

**Sermon, May 31, 2026**  
**"Mercy, August, Mercy"**  
**Trinity Sunday - Baptism of August Emmanuel Williams-Atwater**  
**Delivered by Rev. John Balicki**  
**St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Wilton, Maine**

We just heard the very last words in the Gospel of St. Matthew. Jesus' final command to his eleven disciples was 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 and teaching them to obey everything". This has been termed as the Great Commission. Well here we are, almost two thousand years later, and how have we done? Shouldn't we be feeling a little self-righteous here at St. Luke's. We have a baptism today! What a joyous celebration for family, friends and church community. And we had two baptisms last month! We must be doing great! So forget that we've only had five baptisms during my 3 ½ years here. We're on an upsurge! But this gospel designated for Trinity Sunday is just perfect to both reflect on what Jesus' final command really meant, what we are baptizing young August Emmanuel into, with a little bit about the Trinity for good measure. But to take a wider view than just Wilton, Maine. How are we doing with following the Great Commission?

Christianity is experiencing unprecedented growth in parts of the Global South and East, with millions converting in regions like sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia. The Bible has been translated into thousands of languages, meaning more people have access to the scriptures in their native tongue than ever before.

Then there's the flip side: the untold abuse, cultural erasure and outright physical violence that resulted from Christian missionary efforts too closely aligned with colonialism. And despite centuries of missionary work, thousands of distinct ethnic and cultural groups (the "unreached") still have little to no access to the Christian gospel. Critics argue that the amalgamation of Christian churches has sometimes focused too heavily on "counting conversions" or reciting salvation prayers, rather than the more demanding, time-intensive process of deeply "making disciples" and teaching them to live out Jesus's teachings.

And that's where our take-off point is this morning. Notice that in this text called the Great Commission that Jesus says to make disciples first and then baptize. So August, here's your first disappointment at the hand of the church - you aren't going to be a disciple today. But hopefully your dads and godparents and church community are

working at it and if we need to work harder well so be it and we pray eventually that word will have some meaning for you.

So “making disciples” does not mean baptizing people or even converting them. The verb *mathēteuō* focuses on teaching, often toward a specific goal of making someone a particularly devoted pupil. Which makes sense for Matthew’s Gospel dedicates so much attention to Jesus’s teaching activity. Jesus taught to shape behavior, not simply to inform. Jesus’s commands, throughout Matthew, are situated in his words and deeds. And those deeds? They focus largely on showing mercy, especially to those most in need of it.

Jesus presents baptism as part of the process of adding collaborators and accomplices to a movement that places mercy and compassion at its core. Let’s go back to February for a moment – not too painful as the weather wasn’t much different back in February than this weekend. The first major teaching effort of Jesus was to gather folks on the side of a mountain and to say, “Blessed are the poor in spirit”, “blessed are the hungry”, “Blessed are the merciful”.

The Merciful - all of God’s ways of being revealed, known, and experienced – demonstrate a divine commitment to extending mercy, and that mercy is intended toward those in life who most struggle, those who were at that Sermon on the Mount – the poor, the hungry, those who mourn.

Do we want to welcome August today into the community of Jesus? Then let’s obey the main teaching of Jesus and be people of mercy and compassion. If any one of us begins to not reflect that teaching, we don’t need to go into a long harangue, perhaps we just need to gently say “Mercy” or “compassion”.

So August, where is the missionary field in your lifetime? Is it the Amazon rainforest or lightly inhabited islands in the Pacific that have almost no contact with outsiders or is it our own nation? What if instead of building a temporary arena on the White House lawn in two weeks for an Ultimate Fighting Championship event to celebrate the President’s birthday, what if instead to demonstrate we actually are the Christian nation some claim, that we lived out the beatitudes and Jesus command to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth? What if we brought even a portion of the 48 million people in our nation in food insecurity and brought them to the White House lawn and fed them a decent meal or even better yet gave them a month’s groceries? What if we brought people who have lost loved ones to ICE Detention Centers and mourned with them? What if we practiced mercy instead and didn’t build ICE Detention Centers in

the first place? What if we took the command to be peacemakers seriously and didn't start a war in the Middle East?

Ohh, August, if you really want to learn the path to becoming a disciple there's a lot of work ahead of you; this discipleship is hard stuff. And harder than criticizing those with whom we disagree is looking at our own specks and our own failings. We all get another chance today to respond to the baptismal promises. We've been doing them all Easter season? Can we truly proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ? Can we truly respect the dignity of every human being?

We've talked about the Beatitudes as the first lesson Jesus taught – the last is the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, “when I was hungry you gave me food, when I was thirsty you gave me drink, when I was a stranger you welcomed me. We commune with Jesus himself when welcoming strangers and feeding those who are hungry. Likewise, we find ourselves caught up in the trinitarian fullness of God's revealed identity when we engage in the mercy at the heart of the kingdom of heaven.

As we baptize August today in the name of the Trinity, we celebrate our imperfect discipleship and are empowered to do better. The more we ponder who God is, in all the divine complexity, beauty, and solidarity that we find in the witness of the saints, the more we are going to find ourselves drawn into a life of obedient love and advocacy for our neighbor.

Trinity Sunday, therefore, is a day to baptize and even more a day to extol mercy. Let's do it.