

Sunday 30 May: Trinity Sunday

Living the Trinity

Readings: Romans 5.1-5; John 16.12-15

May I speak in the name of God: Creator, redeemer, inspirer; Life-giver, pain bearer, love-maker...Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Alike but different, separate but in some sense joined, a mystery to be experienced and lived, existing in a relationship of mutual love and affection, of the same substance and speaking with one voice? These could perhaps be words to describe our new coalition government that we are beginning to get to know. But on this Trinity Sunday they are to help us explore our understanding of the nature of the God that we worship together. Father, Son and Holy Spirit: not a coalition of parties, artificially joined, through expediency, giving up something of their nature as they try to find common ground from which to govern, but three persons of God, bound by love, centred on a life-giving relationship of community and connectedness. Fully themselves *because* they are interdependent. At the heart of God is a loving relationship.

Relationships are key to our lives and sustain and nourish us. Just this last week a report from the Mental Health Foundation, on the increase of loneliness in our society, has reminded us how crucial they are to our wellbeing. It describes how our contemporary market-driven society has led to an increase in loneliness for many people. As we increasingly focus on being consumers, sustained by what we can acquire, our society has forgotten about the value and importance of our relationships. In short the Loneliness Report (The Lonely Society?¹) suggests that better relationships mean better lives. The quality of our relationships is about real dialogue and exchange, simple humble human love and care for each other, concern and connectedness. It is this that is life-giving, creates and sustains our communities and builds our society.

At the heart of our understanding of God is the dynamic of a real tender and loving relationship. Through the amazing, loving intimacy of the relationship between Son and Father, which Jesus reveals to us, we learn something of what God is. We learn that we too may hope to relate to God with the same confidence and intimacy. That intimacy is at the heart of Jesus' words to his disciples in John's Gospel that our passage today picks out. Here Father, Son and Spirit affirm and celebrate one another and want us to understand and know and seek and love the other. They speak the same words, there is a common sense of ownership and gift, one to the other – the words of Jesus offered through the Spirit, the gift of all the Father has, to the Son.

The relationship isn't exclusive, with us on the outside, but is like a never-ending circle that draws and invites us to find our place within it. This relationship offers us a pattern of diversity and union, differentiation and community, connection and movement, and above all, mutual love.

What brings us to share in the loving relationship at the heart of God is Christ, as Paul's words from Romans remind us. Through him we come to stand in that circle, a place of peace, sharing in God's purposes and love for the world, that is not just given to us but poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. No matter what our experiences of life, good or bad, nothing can take away from us our sense of being in the right place with God, sharing in his

¹ <http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/campaigns/loneliness-and-mental-health/>

love for the world. And we find ourselves as part of that life, in the intimacy of that loving circle, because we are invited there by Christ.

If we are literally to ‘live the Trinity’² we will also be outward focused, looking at others in a way that celebrates and enables them and invites them in. Open ourselves, as Timothy Radcliffe reminded us last week, to how they can speak to us of God too. The Trinity shows us how we ought to be living and is the opposite of loneliness.

I spent a few days of this last week on retreat with the Franciscan community at Hilfield Friary in Dorset with the brothers and the community that gathers around them and had very much a sense of a community that lives the Trinity. Some there like me were on retreat, some are living there as part of the Hilfield project for ‘Peace and the Environment’ and others more vulnerable, offered there a place of welcome and respite. Each of us gathered in and for that brief time, a temporary community, in relationship with one another. The life lived there is open, loving, inviting and continually in touch with the Father, through the Son in the Spirit of prayer. The heart of that community felt a very dynamic, creative and life-giving place to be.

A place that is **aware of the Father** who sustains and creates our environment and all creation, every leaf, the precious detail as well as all the powerful forces of nature. Through their *Peace and Environment Programme* the brothers work to share the Franciscan values of peace, justice and the integrity of creation, bringing together, in relationship, people of different faiths and none to work for a more gentle and respectful care for the earth.

Aware of Christ present and active in other people’s lives. At one Eucharist the Gospel reading of the healing of the blind Bartimaeus was all the more poignant because one of the eleven that gathered, a young man, was himself blind. Over supper later that evening I asked him what it was like to hear that Gospel. He laughed and said, ‘O no I’d rather not receive my sight back, I’m happy as I am. I’d have to learn how to do things all over again.’ Someone at peace with himself, knowing the love and hope of the Son. Unable to join in with too much of the daily services his voiced piped up ‘Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit’ at the end of each of the psalms. He stood out as someone fully embraced, living in the love and life of the Trinity.

Aware of the Spirit, with us in prayer as four times a day we gathered in the converted barn of a chapel. At the furthest end beyond the altar a cross shaped icon, intricately drawn, radiantly colourful, Christ with his arms outstretched. Reaching out, love and hope flung to the edges of life, to the lonely places and people and to those on the outside, welcoming us all in.

At morning prayer on Friday the brothers say prayers before the cross. They kneel, turned towards the beautiful icon, with their arms outstretched mirroring Christ – vulnerable, exposed, in a gesture of self-giving, humble and open; open to give and receive completely, holding nothing back... entering into the life of the Trinity.

The Cross and suffering are at the heart of the Trinity. The love of the Trinity is a love that moves outwards that is the essential nature of God’s love. The cross shows us God’s ultimate movement towards humanity – his willingness to give himself totally to the life of the other – to suffer for us. In the suffering of the cross Christ identifies himself with the agony and pain of all humanity.

² Ware, K. *The Orthodox Way*, New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995, p.52

As Christians we are called to 'live the Trinity' and we do this by moving out towards the world. Living the Trinity implies that the mission and ministry of the Church must be the continuing of Christ's saving act in the world. It must be the work of healing and reconciliation; of forgiveness, of allowing space for the other and the offering of compassionate fellowship.

In their life the brothers at Hilfield are focused on living this kind of life. Focused on Christ, living outwards, in loving service and action, in touch with the reconciling, loving, forgiving, healing dynamic life of God around them in nature, in the world, welcoming others, in the power and gentleness of the Spirit.

The love of the Trinity calls from us a loving response. It calls us to fling our arms open to the edges of the life we know, exposed, extended, touching and encountering others in the life of God. Made in God's image, we are made for total dependence on God. We are made to love and praise God and to offer the love we receive from God to others.

Christopher Cocksworth describes what living the Trinity means for us as we worship the one God, life-giver, pain-bearer, love-maker...

'As we worship, God crafts the contours of his life into our lives so that his Trinitarian being becomes not an impossible thing to believe before breakfast, but a reality known in our depths because it is a love which has caught us and captured us and made us cry.'³

We can never be lonely if that's the kind of loving, suffering, generous God that we are in relationship with.

³ Cocksworth, C. *Worshipping the Trinitarian God*, DLT 1997, p. 16