

## “Discipling Sermon – May 31, 2026 Stone Presbyterian Church

---

Doctrine, dogma, and discipleship. Are there any other three words, that if you hear them as a person coming into the church for the first time, that it will be the last three words you hear as you turn around and go right back out before our swinging doors even swing the other way.

Thus, for you that are kinda stuck here, I ask for a bit of your indulgence.

Today is the first Sunday after Pentecost. And as the first Sunday in Ordinary Time, we historically celebrate the doctrine of the Trinity, namely the concept the God is one essence but in three distinct, co-equal persons, Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.

But that explicit explanation and definition wasn't formalized until the Council of Nicaea in the year 325 and then finalized at the Council of Constantinople in 381, resulting in the creed that we will recite later.

After that the doctrine of the Trinity became dogma: an authoritative, non-negotiable truth. Anyone or group that said otherwise is a heretic and subject to persecution and banishment. Despite all of our differences today, Orthodox, Catholics, and Protestants of all flavors, all have the Trinity as dogma.

Today's lectionary passages were pick in that light, though the scripture passages themselves are more suggestive rather than definitive on the concept of the Trinity as we understand it today, particularly since the word "Trinity" appears nowhere in the Bible.

Today's scripture from the end of Matthew's gospel in chapter 28 seems to come close as Jesus says in verses 18 to 20, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

## “Discipling Sermon – May 31, 2026 Stone Presbyterian Church

---

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, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”

In fact, these verses are often called “The Great Commission.” In keeping with our theme, though, those words do not appear anywhere in the Bible.

Commission in its most basic meaning is the act of passing a responsibility to someone else. Here it can be viewed as a command or special assignment from Jesus to his disciples.

But for 1600 years this passage was not particularly noted.

Then in 1664, Baron Justinian von Welz, an Austrian-born, Dutch-educated Lutheran, who found himself a religious refuge in Germany, first used the term “The Great Commission” in one of his sermons calling to spread Protestant Christianity throughout the world.

But the term faded and didn’t show up in popular print until late 1800s when it was popularized by James Hudson Taylor, a very influential British Protestant Christian missionary who used it as a compelling catchphrase to recruit workers and raise support for missionary work in inland China.

Many churches and denominations, including here in the U.S., ran with that idea. Stone Church sponsored missionaries in Korea for quite a while in the last century.

We need to be mindful, though, how we interpret and say things. Some hear “\*The\* Great Commission” and interpret it as the “\*only\*” commission. From author Jordan Rayner here are four reasons that is not true: 1) Jesus never said “only” commission, 2) It neglects the other

## “Discipling Sermon – May 31, 2026 Stone Presbyterian Church

---

aspects of God’s kingdom, 3) Ironically, it makes us less effective at the Great Commission, and 4) It blocks us from seeing the full extent of how our work matters for eternity.

For example, when a commencement speaker at graduation says, “Follow your dreams” they don’t mean forget about anything else.

Still, let us consider the commission as presented.

When Jesus says, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” we need to see this in the context of Matthew’s gospel.

This is not an authority that demands people’s submission but rather an authority that empowers and liberates.

In Matthew the word “authority” (*exusia* in Greek) is always used in connection with Jesus’ acts of healing and forgiveness. People celebrate Jesus’ deeds and words because they recognize that he is acting not authoritatively as from on high to those below but with authority, as one \*trusted\* with the right and power as delegated by God the Father.

Then in our English translation Jesus says, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” But the Greek is a single action word, so it’s really “disciple” or “discipling” as a verb. In Greek it means to instruct, to teach. Not “I’ll \*make\* you, force you to, be a disciple.

Thus, we are to instruct others by being imitations of Jesus with intentional initiative.

As Garrett Kell, lead pastor of Del Ray Baptist Church in Alexandria, Virginia, says, “At the heart of following Jesus is Jesus’s call to imitate him and replicate him. As disciples, we are called to imitate Jesus’s love, his mission, his humility, his service, his suffering, and his obedience to the Father. Since he is our teacher, we are to learn from him and strive

## “Discipling Sermon – May 31, 2026 Stone Presbyterian Church

---

in the power of the Holy Spirit to become like him. This growth in Christ-likeness is a lifelong endeavor that is fueled by the hopeful expectation that one day we will see him face to face.

So, we can say we are “discipling nations” but that can still be misleading. “Nations” in our minds are countries, nation states. The Greek word is *ethne* from whence we get our word ethnic. In the Bible this same word is often translated as Gentiles, that is non-Jews. In the traditions of Israel, this term is associated with the oppressors of Israel such as the Babylonians, the Syrians, and the Romans, that is, the \*enemies\* of Israel.

The commission to make disciples of all the nations is, therefore, a mandate to continue Jesus’ ministry and teaching among the Gentiles to expand beyond the children Israel to include all children of God, reconciling even if they are our enemies.

It does \*not\* mean to make or force a nation state to be Christian.

Nowhere does the Bible say that. In fact, it says the opposite. We are to be imitators of Christ so that people are drawn to Jesus the rabbi as much as Christ the Savior.

Part of “discipling” Jesus says is “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”

“Obey” is an unfortunate translation. In English “obey” sounds like being obedient, keeping a rulebook, following the letter of the law.

The core meaning of the word in Greek, though, is “to keep.” In context it means “holding close”, “living out”, “protecting”. It is more about spiritual formation than obedience to a law.

## **“Discipling**

### **Sermon – May 31, 2026 Stone Presbyterian Church**

---

Finally, we are to keep Jesus’s commands, which throughout Matthew are situated in his words and deeds. They focus largely on showing mercy, especially to those most in need of it.

Living out everything that Jesus has commanded is more than accepting a certain dogma or doctrine. It is a call to pursue a style of life that is based on love and justice, a command to be doers of the word that Jesus has spoken from God, and not simply hearers. It is a call to a common practice, not to a common religion.

So, I say to you: go, therefore, and disciple all peoples, welcoming them to be baptized them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to hold fast and live out everything that Jesus commanded us as doers of the word with love, mercy, and justice. It is challenging and at times discouraging but we don’t do it alone. You know Jesus’ final words, “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

In the name of God the Father, the Creator; God the Son, the Redeemer; and God the Holy Spirit, the Sustainer. Amen.