

## Trinity Sunday First Sunday after Pentecost Matthew 28:16-20

God must particularly enjoy Trinity Sunday, watching preachers around the world trying to explain the great mystery which we celebrate today, the mystery of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – three persons -- one God – each person fully God.

The reality is that it is impossible to explain the mystery of the Trinity and generally speaking we can't get it. It is beyond our human comprehension to grasp the concept of the Trinity – three persons in one God, each fully God. So, perhaps it would be appropriate for you to say, "Why bother? I have enough problems with things that I understand, let alone things that I don't understand." As coincidence would have it, there are THREE good reasons why we should attempt to understand the mystery of the Trinity as best we can within our human limitations.

The first reason is that Jesus revealed the Trinity to us. The existence of the Father, of himself, the Son and the Holy Spirit, whom He and the Father sent forth upon the apostles, is documented in Jesus' ministry. We can find numerous examples of Jesus teaching about the Father, praying to the Father and generally pointing all of his works towards glorifying the Father. He spoke to his disciples of baptising in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, this is how Jesus reveals God to us in his own words. So whatever Jesus revealed to us, He revealed for a reason and it is important for us to pay attention to it and try to understand it as best we can.

Secondly, there have been other teachings on the trinity in places we wouldn't normally expect to find them. In Genesis Ch 1 verse 26 we have the words, "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness:" Us/Our, these are not misprints, it is this form of words which has survived to be written in the Hebrew scriptures and to be part of our Christian bible. The use of the plural must be there for a reason. There is also a Jewish tradition of separating God in terms of the Word of God and the Breath of God. Jesus has often been described as the Word made flesh – in St. John's gospel we have that unforgettable beginning – "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God." The Holy Spirit – the mighty rushing wind that the disciples experienced at Pentecost – that sounds very much like what one would expect the breath of God to be like, don't you think? Mighty, powerful, scary and utterly life changing. The idea of God's capabilities and his form being beyond our understanding has been since the world began, but more than just Christian tradition points to a 3-fold, Trinitarian understanding of God.

The third and most important reason is that in the first chapter of Genesis, humankind, you and I, are created in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, since Jesus has revealed to us the essence of God as perfect unity, harmony, community and relationship, then the very core of our creation is a call to perfect harmony, community and relationship. While we cannot grasp the idea of one God – three persons – each God, we can recognize that the Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are the perfect model of harmony and unity, a community of relationship, so perfectly intertwined that you cannot tell where one begins and the other ends.

This is a real challenge living in a society where individualism is promoted. Nonetheless we are called to expand our circle of relationship to include more and more people and to adopt an understanding of relationship that does not always fit in with what the world understands relationship to be.

God in relationship is a concept almost as difficult to explain as the trinity itself. God is of one substance, one essence and has been revealed to us in the form of three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. There is no sense in which each person has different jobs, it is not that they split the world into thirds and do a bit each but they do have different roles and experiences. Within those different roles and experiences they are not so separate as to be three gods who come together but they hold amongst each other a relationship.

In human terms language breaks down because if three people are in a relationship they are three separate people and if three people have different experiences that is because they are three separate people. This is where the doctrine of the trinity comes under most pressure – getting people to get past human language and understanding to accept that God is not bound by the same rules and limitations as we are.

So try to get beyond in your mind the threeness of the trinity and look at it as a oneness for a moment. A single Godhead which contains the creative power of God the Father, the redemptive power of God the Son and the Sustaining power of God the Holy Spirit. Laying to one side for a moment the fact that all three are involved in all aspect of being God, we can for our human purposes see those three elements of God coming together in relationship with one another to form a perfect whole. A relationship where each person has something unique to offer the group but also something to receive from the other two that it otherwise would not have had. It is in this way that the trinity models for us the perfect relationship.

We recognise that if two people were identical in their likes, dislikes and experiences of life they would very quickly run out of things to talk about. There would be no debate on issues on which they disagreed and no animated discussions about the passions they shared. Yet, when people have nothing in common, when they recognise nothing of themselves in the other person, a relationship can rarely survive for long because they neither value nor understand the input of the other. God as trinity is a lesson to us all if we can just see it, in human relationships. God has revealed Godself to us in this way for a reason, perhaps this is it.

God exists in a perfect, equal relationship where each person is valued equally highly by the others and scripture tells us that it is a co-eternal relationship – God existed in this form from the very beginning. It can be likened to a fire, when a fire is started all at once comes the flame, the heat and the light. None can exist without the others, one element does not come first, neither does one come last – they are three distinct elements which make up one complete thing.

So it is with God – it is not easy to understand, it truly is a mystery but a mystery is not something about which nothing is known it is rather something about which not everything is known. Scripture has revealed to us that God is trinity, the three in one. We do not and cannot know precisely how or why that works but in recognising the relational nature of a Trinitarian God we can experience it, in our families, with our friends, in our workplaces. Anywhere in fact where relationships are formed we can look to the model of the trinity and experience relationship in the image of God – just as we were created.