

Trinity Sunday, Year C, 2022

Proverbs 8.1-4,22-31; Psalm 8; Romans 5.1-5; John 16.12-15

In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

It is Trinity Sunday. It is a day to pause for a moment to think about our faith and what it means for how we have come to understand God through God's revelation of himself in time, in the life of the Church and down the ages. God has made himself known to us. We can sidestep seeking to define what this means, that is a one response, but fortunately that is not the response of the Church. She seeks to define to the best of her ability, acknowledging her limitations, how we can think of God as Trinity and what this means for our lives. Our daily lives? Really? This may surprise us. But I suggest that reflecting on the Trinity, allowing our hearts and minds to dwell on the mystery of God, will impact on us individually and communally. For one thing I shall go into later, Trinity is about relationships, and relationships are central to life. In God's abundance.

Thinking of the above I was reminded of the labels on the backs of bottles, jars and food packaging in general. Whether I know how something is constituted is irrelevant if I am only concerned about its taste, but taste as we know is not everything. Should I set aside any concern for how this product is affecting not only my health but the wellbeing of others? Think of Fairtrade. People often say, 'Keeping healthy is the main thing...' I might disagree? What do you think?

Central to the notion of God is love, as in the biblical formula, 'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes should not perish but have eternal life.' (John 3:16) This Johannine perception is given voice when he writes, 'God is love and those who live in love live in God and God lives in them.' (1 John 4:16)

Trinity as most will know is not a biblical term. You won't find the word Trinity in the New Testament. One, the New Testament is written in Greek and Trinity is definitely a Latin term, but also because it was only in time that the Church came to better define what it believed about God through her belief that Jesus is both Lord and Saviour empowered by the Spirit and living in the Spirit and in Jesus Christ as his body, his ecclesia, his Church.

Before going forward let me remind us that Trinity is a composite of two words tribus (three) and unitas (unity). The three are an indivisible unity. One in three and three in one is a phrase we may be familiar with? It is essential to think just how bold, even costly this departure concerning God is from the monotheism of Judaism and which later is offensive to Mohammed. It would not have been easy for those reared in first and second century Jewish monotheism to think of God in a fuller way and in the end in a new way, although God has not changed. And whatever we come to say as mortals about God it is provisional. It remains a theological mystery. We bow before the majesty of

God, who is thrice Holy as in the Trisagion Holy God, Holy and strong, Holy and immortal. But the use of mystery needs defining. Mystery in theological terms means something that is hidden and has now been made known, which we could not have known to be true had God not revealed it, as captured in the hymn, 'O love, how deep, how broad, how high, beyond all thought and fantasy, that God, the Son of God, should take our mortal form for mortals' sake!'

But to get a flavour for the living faith of the apostolic church as it came to experience God as Trinity and give voice to it, it is helpful to trace a few instances of Trinitarian-leaning phrases in the writings of the New Testament. In the Anglican liturgical tradition a funeral service always begins with the Funeral Sentences taken from Scripture. The minister reads them to the congregation as he or she enters the church reciting the sentences as they walk to the front of the church. Words of comfort, words of faith, words of truth as in the 'Lord gives and the Lord has taken away. Praised be the name of the Lord.' Leaning into this liturgical practice that most of us will be familiar with, I will do this with what I shall christen the 'Trinitarian sentences'. (So let me hasten to the back of the church. The sentences are reproduced on the front of the wrap for reading at home.)

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord;... (1 Corinthians 12:4–5)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you. (2 Corinthians 13:13)

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:4–6)

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (Matthew 28:19)

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who have been chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood:
May grace and peace be yours in abundance. (1 Peter 1:2)

John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. (Revelation 1:4–5)

For me today, as I stand here, there are a few things that are important and which the doctrine of the Trinity *ensures*, and if that is too strong a verb, *points to*.

It reminds us that while God is other our lives are to reflect something of God. God does not need us. God is self-sufficient. This is what the teaching reminds us of, but at the same time using an Anglican phrase 'whose property is always to have mercy', it is also a property of God's to create. It is out of love that he creates the cosmos. It is not simply because God can, but it is out of love that he creates and we remind ourselves that what God creates is good, so we too are to learn to love God's creation.

God in and of himself is love and because this is so God in and of himself is relational, you can say God in and of himself is community. God is the perfect community. We have become fascinated with the self in our Western tradition, but we must always see the self in relation to others, a wider community and ultimately for the believer to be sure in relation to God, which means we are always taking ourselves back for the sake of the community which God is bringing about (creating), because our health is not in realising ourselves in opposition to others in the first instance, but within the community where all most have space to become, grow, repent, flourish, seek forgiveness etc. To be Christian is to always to see yourself first in relationship to God, who is Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

It is the nature of love to give and receive. I am sure you have heard me say that numerous times over the years. In God there is relationship. In God there is community. And the Pauline image of Christ emptying himself is as true of the man Jesus, as it is for God himself. I give myself to the other completely and the other receives all that I am that they might be one. And as soon as God empties himself as Son, so the next person of the Trinity fills the Son with love in an unending circle of sacrificial love, of giving and of receiving.

Our notion of God as Trinity means that as we consider God we don't think first and foremost of God as a solidity meeting our abstract philosophical categories such as omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, although I personally accept these categories, but rather as alive in God's eternity. Here at Christ Church we give expression to this reality Sunday by Sunday in a formula familiar to us. How do we meet? We meet 'in the name of the living God, Father Son and Holy Spirit.' I sometimes wonder if you miss that little addition as you worship in other churches 'In the name of the living God?' So rather than think of God as a solidity I consider God under the category of movement and this is best captured in the formal dance of movement, of weaving in and out endlessly as in a circle and in which we are invited to participate.

Today marks the beginning of Trinity season. It is a call to live in and out of the fullness of God, as revealed through God as being Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who gives life in abundance. It is based on the belief that apart from God we only enjoy 'a good life' according to our own self-limiting standards. 'Jesusology', which can be a useful entry point into the Christian faith, always must turn

into Christology, which in turn needs to live out of and in the Holy Spirit to the glory of the Father. Christian faith calls us to a Trinitarian Sein/being/living.

I can trace, I believe, particularly prevalent in Victorian and Edwardian times, a 'Jesusology' by which I mean a belief system in which one emulates Jesus according to Victorian and Edwardian morality and one's own popular understanding of the faith, whereby Christian faith is good for morals but not much else. To borrow a Pauline phrase, they exchanged the glory of God's revelation of self for a watered down goody, goody morality of their own making.

Let me add by building on a phrase that I have used a few times. Christians are always those who are in the process of moving from being followers of God to becoming friends of God out of our love for God in his fullness, who loved us first revealing himself as Triune, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I invite you to recite with me the doxology, while bowing for the first phrase before the mystery remains in our believing.

Glory be to the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be world without end. Amen.