

St Gabriel's Holy Communion, Trinity Sunday 18th May 2008

Epistle: Isaiah 41:1-17; 27:31; Romans 5:1-5

Gospel: John 16:12-15

Trinity Sunday - a day when we celebrate the basis of our faith within the context of Christ's resurrection - as every Sunday is. It's always been one of those Sundays that fill clergy with anxiety or anguish. One tries to prepare a sermon on the Trinity that is not boring and so full of theological jargon that it sends you to sleep.

Neither will I try to explain it through the many wonderful analogies: candle (wax, wick & flame); kettle (water, heat & steam); cloverleaf (three leaves, one plant); husband, father and grandfather. However helpful or unhelpful these analogies may be the fact remains that the Trinity is a profound mystery and always will be. We are wrestling with something that is beyond our meagre human understanding. However, I would like to share with you some reflections on how the Trinity shapes and forms who we are as a people of faith.

From Advent through to now we focus all of our attention on the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. It's almost as if we enact a kind of liturgical drama of Christ's life Sunday by Sunday climaxing with the events of Easter, Ascension and Pentecost. Now comes the hard part - living the faithful life, with the Spirit's gifts to empower us.

In order to understand the Trinity we need to go back to basics. We need to try and understand how that early community of faith understood their life and how it resulted in the adoption of the Trinity as a way of being and doing.

1. They understood God as Creator: The early church knew their story as found in the Hebrew Bible and in the Gospel stories. They knew God as their creator and in whose image they were made and that God created all that was and is.

But God was more than just their creator. God was in an intimate relationship with them as a parent. We understand that from the stories where God hears the cries of the people and lifts their burdens; he cares for them as a hen cares for her chicks, where He calls Israel 'my children,' and weeps over their actions, as parents weep over the actions of their children.

So God is not a God who stands far off or just a God of judgement, but a loving and gracious God who cares deeply for them, remember when Adam and Eve disobeyed Him? He didn't abandon them but stayed with them and clothed them. The story of God as creator and intimate parent, father/mother abounds in their history, and continues in ours.

2. They understood God as 'One of Us': For the early church another understanding of God came through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. '*God became flesh and dwelt among us.*' The incarnate Word. Through the early apostles and disciples the community heard the story of Jesus and how God lived and acted in new and profound ways among the people. During Jesus' life the disciples struggled to make sense of all this. It wasn't until after His resurrection that his life made sense to them. We know from the Gospel of John how difficult that last night was as Jesus explained what had to happen and what it all meant.

The disciples finally get the full significance at the Ascension when *"they return to the temple rejoicing and praising God."* God was made visible in Jesus to ensure that the community of followers understood that God was not just out there somewhere, up in the sky! God lived as one of us through His son Jesus.

Those first followers also experienced the risen Christ and knew, like Mary, that with God nothing was impossible. The Easter story is all about the knowledge that the impossible is possible. So through all these experiences and stories they came to know God not only their creator, but as their Saviour and Redeemer.

3. They understood God as Spirit: Finally they come to understand God as the Holy Spirit. As promised by Jesus. We heard last week how the gift of the Spirit came at Pentecost. It came to the whole community of followers and not just a select few. The Spirit came to the gathered group and people from all over the known world even though they spoke different languages and were from different cultures heard the word of God in their own language. To them it must have been a mind-blowing experience.

The Bible says they were "bewildered." For only the disciples knew about this gift Jesus had promised but I doubt they knew in what form the Spirit would come. For the woman at the well, for the Good Samaritan Jesus lived and preached a life of welcome and inclusion even when his followers didn't. The community now has experienced God as the Holy Spirit.

Why celebrate Trinity Sunday? For us it is the time when we begin the struggle to understand how we are to live in this community of faith. The liturgical dramas of Jesus' life are over and we are the ones left to tell the story. We are the ones to go out into the world to proclaim the good news therefore we must understand how God acts and lives in our lives.

People are not drawn to Jesus because we can articulate a theological doctrine but because we can share our faith in very human terms. Sharing how God has acted in our lives as creator, redeemer, and empowering spirit.

We are called to understand God who is a loving and generous God who loves unconditionally. The God we worship is the God who created all of us and accepts all of us as we are. God does not make mistakes. Understanding God in this way should help us to love and care for others who are different from us for we are all made in God's image.

We are to understand God the Son, the Redeemer? We are Jesus' hands, feet and heart in the world. As we share in Christ's body and drink the cup week after week and year after year we become what we eat and become Christ in the world. In our baptism we are baptised into Christ's life, death and resurrection.

We are to understand God the Spirit. Too often the phrase "Spirit-filled" has been understood to mean the charismatic. As if one has to have a certain type of religious experience to be Spirit-filled. We are all Spirit filled. How we exercise and live our lives in the Spirit is up to us. Paul reminds us *'there are a variety of gifts but one Spirit.'* We are variety of people in one Spirit. We are called to live out and develop our gifts to the fullest being appreciated for what they are - a gift from God, of God, for God.

Trinity Sunday is about getting back to basics. It is a day for the church to celebrate how it understands God and how it lives out that understanding. It is an opportunity for us to wrestle, struggle and to celebrate the meaning of God in our lives and in the life of St Gabriel's.

To being the community that lives the resurrected life of the risen Christ and makes itself manifested in the world by living and witnessing to Jesus.

It's about being the community that knows it is empowered by the Holy Spirit to live boldly as it proclaims the good news and goes into the world baptising in the name of the God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit – in the name of the Trinity. It really is simple this Trinity; very basic and very profound. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you. Amen!