

Trinity Sunday John 16:12-15

After the joyous season of Easter, culminating last week with our celebration of Pentecost, we move now into the second half of the Christian year and what is often referred to as ordinary time. But before we change the colours to green and follow a long list of Sundays after Pentecost, we have one more celebration to go – Trinity Sunday! We decorate the church in white and signify that this is a high day or holy day but for those who prepare to preach, Trinity Sunday is less of a celebration and more of a time of anxiety.

Traditionally this is the Sunday we preach on the doctrine of the Trinity, 1 God, 3 persons, each one wholly God but not 3 separate Gods. It is not an easy concept to understand, it is less straightforward to explain and the risk is, year on year, we might leave church more confused than when we entered. And yet, we can celebrate the trinity without having to pretend we fully understand the doctrine. There is much to say about God and the relationships of the persons of God which is helpful for our church communities which doesn't need to cause us confusion.

The reading we just heard from the gospel today is one of the many times we catch a glimpse of this trinitarian relationship. Jesus is talking to his disciples and referring to all three persons of the trinity as separate entities all working towards a goal of relationship and support for these disciples. The spirit will come, the spirit will share what is known by Jesus who cannot tell them everything all at once, and all that Jesus knows is from the Father. All three persons are part of the relationship that is forming between God and humanity in a new and transformative way.

Take a moment to think about where else in scripture we might encounter this 3 in 1, trinitarian description of God. Perhaps the most striking for Christians is the gospel accounts of the baptism of Jesus where we hear the description of Jesus coming out of the river Jordan, while the spirit descends upon him like a dove and the voice of God is heard saying, 'This is my beloved son, with him I am well pleased'. But there is also reference in the Hebrew scripture, as far back as Genesis of the word of God as distinct from the breath of God both of which proceed from God.

The trinitarian nature of God and the mystery of that is nothing new, then, it isn't even Christian in its origin, but it is the Christian church alone which tries to form doctrine and description of this mystery to deepen our understanding of God. So what is it about the trinity that is helpful for us today, why is it worth our frustrating and inadequate attempts to define this mystery in day to day Christian living?

Jean Vanier, theologian and founder of the L'Arche community organisation, would suggest that the trinity is the perfect metaphor for, and example of, community. His writings refer to the fundamental human need to live in community with others and points to the notion that God also is a communal being, indeed our status as creatures made in the image of God, who is trinity, is why we have this imperative to be in community to some degree or other. This understanding of the trinity and its consequence on humanity is what has

underpinned the concept and structure of L'Arche. The L'Arche communities are places where people with developmental disabilities live alongside people without such disabilities in a system where each supports the other. The assistants without disabilities are not staff as in an institutional setting but they help their fellow community members where help is needed, as should occur in any community environment. The community members with disabilities are valued as teachers in these relationships and are not burdens to be borne by others.

This same understanding of the relational nature of God can and should inform the relationships each Christian forms in response to our faith. To believe that God loves us unconditionally, that Jesus was the word of God incarnate who came to earth to redeem us while we were yet without relationship with God, and that the Holy Spirit is invoked and enters our lives by baptism and at our invitation to sustain the relationship we have with God, should transform our relationships with others. If this is God's response to each of us, it is God's response to everyone else too and therefore we are all invited to see in others the great value that God sees in us.

If we need to learn how it looks when we form God inspired relationships, we need only look at the relationship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit for inspiration. Where the persons of the trinity interact they display nothing but love, one person to the others. The Father builds up the Son, the Son prays to the Father. The Spirit is heralded as the greatest gift and upon arrival in the lives of the disciples, inspires preaching of the good news of Jesus and the overwhelming love of the Father.

We don't need to understand how the trinity works to recognise that it simply is. This is the way in which God has chosen to reveal God to humanity. Distinctively there is creative, redemptive and sustaining power which is co-equal, co-eternal and entirely intertwined. Our human relationships, whether we choose to recognise this or not, are a fundamental necessity for us as we mirror the God in whose image we are created. Our relationships should also be places where we experience and offer the love, kindness and support that is modelled in our relationship with God, where we see in the other not the flaws, but the perfection of another creature formed in the image of God.

We may be no closer to explain what the trinitarian God is, but we can experience what the trinitarian God does and inspires us to do. God is a mystery, it would be impossible for us to understand God as anything else, yet the love of God, 3 in 1, can be experienced and shared throughout humanity, and where that occurs, lives are transformed. May God inspire us to build our communities in the image of the trinity.