

SERMON AT BRUNSWICK: 20/5/2005: TRINITY SUNDAY:

GEOFF CHADWICK

“CREATIVE SPLITTING AND LUMPING”

the Trinity is one of my favourite doctrines. It is a favourite because it is a uniquely Christian Doctrine and because it remains ever mysterious.

One way of explaining the development of the doctrine of the Trinity is to talk about “splitting and lumping”. As the early church tried to come to terms with a belief in one God alongside a belief in the divinity of Christ *and* the Holy Spirit many theological wars were fought between the splitters and the lumpers.

The splitters were those who emphasised the distinctions or differences between God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. These people were given titles such as modalists, Arians and Nestorians...

(I however prefer to call them splitters.)

The lumpers (no they are not members of the waterside workers union), were those who emphasised the similarity or unity of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These people were given titles such as monophysiticites, and monarchianists...

(Lumpers)

Eventually it was decided that when talking about the Trinity we can become overly plitty or overly lumpy and that a boundary should be put around how far we split and how far we lump. So we say odd things like “not three separate persons but one” and “not one person but three.” The Christian understanding of God lies in

between the two extremes as a mysterious and wonderful source of contemplation. The point however, is not that we engage in some odd heavenly form of algebra but that we seek to understand how the relationships between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit model how the best of human relationships are meant to be. Putting it simply, the best of human relationships are those where splitting and lumping are in perfect balance.

For example, in marriage the ideal is that both partners are sometimes one and sometimes separate. As *one* the ideal of perfect community is sought. As *separate* the ideal of perfect freedom and individuality is sought. Both are needed to promote a healthy relationship. We can all think of marriages which have gone sour either because individual freedom was stifled or because unity was neglected. The Trinity for me therefore, speaks about how we humans should relate to each other, the world around us and God. Not too much splitting and not too much lumping... just the right balance.

Now it is interesting that whenever we try to achieve something as a church the the best approach is one of splitting and lumping. Often we get a great "lump" of an idea but it can't come to fruition unless it is split up into smaller achievable tasks. This I think is the meaning of community. "Common unity" is what the term means and it implies a coming together of different ideas and thought into a whole. As people of the Trinity community is calling, yet we struggle with it all thie time. Sometime we want to lump everyone and everything together so that the individual is not heard. At other times we allow the individual to hold the rest of the community to ransom. Far from being an irrelevant, unintelligible bit of theology, The Trinity presents the challenge of real community beofe us. We work towards it. Yet we must

always be in tune with our own destructive ideas in its midst. We aim for community graciously examining the intension of our lumping and splitting hearts.

As people who claim faith the Trinity I trust we will inspired enough to honour God not as “splitters” and not as “lumpers”. That we will be people who know the delicate balance of being many yet one; and being one yet many. Somehow I think this is the ministry to which God is calling us – a ministry which notices the individual and at the same time creates common unity. May “The Trinity” not just simply be an name to us but be a way of being.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.