

Date: May 31, 2026 (Trinity Sunday, series A)

Title: “One, Two, Three... One, Two, Three”

Text: Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁶Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’

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About six weeks ago, I started using this little device when I’m running. It looks like a soother, and I suppose that’s what other people might think too, when they see me using it. Actually, it’s a “breathing device” called a Relaxator. It has a one-valve inside of it, which lets me breathe *out* through my mouth, but not in! That in turn forces me to breathe *in* through my nose. No other pattern than that.

The reason that pattern is good, is that breathing in through my nose draws air more deeply down into the bottom of my lungs. And that deeper and better breath *in*, sets me up to breathe *out* more forcefully too. More air in *and* more air out. Better *breathing*, better *performance*. From what I can tell so far, this gizmo really works.

Breathing in and breathing out—harder, stronger, better—is a good goal for all of us to have as “the body of Christ.” Last week we heard about how our Christian ancestors “breathed in *deeply*” from the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost—a good, bracing lung-full that propelled that body of Christ *forward* in faith and mission. God gave them an *abundance* of his Spirit, there on Pentecost Sunday, and the church “drew it all in, gladly,” way deep down into its lungs.

You and I do that today too, whenever we read the Bible. St. Paul told young Timothy that **“the holy writings are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”** That’s because (as Paul put it), **“All Scripture is breathed-out by God.”** So, every time you and I “breathe the words of the Bible *in*,” it’s kind of like God is giving us “mouth-to-mouth,” spiritually speaking—saving us, and giving us a brand-new lease on life!

Then, as Paul continues to tell Timothy, **“All Scripture is [also] useful for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, and for training in righteousness, so that the person of God may be complete, and well-equipped for every good work.”** (2 Tim 3:15-17) That’s God’s *second* goal for us, after he saves us—that we should be *healthy* enough, *complete* enough, and *well-enough equipped* that we are able to *work* for him and his kingdom, with all the strength and energy he supplies. As Jesus said, that work involves **“loving him with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength—and loving our neighbour as ourself.”** (Mark 12:30-31)

Here, then, we have another *double* sort of pattern (or rhythm) that animates the body of Christ—and each of our own Christian bodies as well. First, we breathe *in* all of that “spiritual oxygen” God gives us through his Word. Then, God also wants us to breathe *out*--in a double sort of way, in service to him and one another.

It’s important for all of us to *train* ourselves, purposely, *in* this pattern. First, we breathe-in, deeply, from God himself—we are actually increasing our spiritual “lung capacity.” That is what makes it possible for us to then “propel ourselves forward” on the *exhale* (if it makes sense to think of it that way), along the path of discipleship God wants us to follow.

Frankly, some of us could probably “work a little harder” on the *intake* side of this pattern. Our worship attendance is spotty. Our Bible-reading is minimal. We don’t think very much, or very deeply, about what it really means to obey St. Paul’s instruction to **“take off our old nature [our sinful self]... and put on the new nature, which has been created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”** (Ephesians 4:22-24) That’s another “two-part” way of talking about the Christian life, right?

“Off with the old, on with the new... Off with the old, on with the new.”

Again, though, what really increases our ability to do that is not our own grit—but rather our *intake* of the pure and life-giving oxygen of the gospel. All of our sins have already been forgiven, by the death Jesus died in our place. *Ahhh, yes!* That’s what I need to “draw down into myself” every day!

So, if any of us here today have been getting lazy or sloppy in terms of this spiritual *intake*—well, *breathe in*, dear people—take a deep breath!

- Breathe in that good news of God’s forgiveness for you, right *now*, on account of Jesus.
- Take *another* deep breath at home, when you sit down *with firm purpose* to read your Bible.
- Work on your breathing some more, when you come here during the week (or on Sunday morning) for the “spiritual *exercise* class” we call Bible study.
- Then, make sure you *come back here again* next Sunday morning, to start off another one of these regular weekly workout-cycles.

Others among us here today maybe need “more help on the *exhale*” part of this pattern. What *we* need to grow in (in other words) is the *output* side of our faith—and the challenge we face there is to “*get moving*”—to become more active in serving God and others. Maybe there are groups and activities here at church we could get involved in—if only we could just get ourselves a little better organized. Maybe there is more we could do to live-out our faith within our families, or in our relationships with our friends or neighbours—if we could only just stop procrastinating.

Well, hopefully this encouragement St. Paul shared with some Christians he was coaching (in the city of Corinth) can be helpful to you as well: **“Do you not know,”** Paul says, **“that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is *in you*, whom you have received from God? You are not your own, you were bought with a price! So, glorify God with your body.”** (1 Cor 6:19-20)

For all of us, you see, the goal is *balance* between those two vital functions.

- Breathing in *and* breathing out...
- *Receiving* forgiveness, life, and salvation (through faith in Jesus), then *living* as a *healthy* and *active* **“temple of the Holy Spirit.”**

Getting better at the first part (the breathing *in*), ensures that we will never run out of breath.

Getting better at the second part (breathing *out*), ensures that we will never run out of things to do!

On top of that double pattern, though (in and out), there’s another rhythm too that this nifty little breathing-device also makes me much more aware of, when I’m running. That rhythm is, how many strides I take per breath. Obviously, I can figure that out, without this device—but *using* this device makes my stride-rate much more obvious:

“*In*-two-three, *Out*-two-three... *In*-two-three, *Out*-two-three...”

That’s the pace that works the best for me, *most of the time*. If I’m going up a hill, I often have to increase that rate so that I’m working my lungs every *two* steps:

“*In*-two, *out*-two... *In*-two, *out*-two...”

On the other hand, if I’m going down a hill, or doing a long slow run, I’ll often slow my breathe down to half of that rate (*four* steps on the *in*-breath, four on the *out*-breath). Most of the time though, a three-step cycle seems to work the best. I can keep that easy pace going, once I’m warmed up, for many kilometers at a time.

One of the things that today (Trinity Sunday) helps us realize, is that God's work in the world *also* unfolds in a *regular, three-beat rhythm* as well. Or, to put it a little differently, there are three regular *phases* or *aspects* or *dimensions* to God's work:

"Father, Son, Holy Spirit... Father, Son, Holy Spirit."

That's the pattern the Bible itself describes, in all 3 of today's readings.

Granted, we have to *work* at it a little bit harder, to *notice* that pattern in our first reading. Only one of the three Persons of the Trinity is explicitly named there—**"the Spirit of God,"** which we are told was **"hovering over the waters."** (Gen 1:2) It's hard to know exactly what that **"hovering"** was all about. But Moses uses the same Hebrew word elsewhere to describe the way an eagle flutters its wings over its chicks to protect them, and keep them calm. (Deuteronomy 32:11) So maybe what we're being told *here* is that God the Holy Spirit was sort of "encouraging" or "cheering on" God the Father, as he was deciding on "the next steps" he wanted to take (day by day, as creation came together)—and God the Son as well, as he kept on "actually doing all the work" (of *putting* all of creation together).

"The Father's plan, the Son's work, the Holy Spirit's encouragement"—over and over again, in this *three-step* rhythm of creation that those separate-but-closely-related Persons of the Trinity *practiced* to the point of absolute *perfection* as that very first week in all of history unfolded.

Moving on next to today's Gospel reading—there, Jesus is much more purposeful than Moses ever was, about *naming* the three Persons of the Trinity. **"As you go out into the world,"** Jesus told his disciples—**"As you go, make disciples of all nations, by baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and by teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."** (Matt 28:18-20) Look at this!—*another* double pattern for us to *learn* to "walk in." This time it's a two-step pattern of **"baptizing and teaching."** Baptism is what draws each of us *into* the body of Christ; teaching *explains* what it means to be brought in. Whichever of those two steps comes first, hardly even matters; the *rhythm itself* requires both! Most of us start off with our *right* foot, by being baptized first—but some of us start on the *other* foot, by being taught first. Both sequences work just fine. As long as both of those steps get taken, we are indeed following this rhythm Jesus gave his church to live by: **"making disciples by baptizing and by teaching."**

Notice too that that *name* Jesus tells us to baptize in, is a *three-part* name: **"the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."** (19) In one way, of course, that's really only *one* name, that all three of those Persons share: **"the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."** Yet there are those three different Persons who share it!

"One-two-three... One-two-three."

What that suggests, in a practical way, is that each of us who have been baptized *into* this Name relates to *God the Father* (first) as the one who created us. As Martin Luther puts it in the Catechism, God the Father *continues* to **"richly and daily provide me with all that I need to support this body and life."**

- Then, we also relate to *God the Son*, as the one who has **"redeemed us lost and condemned persons, and purchased and won us from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil—not with gold or silver, but with his holy and precious blood, and with his innocent suffering and death."**
- Then, you and I also relate to *God the Holy Spirit* as the one who has **"called us by the gospel, enlightened us with his gifts, and sanctifies and keeps us in the true faith."**

"Father, Son, Holy Spirit... Father, Son, Holy Spirit!" *Each* of us relates to *all three* of those Persons within the unity of God. They are *three*, and yet they also are one. So, again—

“One-two-three, one-two-three!”

That’s who Jesus himself tells us God is.

Finally then, in our middle reading from Acts, we get a tiny little glimpse of the way Peter *preached* (on the day of Pentecost) about this *one single* God who we know as *three* Persons. Most of Peter’s message there that day was about our Saviour’s death and resurrection. But right toward the end, Peter says this: **“Exalted to the right hand of God, Jesus has *received* from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, and has *poured out* what you now see and hear”** (that is, those *tongues of fire* that rested on top of each of the Christians’ heads, and all those *words about Jesus* that spilled out of their mouths in different languages). (Acts 2:33)

You and I live in that same sort of three-fold, three-part, Trinitarian pattern. We also recognize that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are *active* here in the world, in different but closely-related ways.

- God the Father is “always in charge.”
- God the Son is “always in the middle,” right there at the centre of our faith.
- God the Holy Spirit is always “pointing us *toward* Christ-at-the-centre,” and *keeping* this healthy and strong three-part pattern going, all the way through our lives.

I hope and pray that each of us *does enough* of this very special sort of “*spiritual* training” that we can be *confident* and *relaxed* in both of these overlapping patterns.

In my actual *physical* running, there’s (first of all) the double “in-and-out, in-and-out” pattern of my *breathing*, and then (on top of that) the “one-two-three, one-two-three” rhythm of my strides.

In our Christian life, the “in-and-out” pattern is (first of all) receiving from God, then giving-back to God—growing in faith, *and* serving.

Then, on top of that, you and I also *learn* over time to “**live and move and have our being**” (as Paul says in one of his sermons) in relationship *to* God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. (Acts 17:28) For many of us, that training leads us to make the sign of the cross every morning, remembering our baptism that *put* “the *one* true God’s triune *Name*” onto us. **“In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,”** we say. That’s a reminder to ourselves that we belong to that *one* God who we receive, and serve, in *three* Persons. Then, of course, all of us remember and confess that same Triune name, and make it our own, in the Invocation that we share together here, at the start of every service.

When I started using this *physical* training device, I didn’t think I would *ever* get used to it! It forced me into such a strict, disciplined, purposeful pattern of breathing that I didn’t think I could stand it! In the same sort of way, people like Muslims, Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Unitarians, and many others, *resist* this “three-part pattern” we’re talking about here today (of knowing and worshipping God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). No matter how good such people *seem to be* at that *two-part* pattern (of *receiving* from God, and *serving* him), they just cannot seem to get the vital and necessary *Trinitarian* part of *true* faith in God, figured out.

May God help them. *And* may God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) keep *us* FIRM in the one true faith, all the way home! May all *three* of these divine Persons help us, and encourage us, *into* this perfect pattern that is made up of *two* overlapping rhythms—taking-in *and* giving-out, *as* we worship and serve the *Triune* God—for our good, and the glory of his name, now and forever.

So may it be! AMEN!