

Trinity Sunday 7 June 2020 Deborah Hodge

Let us pray. Lord please speak to us through your word today. Amen

Well hello! It is so good to see everybody. And to be let loose to preach on Trinity Sunday! Always a favourite with preachers??

As many of you know, I am training to become a priest. Part of the course is to submit a video-recorded sermon – and this is it. So ... no pressure there.

Now, you may be relieved to hear that we haven't studied Christian Doctrine yet, so I won't be trying to explain the Trinity. This may be a good thing. For all of us! Apparently it took Saint Augustine 15 volumes and he still found it 'impenetrable'. And Martin Luther said 'to try to comprehend the Trinity endangers your sanity' So I think I would have about as much chance as Garth Crooks explaining the off side rule to Mr. Blobby (for those of you who remember Noel's House Party!)

However, not being able to explain something doesn't stop us from appreciating it, and if we can't explain the Trinity we can still experience and enjoy it as the expression of God. And I would like to think for a few moments about what a beautiful and precious thing the trinity is.

So here goes.

In our reading from the very end of Matthew's gospel the resurrected Jesus meets his disciples on a mountain in Galilee. These are his last words to them – both challenging and wonderfully comforting.

He tells them to go and make disciples of all people everywhere and to baptise them in the **name of the father and of the son and of the holy spirit**. I have to admit that I had never noticed those particular Trinitarian words before!

Jesus directs that all disciples are to be baptised into the Trinity. And all of us who are baptised were duly baptised in accordance with these instructions - into the love of God, the mighty father, who created the world and whose majesty is described so beautifully in the reading from Isaiah which Evelyn gave us. Into the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the son, who came to earth as a baby, lived a human life, suffered and died for us and knows at first hand our joys and our sorrows. And into the fellowship of the Holy Spirit who lives within us closer than a breath, giving us knowledge of God and bringing us life. From the very start of our Christian life Jesus wants us to know that the God we belong to is expressed as Trinity.

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Here is the famous icon of the Trinity by Anton Rublev. Linked to the story of the three angels who visited Abraham in the desert it is considered to be a depiction of the Trinity. With God on the left, Jesus in the middle and the Holy Spirit on the right all sitting round a table set in a peaceful meadow.

I find this a very beautiful image. It is tranquil and calm with a stillness at the centre which is very appealing in these strange and turbulent times we are living in. There is something about the way they are sitting, inclining their heads together, leaning in towards each other, which speaks of a perfect intimacy. And although the picture is full of peace it is not static. There is gracious ordered movement. The three are flowing into each other in grace and harmony and flowing out into the world.

This lovely portrayal tells me that the heart of God is relationship. Each person of the trinity is separate but inseparable. Perfect love binds them together so they can operate as one. They have a perfect relationship where each delights in the other, seeking only the flourishing of the other. There's no envy, no jealousy, no competition. As Sam Wells puts it they are 'so harmonious that we call them three, so melodious that we call them one'.

And this is our God – aren't we blessed?!

As God's creatures made in his image we are also made for relationship. It is in our DNA. We are created to be in relationship with God and with everything he has created. We are social animals. If lockdown has taught us anything it is the value we place on human relationships. Suddenly we were deprived of so many normal social activities. What have you missed more – haircuts or hugs? Now I really miss my hairdresser but I can put up with shaggy hair a lot more easily than the absence of my grandchildren. Social isolation is just that – isolating! Technology is great although it can't replace real human contact. We crave that friendly smile, that touch that tells us we belong to the human race.

And at the deepest level of our being, we are dependent on our relationship with God.

As we need relationship with God, so he also wants to have relationship with us. If we look at the picture again...

There are three people sitting round a square table. This means there is a spare place right in front of us. It is as if we are being invited to come and sit at the table with them. There is a gentle gracious welcome in the turn of the faces towards us and the hands loosely placed on the table.

I wonder if you ever had to walk into a room full of people who are all sitting down? Maybe you are late to a meal or a meeting. Your eyes quickly scan around the room searching for a place to sit. How good it feels when somebody pats the chair next to them, nods at you and silently offers you a place. That is the kind of feeling I get from this picture – come and sit with us, we really want you to be here. No-one is going to force you, it is your free choice. But this is your place. It has been here from the beginning and it will be here for eternity.

This is what I take as the meaning of being baptised into the trinity. It is the invitation to be drawn into a living relationship with God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The love, the grace and the fellowship are there in the eternal meadow and each one of us has our special place. Wherever we go, whatever we do, the invitation remains open.

I wonder what difference it might make as we go into another week of semi-lockdown and uncertainty to carry in our hearts the certainty of that invitation. What difference to our own, less-than-perfect, human relationships to carry the knowledge of our eternal relationship with God the creator, redeemer and sustainer. Which on His side at least can never fail. What difference to the world if we allow the love, grace and fellowship of the three-in-one God to flood our being and flow out again.

And so ..may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore, Amen.