

Trinity Sunday

Trinity Sunday is one of those difficult to preach on Sundays, which rectors and vicars traditionally ask their curates to cover. With two newly authorised preachers in the congregation I guess I shouldn't have been surprised when Marie asked me if I would like to take on the challenge this year..

I thought about using one of the traditional images of the Trinity that preachers trot out on these occasions, ice- water and steam all being chemically the same, a tree consisting of root, branches and leaves and many others which I am sure some of you will have heard time and time again.

But instead, I want to look at the **mystery** of the trinity. St Justin a philosopher and martyr who lived around 100 years after Jesus was on earth said:

“Our detractors proclaim our madness because we honour a crucified man alongside the unchangeable and eternal God, the creator of all. They do not discern the mystery in this, and it is to this mystery that we beg you attend”. More recently Frederick Buechner an American theologian who died just last year said, “Father, Son and Holy Spirit mean that the mystery beyond us, the mystery among us and the mystery within us are all the same mystery. Thus the Trinity is a way of saying something about us and the way we experience God.”

We live in a culture that likes answers, mysteries are OK as long as they end up with a neat explanation. But unlike books and TV shows there are not always neat explanations, particularly when it comes to love and faith, and that is where we enter the realm of mysteries.

Over the months since the start of the church year in Advent we have bounced joyfully from festival to festival – Christmas – epiphany – a pause for breath during lent - then Easter - Ascension - and Pentecost. Mystery after mystery in a whirl of special days and different coloured hangings and scarves and next week we start into what the church calls ‘ordinary’ time, our hangings like the trees go green and we get time to settle down and ponder the mysteries that we have just experienced. It has been suggested that mystery is a gift providing both the space for us to choose to accept God, and a rest from searching and understanding.

Let's explore the mysteries associated with each part of the Trinity in a bit more detail. I apologise now that the limitations of language mean I will refer to God as male though I am sure God transcends our simple gender terminology, and as Father again knowing that that is not helpful language for everyone, but using it as shorthand for a parent who is more caring than any of us can fully appreciate.

God the Father. There are lots of big words that theologians use to try to describe how God has been the same since the beginning of time, is everywhere, knows everything. I like shorter words, Douglas Adams in his Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy says “Space [...] is big. Really big. You just won't believe how vastly hugely mind-bogglingly big it is. I mean, you may think it's a long way down the road to the chemist, but that's just peanuts to space.” Well, our God is even bigger than space!

But God the father is not content to sit back in his vastness and play marbles with solar systems. The use of the word Father tells us He is a relational God, He cares about and involves Himself in the lives of people, ordinary people like us! Time and again in the bible we read of people calling on God and getting answers, very clear and specific answers to everyday questions. And occasionally we read about how God puts Himself outside the laws He has created to keep the

universe and our world running smoothly and performs miracles, Noah and his family are rescued from the flood, Moses and the Israelites escape safely from Egypt, Elijah defeats the prophets of Baal. Throughout history there are examples of how God is here on earth looking after His people ensuring that they can live, thrive and choose to worship Him.

God the Son – Mysteries make up Jesus’s life on earth. Each week during communion we proclaim “the mystery of faith...”

Christ **has** died
Christ **is** risen
Christ **will** come again

those 3 short statements, like the trinity encapsulate a vast inexplicable reality. From the virgin birth through to His death and resurrection to his ascension Jesus’ life on earth was full of mysteries. He performed numerous miracles and told stories that were mysterious to many of His listeners. It almost seems like the ordinary things - being exhausted and falling asleep in a boat or cooking breakfast on the banks of Galilee - are the unusual ones in the accounts of His life. We are fortunate in having so many reminders of these mysteries in our beautiful church. The crosses that many Christians wear are a way of celebrating visibly the mystery of our God coming to earth, willing to suffer physical pain and death, to enable us to join in the relationship that God – Father, Son and Spirit - had enjoyed from the beginning of time. Our Gospel reading earlier reminded us that at the very end of His ministry on earth Jesus told his disciples and therefore told us to go out and share news of this mystery.

God the Spirit – although the excitement of Pentecost last week recalls the time when the Holy Spirit was poured out on Jesus’ followers after His Death and Resurrection, the Spirit was with God the Father from the beginning. Right at the start of Genesis we read that the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters of the formless earth; throughout the Old Testament we read about Gods Spirit filling people and empowering them to do extraordinary things. Then in the New Testament we have examples of the Spirit working in people from the 3000 converted on the day of Pentecost, to Saul’s dramatic conversion and the changes in the lives of believers as word of Jesus’ mysterious life spread across the Mediterranean and out to the wider world.

In Conclusion...Mystery is something that we accept as part of our faith, we often don’t give it that name but it is important. So important that we declare it each week in the eucharistic prayer as we say

Christ has died,
Christ is risen,
Christ will come again.

If we could explain everything about who God is and what He does then either we wouldn’t really be talking about our great God or we wouldn’t have any choice but to believe whole heartedly because what our God is and does is so marvellous. We have seen that each part of the Trinity has its own mystery but these 3 - Father, Son and Spirit - together as an integrated whole - are the ONE God that we worship week by week.

After the excitement of the first Pentecost we read at the end of Acts chapter 2 that the followers of Jesus continued to meet together as we are now, they broke bread as we will soon, they prayed and praised God as we have this morning – in other words business as usual.

As we come to the end of the church's season of mysteries, we turn back to business as usual, to ordinary time, and in that time we can allow our minds to accept the gift of mystery and rest from searching for meaning as we consider the mystery of the Holy Trinity in all those festivals since Advent. Our second reading said, it is a time to live in harmony and peace so the God of love and peace will be with us.

A German poet called Rainer Maria Rilke said that we should:

Live the questions (*or the mystery*) now.

Perhaps then,

someday far in the future,

you will gradually,

without even noticing it,

live your way into the answer.