It was the best of times; it was the worst of times. As Charles Dickens once said. It was after the resurrection but before the ascension when Jesus called the disciples to meet him on a mountaintop in Galilee. Funnily enough, the end of the story contains traces of the beginning, but this is not a joyous homecoming. The text makes it clear; there were only eleven there. The emotions would have been mixed. The joy of seeing Jesus alive again tangled with the constant reminder of the betrayal they had all faced. Afterall, there were only eleven there. Without even having to say it, everyone knew why the twelfth was absent.

So, it was no wonder that what should have been a joyous occasion was riddled with uncertainty, fear, and perhaps even a little anger. They thought they had been on the up and up. That they had backed the right horse, so to speak, the messiah. In their time together, Jesus had given his disciples authority or power over unclean spirits. They had banished demons themselves. They had seen Jesus raise people from the dead, walk on water, and perform great signs. Now, he is there, resurrected, claiming that all authority on heaven and earth had been given to him.

But, when they looked around them, nothing seemed to support this. For one, they had watched Jesus be executed, and we all know how they responded to that, running in fear. Their friend had betrayed them and was now dead. Their already small numbers were shrinking. Down from 12 to 11 in less than a week.

Now, they had to meet on the outskirts, in Galilee, out on the margins away from others. All the authority on heaven and earth? It did not feel like they had any power at all. Yet Jesus was there. It was the best of time; it was the worst of times.

Our faith is full of contradictions like this. The ability to hold things in tension is an important aspect of the Christian faith. Doubt and faith. Authority and feelings of powerlessness. Matthew intentionally makes room for these contradictions in his Gospel. Matthew allows doubt and faith to coexist, to even go hand in hand. The disciples, the first and most faithful followers of Christ, continuously struggled with doubt up until the end. Throughout the ministry of Jesus, the disciples wondered how the things they saw could possibly be and what it all meant. Even Peter, when he went out to meet Jesus on the water, began to doubt and sank.

And in this text, Matthew introduces us to another tension filled tenant of the Christian faith. Another aspect for the disciples and followers to grapple with, struggle with, and sometimes even doubt. This text is one of the few times that we see an explicit reference to the Holy Trinity in the New Testament. One of the most important tenants of our faith, and we have but a few lines. “Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (verse 19) God in three persons. Blessed trinity.

Like most contradictions and other tension filled tenants, the Trinity has posed some challenges throughout history. Always has, always will. Trying to adequately explain how our God is three co-eternal beings in one is tricky. You may have heard the Trinity compared to an apple with skin, core, and insides, or water in three forms, or even a tree. But I would warn you about these seemingly simple explanations. There are plenty of pitfalls of ancient heresies that you can easily fall into, and our texts do not clearly lay out how it works. Throughout Church history, as our understanding of the Trinity developed, there were arguments and divides leading to some even being ostracized from the Christian community based on their view of the Trinity.

While the complexities and mysteries of the Trinity and the evolution of its doctrine may not seem that important in your day-to-day faith now, our view of the Trinity says a lot about who we are and who we think God is. What tensions we hold in our faith. Is God relational, dancing around with creation, or is God a lone, distant ruler up on the mountaintop? Is the God who created the heavens and the earth the same God who died on the cross for us and the same God who sustains us now? If so, how? And how does it all hold together? How does it work? And how do we get all that from this little text? If you do not have the immediate answers to these questions, it is ok. Theologians have been working on them for thousands of years.

Yes, there is a lot of tension and mystery surrounding the Trinity. And, I am sure the response today is the same as it was with the disciples. Some worshiped, some doubted. Some of you may have eyes glazed over, wondering why we have w hole Sunday dedicated to this. But, that is ok. The tension and wrestling with it are part of our faith. The disciples doubted and Jesus still had a job for them to do. Jesus knew it would be tricky, that there would be doubt and faith.

In response to humanity's expected response, Jesus showed them the nature of the triune God. He gave to them, abundantly. Not of the powers of the earth, of kings and rulers, but of God. Jesus gave the disciples even more authority than just casting out unclean spirits. He gave them the authority of the Trinity, to baptize and to teach. He gave them the authority of the Church. In this, Christ revealed the steadfastness of God by fulfilling the promise made to Abraham so long ago that the family of God would include children from all nations, yes, that means you and me. God gave himself, even to us, even to the Gentiles.

Because the Triune God is indeed a relational God. Even though we might not fully understand God, we can understand how God has reached out to us. God the creator walked in the garden and was active throughout the history of his people. Then God became incarnate to be in full relation with creation and continues to sustain us. All aspects of God show us how much he loves, and how God continues to reach out to us to have that relationship and connection with

creation. Even when it does not make sense to us. That is why Jesus instructs the disciples to invite others into this self-giving relationship with the Triune God. Into this mystery of a God that loves us enough to die for us and to continue to be with us.

Perhaps it is not such a mystery, or a contradiction, that we have gotten so much understanding of God from such a little text. Even today, we are finding out new things about the Trinity and about how God reaches out to us. We can see the ways that God continues to seek us out in our lives and in our day-to-day faith. We can see it in the beauty of creation. We can see God's love in the Word, still incarnate. And, we can see God's love in one another as we care for each other. Even in times of doubt and uncertainty, God is reaching out to us. Even on days when it does not feel like the best of times, just the worst, God is still meeting us, just like on the mountain outside of Galilee. What a wonderful gift from a loving God. To have a creator who wants so desperately to have a loving and giving relationship with us.

Now it is our turn to answer the commission Jesus gave his disciples so long ago. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations. Show others that God loves them too. Bring them into the relationship with the triune God where mysteries and contradictions are welcome. Bring them into a relationship where doubt and faith go hand and hand with a loving God in three persons. Bring them into the family.

But remember, as John Wesley once said and Jesus reminds us today, “The best of all, God is with us.”