

Trinity Sunday, Year A 2023 **2024**

Isaiah 6.1-8; Psalm 8.12-17; Romans 8.12-17; John 3.1-17

If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can I tell you about heavenly things?

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen (Psalm 19.14)

Last Sunday we celebrated the life giving feast of Pentecost the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all those gathered in one place in Jerusalem followers of Jesus witnesses to his ministry, his death and his resurrection. We saw those on whom the spirit was outpoured being compelled into the streets of Jerusalem speaking in tongues as God gave them voice. We gave thanks for the power of the Holy Spirit, the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, the peace of the Holy Spirit, the healing of the Holy Spirit, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the fruits of the Holy Spirit, and the life-giving breath of the Holy Spirit.

Today Trinity Sunday we consider how God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are one yet three and three yet one. Some months ago a member of our church was surprised to learn that the word Trinity, a combination of two Latin words trēs three and unitas unity or one, is not found in the Bible. This is true. I don't know the context in which this was made to the said person, but one can hazard a guess that it was not to build up, but rather to sow doubt...

Now is not the time to list all the biblical references where we see Father, Son and Spirit in their unique relationship within one another being touched on, which will lead the Church as she contemplates the revelation it has not only been given, but has also been entrusted with to inch towards speaking about the Christian God as Trinity. But it always does so on the basis of the relationship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as one yet three. The best known passage is found in the Gospel of Matthew,

'Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'
(Matthew 28:19-20)

Passages like this one lead to the formulation of our understanding of God within Himself as three persons in one God and to one God in three persons or as the Athanasian Creed posits it towards the beginning,

And the Catholic faith is this: that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Essence. For there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son; and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one; the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is; such is the Son; and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreated; the Son uncreated; and the Holy Ghost uncreated.

The other day another person in our congregation was surprised to learn that Jehovah Witnesses as Mormons are not Christians, in the way that we together with the Early Church, the Apostolic Church have come to believe. For them Christ is created and not eternal as captured in the phrase ‘The Father uncreated; the Son uncreated; and the Holy Ghost uncreated.’

There is one thing I am obliged to stress each year and that is both the language and teaching of the Trinity come out of a lived experience of the Body of Christ, the Church intertwined with being attentive to God as made known through the Bible as well as being grounded in worship, prayer and discipleship. Church here is not the institution, a solidity, but rather the lived experience of the believing Christian in community who is seeking to live their faith in humility before the living God of which our Isaiah passage is an example. Before the living God the Prophet responds to the vision he is afforded by exclaiming,

‘Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!’

The Prophet does not exalt himself. Does not think of himself more highly than they ought.

One of the places we see this lived experience manifesting itself is in our worship and in our corporate prayer life. In our being gathered. Here at Christ Church we begin with ‘We meet in the name of the Living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit’ affirming therewith the oneness of God the God whom we worship. This God whom we worship is not the God of the philosophers, but the God who has made himself known to us, limited as we are, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

Consider this formulation from the corporate prayer life of the church something we are engaged in today through this service. 'In the power of the Spirit and in union with Christ, let us pray to the Father.' Most the collects (the opening prayer of our services of Holy Communion) are addressed to God, the Father in some form or other 'Almighty God', 'Almighty and everlasting Father', 'Almighty Father' and end with 'through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you in the unity of Holy Spirit one God, now and ever.' Before proceeding prayers can also be addressed to Jesus and to the Holy Spirit. Why? As already stated, 'But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one; the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal.'

If you are still with me then you will have noticed that subtly we, meaning you and me, the body of Christ is continuously affirming God's oneness. This we believe. God is one. This is important to maintain given our dialogues with Muslims and Jews, who are certainly nowadays going to be our neighbours, our colleagues, but also friends and acquaintances. We are not polytheists believing in many Gods as the pagans did and the neopagans of today do, but we affirm the oneness of God, the Godhead, but we can say more and it is important that we say more, one because it is central to the faith that has been entrusted to us, but also because by attending to God as Trinity we will come to a richer understanding of God and God's love for us and what our response is to be in the big arc of life, as it gives meaning, while impacting directly on our daily lives by enhancing both our decision making and our celebration of the life, the gift of life. Here I stress our celebration of life! John writes, "God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

As there is a new creation in which sin and death have no more dominion over us, there is also a new understanding of God. How can this be otherwise given that God in Christ has made himself so small that he indwells a human life in a particular time, in a particular place, amongst a particular people for our sakes, for the sake of the word, for the sake of creation, for the Love that God is. God in Christ empties himself, God gives Himself away you might say that we might have life and have it in fullness. How can this be? Again because sin and death have no more dominion over us. Here we find a new freedom. A freedom the world cannot give.

As God pours out his spirit on those gathered in one place, as we heard last week he also pours out his love out within himself. God is not a solidity, nor a concept, nor static, but in Himself dynamic. John will come to write that those who live in love live in God. He is able to say this not as some kind of wishful thinking, but because God has revealed himself as the love that gives itself for the sake of others. For the sake of the world God in Christ lays down his life that he may take it up, but always because of the other and that other is you and me and all those across the whole expanse of history that are made in his image. Our response is not to earn God's love, but to give thanks for God's love by learning to love God as He loves us

- Now to my visual aid or should I say aids knowing how imperfect this demonstration, but I trust it will save a 'higher' purpose.
- *Note for the editor: I will have three glass jugs. These should all be the same. One of these will be full of water. I will pour all the water into the second jug and then all the water from the second jug and into the third jug and then all the water of the third jug and the water into the first jug. I will say something about the love of God within himself. Love in God gives itself to the other completely. It empties itself. I will emphasise that God in Himself is relational, God in Himself is personal and that God in Himself is community and that God through his new creation invites us to be not apart from but a part of the community that He is in Himself and that it should and ought to be the desire, the longing of each Christian to be a part of that community that God is in Himself and to which he has thrown open the door.*
- *I will proceed to say something about my theophany like experience on the top of Mount Sinai in contrast to the three jugs to work against a too technical approach which the jug imagery, as it was fascinating wild display and other in way connecting back too Isaiah's vision.*
- *Finally, I may end with the fresco in The Church of Chora, Istanbul where we see Jesu opening the door to the criminal to whom he says, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'*

When love opens the door and we walk through we are taken up into the love of God from which nothing in all creation can separate us. Amen.