

Trinity Sunday 2021 - Isaiah 6.1-8; Romans 8.12-17; Gospel: John 3.1-17

The Blessed Holy Trinity – God the Father, God the Son – God the Holy Spirit – three persons, one God – God the creator, the redeemer and the sustainer and go-between – not an easy concept to grasp or describe..

This is one of those times when the more you think you know, the less is actually known – a mystery to be pondered but one that can be experienced rather than theorised – by seeking to go deeper in understanding and faith we can deepen our earthly experience of living our lives in a God-conscious way - a life that is driven by the power of the Spirit – in the name of Jesus – to the glory of God our Father in heaven –

And the deeper we go into this mystery – the richer the fruit – and the fruit is purpose, love, joy, peace, comfort, strength, healing and hope that was alive and present in Jesus as he walked the earth those years ago – only now we experience that through each other as the Holy Spirit of God through Jesus works through us.

During the past year or so we have been receiving weekly sermons from Bishops Andrew and Jo and from the Archdeacons Paul and Peter – and it is to Paul's sermon I would turn today – because he has captured beautiful a way in which we can draw the themes of the Trinity into how things are for us today.

Paul begins by acknowledging that preaching on Trinity Sunday is like a short-straw prize – where clergy take annual leave – or use the illustrations of water/steam/ice to explain – or Andrei Rublev's Trinity Icon – The Hospitality of Abraham - that we have on our screen where we see The Father, Son and Holy Spirit illustrated with the space at the table being an invitation for us to join into the hospitality.

And from here, Paul goes on to say:

I'm not sure what the theological fashion is these days, but I find myself in a place where I increasingly want to ask 'what difference does all this really make'? What difference does an understanding of God the Trinity make to a world that is ridden by disease (as we continue to witness the horrendous scenes in India); that is torn apart by conflict (as over two hundred lives have been lost on the Gaza strip in the last few weeks); that is plagued by injustice (rightly re-exposed by the killing of George Floyd last year)?

What difference does it make to our country as it seeks to emerge from the pandemic and rebuild community, economy, education, health provision, leadership and much else? What difference does it make to me (as I sit in the hours of the night, at the bedside of my poorly mother, the victim of a condition undiagnosed during the Covid crisis), and to you in the joys and sorrows of your life? What difference might reflecting on God the Holy Trinity really make in this midst of all this mess?

The difference it makes for us, as disciples of Jesus, is that the Trinity is at the heart of who we understand God to be. And this has a direct consequence on who we understand ourselves to be. Genesis 1:26 tells us that we are made in the image of God. So questions about the nature of God are also questions about the nature of human beings.

As I reflected upon the three appointed readings for today, I found myself doing so through the lens of the vision recently shared by our Archbishops for a church that is humbler, simpler and bolder. Isaiah points us towards humility. His calling has long been read on Trinity Sunday - I assume because of the triple Holy, Holy, Holy sung by the angels at the awesome revelation of God in the Temple. If we look a bit further, though, we see both glory and mystery: glory that is seen through the robe and smoke and seraphs that filled the temple; mystery that is unseen for God cannot be contained, cannot be compassed, by Isaiah's vision, by my sermon or indeed any other attempt.

But what is significant for me in this story is Isaiah's response. 'Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!'

The vision of God the Holy Trinity, set before us today, is articulated so beautifully in John Neale's words 'how shall I sing thy majesty which angels do admire? Let dust in dust and silence lie, sing, sing ye heavily choir. Thousands and thousands stand around thy throne, O God most high, ten thousand times, ten thousand sounds, thy praise, but who am I?

St Paul expresses the most fundamental and transformational truth about our identity before this awesome God. For, according to Paul, we are not just made in his image (as Genesis teaches us), but are adopted as children of this one who sits on a throne. For 'when we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ' (Romans 8:16).

St Paul makes clear here there's not a hint of inequality amongst God's children either. We're equal in status with no discrimination, no favourites, no precedence. It's the reason why racial justice, social justice, Living in Love and Faith and so many of our current agendas as a church are not just good things to talk about. They're core, fundamental, to our belief about God the Holy Trinity and what it means to be his children.

And then St John continues to unfold the divine mystery with a story about boldness. It begins with a human boldness and ends with a divine boldness as it travels from the darkness of Nicodemus' questioning to the light of the new life which Jesus offers him. Nicodemus is bold because he asks about what he doesn't understand. How many of us have lacked the courage to do this over the years?

Jesus carries Nicodemus from the night of his ignorance into the light of his revelation - a light which reveals that new birth makes everything look different. We are enabled to see the character of the Father, who so loved the world that he sent his Son, in whose life we share by the power of the Spirit. And here we see the boldness of the Holy Trinity: love in John's Gospel is a verb. The word doesn't remain word but becomes flesh in the most costly way.

The love that we find deep at the heart of the Trinity is unconditional but also sacrificial.

And so as the curtain lifts today on the second half of the church's year (when we focus upon Christian teaching, as opposed to the events of Jesus' life), the Trinity forms the firmest foundation on which we seek to build as prayerful confident disciples in daily life.

It blesses us by drawing us into its life through being children of the Father, adopted through the grace of Jesus the Son, and born again through the work of the Spirit - who lives within us and enables us to be brothers and sisters in Christ together.

It challenges us through the expectation that those who are born of the spirit, live by the spirit with the words 'here am I, send me', always on our lips - seeking to make incarnate in our being the life of the Holy Trinity for the sake of Transforming Church, Transforming Lives.

We thank Paul for these powerful and thought-provoking words today – and we pray too for Paul and his family as they nurse and tend to Paul's mother – that she – and all in need be comforted and strengthened.....

And to that holy and incomprehensible Trinity be all honour and glory, this Trinity Sunday and always. Amen.

Revd Jacqueline Drake-Smith
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