

In the Name of God
Matthew 28:16–20
Sunday, May 31, 2026 (Trinity)

Let us pray: Lord, give us the faithfulness and the wisdom to *hear* your Word and *understand* it and *act* on it, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Every now and then, you will get an email from me. Except it's *not* from me. It is from someone who has created an email address using my name for the purpose of getting you to send them money, usually in the form of gift cards. It will say something like, "Greetings! I have an urgent matter that I need your help with. Please respond at your earliest convenience." And it is signed, "The Rev. Dr. Patrick Marshall." So it doesn't really *sound* like me, and I would *never* sign my full name and title in an email to any of you. But at a glance, the email address is similar enough to mine that it might fool you. If you reply, they will tell you something like, "I am currently trying to help a group of women with cancer (or some other situation that will elicit your sympathy), could you please help me out by providing gift cards?"

Let me just pause here to say, Ridgley and I will *never* email or call you asking you to send us money or gift cards. We have funds at the church specifically to help people who are in need. If you ever receive something like that, and you aren't sure, *call the church office*. You do not have to be embarrassed or ashamed about not being able to tell if this is legitimate or not. The reason that scams work is because they seem *just believable enough*.

Now, the reason that these scams upset me so much is not just because they are trying to steal money from you. It is *also* because they are doing it *in my name*. It feels like a violation of my personality and my identity. It associates me with something nefarious – something that I would never *do* – and it has the

potential to *erode trust*. They are using my name to *hurt* rather than *help* other people. (Hold onto this for a moment. We're going to come back to it.)

Today is Trinity Sunday, the culmination of holy days stretching from Christmas and Easter through Pentecost, when we celebrate that God is made known to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Not three separate gods, but *one God*, made known to us in *three persons*. The word *Trinity* is not specifically mentioned anywhere in the Bible. And the specific formula of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is only mentioned once, at the end of Matthew's gospel, when Jesus tells his disciples 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."

So many times, when we talk about the Trinity, it's trying to understand how God can be three and yet one at the same time. Or we talk about how *we* who are *many* are called to live life together as *one*, like God. But that's not what I want to focus on today. Because the question that has been sticking with me for a couple of weeks now as I have been looking ahead to today is, "What does it mean to do something *in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit*?" Is it just *saying* the names *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*? Like when I baptize someone, I say, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." Is that all it is? When we *pray* in the name of Jesus, is that just ending your prayer by saying, "In Jesus' name we pray. Amen." Because I could pray for God to kill the people I don't like and end it by saying, "In Jesus' name," but does that really mean I am praying in the name of Jesus? What does it mean to baptize or pray or *do something* or *live* in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit?

The Greek word for *name* is *onoma*, and it refers to a *proper name*, like Jesus or Patrick or whatever. But Greek dictionaries say that it also refers to "everything that the name covers, every thought or feeling which is aroused in the mind by mentioning, hearing, or remembering the name, for example, one's rank,

authority, interests, pleasure, command, and deeds.”¹ It is *derived* from a Greek word that means, “to know or understand; to become acquainted with.” And in Hebrew, a name is inseparable from the person to whom it belongs; it reflects something of their *essence*. The idea is that someone’s *name* tells you *who they are*. Not just their *identity*, but it tells you something about their personality, their character, their very nature. That when you *hear their name*, you know *what kind of person they are*.

So when we *pray* in Jesus’ name, it’s not just about *saying* Jesus’ name; attaching it to the end of our prayers. It is every thought or feeling that his name arouses in our hearts and our minds. It is praying in a way that brings to mind Jesus’ authority, his interests, his pleasure, his commands, and his deeds. And that’s what it means to do *anything* in the name of Jesus, or in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. It’s living and acting in a way that arouses in our hearts and minds *who God is* and *what God is about*. It is calling God into our words, our thoughts, our lives, our hearts, our minds and living in terms of who *God* is and what *God* wants, not who *we* are and what *we* want.

So if the *name* tells us who the person is and what they are about, and *that* tells us who *we* should be and what *we* should be about, then what do the names of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit tell us about how we should live and act?

God has a *name*. Most of the time we just refer to God as *God*, but that’s just kind of a generic title. God has an actual *name*. When God tells Moses to go to Pharaoh and set the people of Israel free from slavery in Egypt, Moses says, “Okay, if I go and say that God sent me to do this, people will say, ‘Yeah? Well, what is this God’s *name*?’ So what do I *tell* them?” And God says, “I am who I am. Tell them *I am* has sent you.” God’s name is *I am*. The Hebrew word for *I am* is *Yahweh*, and it means *I am* or simply *to be*.

¹ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/onoma.html>

And actually, we aren't exactly sure *how* God's name is pronounced in Hebrew, because the Hebrew people never fully spelled it out. They considered God's name to be so holy and sacred and they would never *speak* it or *write* it. Whenever they spelled the name of God, they left out the vowels, so all you have is the Hebrew letters Y, H, V, and H. It might be pronounced *Yahweh* or *Jehovah* . There are some who think it's not even a name to be *pronounced* but *breathed* . The Hebrew letters Y, H, V, and H are pronounced *yod, he, vav, and he* . There are rabbis who say that the pronunciation of the name of God replicates the sound of breathing, inhaling and exhaling (*yod, he, vav, he*).

But either way, the name of God conveys that God is the very fabric of existence. This is the God of *existence* , of *being* , and the one thing *our* existence *depends on* is *breathing* . So the name of God reminds us that our lives, our very being depends on God. That we can do nothing apart from this God. That our *life* , our *breath* has its *source* in God, it *comes* from God – in the book of Genesis, when God creates the first human beings, it says that God breathed the breath of life into their bodies – and one day when we die, the last thing that we will do is exhale, as our breath goes *back* to God.

To do something *in the name of the Father* means that as we are doing it, we recognize that we are totally dependent on God. That we can do nothing *apart* from God. That life, our very *breath* , is a gift from God, and so we do whatever we do in a way that expresses *gratitude* for that gift. Whatever we do, we do so mindful of the fact that life is *bigger* than us, life does not *depend* on us, *we* are not the ones who make all of this work. God is. When I baptize someone in the name of the Father, whatever *happens* in the act of baptism, I am not the one who *makes* it happen. God is. When we *pray* in the name of the Father, whatever *happens* in that prayer, *we* are not the ones who make it happen. God is. Life is not just about *us* . Whatever we do, we do it by the grace of God.

We're probably familiar with the fact that the *Son* of God has a name – *Jesus*. But *Jesus* is just the English version of the Hebrew name *Yeshua*, which is a variation of the name *Joshua*. The Hebrew name *Yeshua* literally means, “Yahweh saves.” Before he is born, the angel says to Mary and Joseph, “You are to name him Yeshua, for he will *save* his people from their sins.” If Jesus’ name tells us *who he is* and *what he’s about*, then who Jesus *is* is salvation, and what Jesus is *about* is salvation. YHWH is the God who saves, and Jesus *is* that salvation.

But the salvation of God is not *just* so that we can go to heaven after we die. Shane Claiborne writes that “we can tell the world that there is life after death, but what the world really seems to be wondering is if there is life *before* death.” And the salvation of God is something that we can experience *in this world, in this life*. In saving us from our sin, Jesus *also* saves us from the guilt and the pain of our sin that we so often carry around with us. In forgiving *us*, Jesus makes it possible for us to forgive *one another*. Jesus saves us from our *fear*. When Jesus lived with us as one of us here on earth, he saved people from diseases, from evil spirits, from blindness, and from hunger. When Jesus first started his ministry, he quoted the prophet Isaiah, saying, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor...release to the captives...recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” *That* is all *salvation* for the people who *need* it.

When we pray in the name of Jesus, we are invoking the name of the one who can actually do something *about* the things that we need to be saved from. Jesus is *about* freedom and peace and healing and life. He is *about* forgiveness and second chances. He is *about* blessing the poor and the poor in spirit, the hungry and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. And so that is what *we* should be about, too. To do something in the name of Jesus means that, whatever we do, we do it in a way that brings about freedom and peace and healing and life, forgiveness and second chances, blessing for those who need to be blessed. And we do it *all* out of *love*, as Jesus did for *us*.

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul says, “Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.” But just *before* that, he tells us what that *means*. He says, “Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience...Bear with one another...forgive one another...clothe yourselves with love...let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts...and be thankful.” *That* is what it looks like to live and act in the name of Jesus. It is to live and act with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, love, peace, and gratitude. We are to let those things infuse every word, every action, *everything* that we do.

Finally, we come to the name of the Holy Spirit, which is a little bit harder, because the Holy Spirit doesn't have a name. Does it? Well, first of all, we have to remember that the Holy Spirit is not an *it*. The Holy Spirit is a *person*. The Spirit is not a *thing* that we need to *get*. The Spirit is a *person* with whom we are in *relationship*. The Holy Spirit is the person of God, the *presence* of God with us in the world today. And the *Spirit* has a *name*.

While not specifically named in scripture, throughout the centuries Christians have associated the Holy Spirit with the name *Sophia*, a Greek word that means *wisdom*. *Sophia* wisdom has to do with intelligence, cleverness, and skill. It is about sound judgment and *practical* wisdom. It's not just about *knowledge* or *information*. Wisdom is about *when*, *how*, and *why* we *use* the knowledge and information that we have. It's about knowing the right thing to do in specific situations.

What the Spirit's name reminds us of is that God does not just leave us alone in the world to figure things out for ourselves. God *guides* us. God gives us the wisdom that we need to know the right thing to do and when/how to do it. God *teaches* us; it is only through the wisdom of the Holy Spirit that we can understand scripture (and understand *each other*). Last week we talked about the *fruit* of the Spirit – love,

joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. When God's Spirit is at work in us, those are the fruit that our lives bear. Those are the things that the Holy Spirit makes possible in us. And so *praying* and *acting* and *living* in the name of the Spirit means that we pray and act and live in ways that trust that, whatever help we need, God *can* and *will* provide it.

Now, let's go back real quick to the scam emails that I talked about at the beginning. I said that one of the reasons those make me so mad is because they are doing it *in my name*, associating me with something nefarious that has the potential to *erode trust*; that they are using my name to *hurt* rather than *help* other people. And so the question for *us* is, how will *we* act in the name of God? What will *we* cause people to associate with the name of God? Because there are plenty of Christians who do things in the name of God that are nefarious and erode trust in God and hurt rather than help people.

Jesus calls us to go out and make disciples of all nations in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. That doesn't mean we *force* the whole world to be Christian and follow Jesus. People have tried that before. It doesn't end well. Rather, Jesus is calling us to go out and teach other people what it means to follow him, by living and acting in ways that recognize that life is not all about *us*; we are totally dependent on God. He is calling us to go out and teach other people what it means to follow him by living and acting in ways that bring about freedom and healing and life and forgiveness and blessing. And we do that by acting and living with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, love, peace, and gratitude. And he is calling us to go out and teach other people what it means to follow him by living and acting with *wisdom*, in ways that trust that God is with us, guiding us, and giving us everything we need to do what God is calling us to do.

It is to pray and think and speak and act in the *manner* and *likeness* of God.

It is to do everything we do *lovingly* and *faithfully*, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.