

Podcast – 7th June 2020

READINGS – GENESIS 1:1-5 & MATTHEW 28:16-20 (NRSV)

After the two short readings we've heard read by Rowena, let me add one more short text, to make a trinity of scripture passages, for this Trinity Sunday:

'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.' (2 Corinthians 13:13 – words of Paul, at the end of his letter; good words to start this message today!)

For it is Trinity Sunday – the time in the Church calendar when we pause, after all the celebratory events of the Easter season, Ascension Day, Aldersgate Sunday (if you're a Methodist, or maybe even if you're not) and Pentecost, to consider how we see God in the fullest sense – Father, Son and Holy Spirit or Creator, Saviour, Enabler.

After Jesus was raised from death to life, left his earthly mission in the hands of his followers – assuring them of God's grace and gift of salvation and equipping them through the bestowing of the Spirit – now we reflect and trace the activity of God as Trinity throughout the whole experience of the people of faith.

It's there in the opening story from Genesis – as the unfolding of the heavens and earth is brought about by the activity of God: as the creator God who starts it all happening (vs. 1), with the wind of God's presence hovering over the waters (vs. 2) and the word of God bringing all living things into being ('God said, "Let there be light" vs. 3).

It's also there in the passage from the very end of Matthew's gospel, as the resurrected Jesus meets his disciples on a mountain in Galilee and sends them out. Jesus commands them to go and spread the word to all people – calling them to become followers too, helping them learn more of God, by entering into a closer relationship by baptism with the God who promises, in Jesus, to be with them always, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In so many places in the Bible we see elements of the immensity that is God revealed through the concept of God as Trinity – the readings for today being some of these. You may wish to look up the other set reading for this day, Psalm 8, and reflect on what that says on this particular day...the majesty of God as depicted in the glory of creation and humankind being part of that creation and tasked with caring for creation. Is this, I wonder, about our part in the dance of the Trinity, God inviting us to get involved?

I've often found that preachers and worship leaders have found Trinity Sunday a challenging day to lead worship – constantly seeking after ever more creative ways of trying to explain how God can be three yet one, one yet three. Maybe you can remember sermon illustrations you've seen using clover leaf imagery; ice, water, steam analogies or the image of a Russian wedding ring (three different varieties of gold bands, interwoven as one – each distinct in their colour but all gold).

For me the concept of the Trinity is the bedrock of my spirituality, the fundamental aspect of my understanding of and relationship with God – that God can be all these things to and for me, and everyone else too. God is not limited by what I can get my tiny mind around, or our human existence – God is so much more: the one who made and sustains the world (and me), the one who came to live in the world and give everything for the world (and me) and the one who lives within us to encourage and give hope to the world (and me)!

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This deep connection to God as Trinity has always spoken to me very strongly through the Celtic stream of the Christian family and means that I often find material (prayers, reflections, liturgies) from groups that stand within that part of our heritage, such as Northumbria Community, Iona Community and the Community of Aidan and Hilda on Lindisfarne (Holy Island) very meaningful and helpful.

I know that people have a variety of ways of naming the three persons of the one God – I've already used two: Father, Son and Holy Spirit as well as Creator, Saviour and Enabler and I don't think it matters so much which words we use as long as they help us to focus on the breadth of God's activity in our world, lives and hearts. For some people it's not about 'naming' God as three persons but more about naming the various aspects of God's nature, being and purpose:

Creating, around us God;

Saving, alongside us God;

Comforting, within us God.

So, because this is such a vast concept, which some of us may find easy and others hard, where we use all sorts of different words and ideas to try to express the inexpressible, today I thought we'd try something a little different.

The idea comes from the Taketime Meditations that one of our ministers in the District, Rev Clive McKie has been pioneering for some years now to help people feel God close to them, know more of God and feel able to share with God. It comes out of Ignatian Spirituality methods for engaging with the bible and its stories and really helps to make things real – which I think is very useful when we may, as today, be talking about challenging, mind-blowing concepts of God as Trinity – God as Creator, Saviour, Enabler – all together, all at once, for all time!

There will be 2 short pauses in this reflection time, spaces to help us all seek to connect a little better with our all-loving, all-listening God.

You may wish to find a comfortable seat to sit in to do this and ensure that you are as relaxed as you can be, feet placed flat on the ground, back supported, arms and hands resting on your upper legs or on the arms of your chair. Sink into the chair...allow it to hold you...be aware of your breathing...run over the various parts of your body in your mind and if you find anywhere that feels tense or out of kilter, allow it to settle, become more evenly balanced and let the tension go.

Breathe in and breathe out; don't force your breath into any kind of unnatural pattern just notice its natural rhythm and go with it...

You might like to think of breathing out any stresses and concerns you carry in your heart, mind and soul and giving them over to your loving God; and as you breathe in, filling yourself with God's peace, and love, and light and joy.

Breathe in; breathe out...rest in God's love.

Using the reading from Matthew's gospel, I'd like you to imagine yourself up on that mountain with Jesus and other followers – you're pleased to see him there and are keen to follow him.

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You hear Jesus say that he has authority in heaven and earth and is now sending you to share his message with the world and to offer baptism in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and that he promises to be with you for always as you do his work.

I wonder how you feel when you hear that? What thoughts rush through your mind? Are you excited, anxious, planning your first mission event or just wishing you'd stayed at home?

If you think of God as Father, Son or Holy Spirit or Creator, Saviour, Enabler if that's easier for you – which aspect of God is most helpful to you as you stand on that mountain, hear those words of Jesus? Who do you need God to be for you now?

Take a moment to think about what you would say to your God now.... speak to the person of the Trinity that it feels most helpful or easiest to engage with and know that God is listening and loving you as you share whatever it is that you need to say to God right now.... (PAUSE FOR REFLECTION)

Now that you have shared what you wanted to with God, in whatever manner you have encountered God in this moment...imagine that this aspect of God's being now speaks back to you, directly to you, calling you by your name and responding directly to the things that you have shared yourself.

What does God say to you in love right now?.... (PAUSE FOR REFLECTION)

Then, ever so gently, return to this moment and this place, the seat you are in, your surroundings and the now.

Give thanks for this time with God, for what you were able to share and what God shared with you; hold onto that feeling of being with God, speaking freely with God, listening intently to God and knowing that God cares for you enough to be that close to you. All any of us need to do to connect with God better, is stop long enough to notice the gracious love of our amazing God is always there – Father, Son and Holy Spirit; Source, Guide and Peace.

To end I'm going to use as a prayer the last verse of the hymn that Robin played for us last week. Dave used verse four of StF 588 last week in our thinking about the Holy Spirit, this is the final verse:

TOGETHER MET, TOGETHER BOUND

BY ALL THAT GOD HAS DONE,

WE'LL GO WITH JOY, TO GIVE THE WORLD

THE LOVE THAT MAKES US ONE.

AMEN