in Jesus Christ.

Baptism is just the beginning. It is the beginning of learning how to live a baptized life. Jesus also commands us to teach others to obey him. He tells us to make students of the nations, to teach everyone how to sit at the feet of Jesus, to listen and watch, ask questions, make mistakes, and then repent, receive God's grace, and learn from those mistakes. This is a lifelong learning process. We do not exist as a church to make church members. We exist to make disciples – transformed people who then transform the world. And that work never stops...not until the New Creation reveals itself in all its glory.

Evangelism, then, *is* discipleship. It is the work of making disciples of Jesus – not simply convincing people to believe in Jesus but teaching people how to follow Jesus. Discipleship is a lifelong journey of intentional formation in the Way of Jesus alongside other disciples. We accompany each other on this journey.

Evangelism is fundamentally a communal responsibility. I think evangelism can feel overwhelming because we misunderstand what Jesus is telling the disciples to do in the Great Commission. We think he is commissioning them as isolated individuals who go into the world, one by one, and win as many souls as possible for Christ. [we do not do the saving] But Jesus does not commission the disciples in isolation. He commissions them in the context of a community. They are sent into the world to baptize and teach *together* and invite people into that community, the Church.

We are Pentecost People (plural)...not Pentecost Persons. We cannot fulfill the Great Commission on our own. We fulfill it in community, through relationships. First through our relationship with the Triune God: The Spirit transforms us in the image of Jesus and empowers us to live and love as Jesus did. And then through our relationships with each other and our neighbors: The Spirit amplifies that transforming power by joining us together as the Church – the Body of Christ – a community of disciples who make more disciples. Proverbs teaches, “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” (27:17 NIV). We challenge, improve, and refine each other. Your sanctification reinforces my sanctification, and vice versa. I cannot baptize myself; I cannot teach myself how to follow Jesus. I can only do those things in community. If we abandon community, then we are stunting the Spirit’s work of sanctification.

On this Trinity Sunday, we remember that Godself is a community – a community of Three – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – mysteriously interrelated with each other and united as One God. The unity we experience in the Three Persons of the Trinity is a unity of love. The Trinity cooperates in loving community to create loving community. We see this cooperation in action in the very first chapter of the very first book of the Bible (Gen 1): God the Creator, with the Word and the Spirit, cooperate to create out of love the intricate community that is Creation.

God from eternity is relational. Cooperative relationship defines the Trinity. And the Church, as a group of disciples baptized in the name of the Trinity, reflects the Trinity in the ways we practice community – communion – together.

Relationship is not a means to an end in the Kingdom of God, a way to boost church attendance and increase giving; relationship *is* the mission! In addition to the Great Commission, Jesus also gave us the Great Commandment: “Love God,

and love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:36-40, paraphrased) – two commandments that are all about relationship.

Jesus’s words in the Great Commission have been used to justify fear-based behavior toward our neighbors – controlling behavior, colonizing behavior that strips our neighbors of their dignity and says, “I know what is best for you; be grateful, because I’m saving your soul.”

That is not what Jesus meant when he commanded us to go and make disciples. He was not commanding us to force the Gospel upon people; he was commanding us to making disciples through our loving witness. When Jesus says, “All authority/power has been given to me,” he is speaking of the power he shares in relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit – power that is creative, contextual, collaborative – not coercive and condemning. Jesus demonstrates this power through a self-giving love that teaches, heals, and proclaims the Good News of God’s Kingdom.

Jesus made disciples by focusing on relationships. We make disciples by doing the same. We are called to spend time with people, share our lives with them, value their stories and perspectives, learn from them, ask what they need, and help provide for those needs. Evangelism is the simple but profound work of loving others as Jesus loves us. Evangelism must be premised on loving relationship, otherwise it cannot be Good News. Wesley taught that the biggest hindrance to spreading the Gospel is the lives of Christians. The church cannot spread heavenly love if it does not embody that love in its communal life and in the personal lives of its members. What Jesus tells us to show others to do and be is also what we are supposed to do and be.

“Go and make disciples” means “Go and make students of Christ.” “Baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and Holy Spirit” means “Welcome them into the family of God.” “Teach them to obey everything that I have commanded you” means “Teach them how to live baptized lives by following me in all they do.” Jesus sends us to the nations, not to make solo believers, but to enlist them as disciples within Christian communities of love.

How do we spread the fire of heavenly love over all the earth? By fulfilling the Great Commission with the Great Commandment. Love God. Love others. And then watch that love transform the world.

Amen.